



ISSN: 0975-833X

Available online at <http://www.journalcra.com>

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL  
OF CURRENT RESEARCH

International Journal of Current Research  
Vol. 13, Issue, 06, pp.17952-17958, June, 2021

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24941/ijcr.41640.06.2021>

RESEARCH ARTICLE

OPEN ACCESS

## THE EMERGENCE OF 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY ECO-THEOLOGY, ITS MAIN FIGURES, AND KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

\*Dr. Andrew Ratanya Mukaria

Theology, Contextual theology, and Eco-theology Professor and Researcher

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article History:

Received 27<sup>th</sup> March, 2021  
Received in revised form  
15<sup>th</sup> April, 2021  
Accepted 20<sup>th</sup> May, 2021  
Published online 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2021

#### Key Words:

Theology, Eco-theology, contextual theology.

### ABSTRACT

The study explores the concept of eco-theology and its development in the 20th century. It also presents some of the key figures associated with eco-theological development and their contributions. The article is developed from a doctoral study defence lecture done on June 12, 2018, at MF-Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society. The article revisits some of the experiences of the researcher during a field study in Kenya.

Copyright © 2021. Dr. Andrew Ratanya Mukaria. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Citation: Dr. Andrew Ratanya Mukaria. "The emergence of 20th Century eco-theology, its main figures, and key contributions.", 2021. *International Journal of Current Research*, 13, (06), 17952-17958.

## INTRODUCTION

This study explores the concept of eco-theology and its development in the 20th century. It also presents some of the key figure associated with eco-theological development and their contributions. The article is developed from a doctoral study defence lecture done on June 12, 2018, at MF-Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society. The writer revisits some of experiences during field research in Kenya. Most time, an eco-theological question was asked, most Christians' respondents asked, 'what is eco-theology? Indeed, the term was also perplexing to some of theologians' and even well informed individuals. They even questioned the mention of a Ph. D in eco-theology. However, from the time the study was done things have slightly changed. Though still there is a need to create more awareness. Per that time, most informants always gasped and asked, 'what is eco-theology? Initially, the writers thought that eco-theology is a known concept. But, it was a surprise, eco-theology was not a very much known concept. This article is developed for those who wish to understand eco-theology in its simplicity.

**Study background:** Eco-theology is a new, though still an old concept. It is an old concept; as David Atkinson, former Bishop of Thetford, stated, St Irenaeus of Lyons saw the world as a creative unity of all things held together by God's providence. St Augustine of Hippo had wide-ranging thoughts, including a strong strand of what we would now call eco-theology. St. Thomas Aquinas has much to say about "nature". Calvin described creation as "the theatre of God's glory". In the 17th century, John Ray wrote *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of Creation*. In the 19th century, Lux Mundi included a chapter that celebrated evolution as re-emphasizing the immanence of God in creation. William Temple's *Nature, Man and God* (1934); Charles Raven's *Gifford Lectures* in 1951; the Evangelical Francis Schaeffer's *Pollution and the Death of Man* in the 1960s (Atkinson, 2013). Atkinson's words agree with the writers contextual experiences and challenges. Atkinson held that. Much as the church has been in the forefront promoting 'eco-theology', the view that 'the earth is the Lord's': on the ground, the writings of theologians, reports from the Synods, eco-theological and environmental conferences do not always seem to make much difference at local meetings, in Sunday worship and Christian discipleship (Atkinson, 2013). His words offer nothing strange. As held, the writer encountered questions like, 'what is that?' The writer, through had a ministerial and theological training (Bachelor of Divinity (BD)) in early 2000s, and from one of the oldest ecumenical and respected theological institution in Kenya had not come across the

\*Corresponding author: Dr. Andrew Ratanya Mukaria,  
Theology, Contextual theology, and Eco-theology Professor and Researcher.

concept. The reason being, then, St. Paul taught nothing about eco-theology. The idea emerged during the writer's master's degree, even though it was also entirely concentrated on the 'traditional forms of theologies.' His was just a one 'eureka moment', not taught but experienced. The moment was possible due to personal walks and observation of the beauty of Norwegian nature. It led into reflections and environmental questions regarding the wanton destruction of the forest and waste management in Kenya. This became a constant thinking and worry which eventually brought the question, what is the place of the church? While inquisitive about the crisis and searching for an answer, I 'discovered eco-theology'. This article tries to answer what is 'eco-theology'. It starts from ecotheology being held as a known concept to some, a new idea, or maybe a strange concept to some. The article concentrate on defining eco-theology, the development in the 20th Century, the central figures, and contributions. Lastly, I give a conclusion.

## METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, the study is done through literature study or content analysis. A literature study was a systematic qualitative review. It was systematic because the researcher chose an array of literature and systematically reviewed them using various strategies. On the design, the literature used were those considered most relevant. However, in the process of building the concept, the study engaged other appropriate and necessary literature. The process entailed reading, understanding, analyzing, and making meaning. It was about transforming existing information into raw data and themes essential in answering the research question. A literature study was relevant and necessary in this case from a topical perspective. Additionally, a literature study offered an excellent way of synthesizing research findings to show evidence on a meta-level and uncover areas of the already done studies. This is a critical component of creating theoretical frameworks and building conceptual models. However, traditionally, a literature study has been criticized for the lack of thoroughness and rigour exhibited by most other methods. Furthermore, questioned are raised about the quality of the data and the trustworthiness of the types of review.

**Defining Eco-theology:** The term eco-theology originates from two words, 'ecology' and 'theology'. The word 'ecology' was coined in 1866 by the German scientist Ernst Haeckel. Modern ecology became a rigorous science in the late 19th century and early 20th century (Case-Winters, 2007). The contemporary theology part of 'eco-theology' arose in response to the widespread acknowledgement that an environmental crisis of an immense proportion threatened the future of humanity and life on earth. The issue was escalated further due to Lynn White's public lecture on December 26th, 1966 and published the article 'Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis' in 1967. Lynn article held that the current ecological crisis is imperatively rooted in the 'Western theology and Judeo-Christian theology', licensed to 'subdue the earth and have 'dominion over it' (Santmire, 1985). The response to this article was both Biblical and theological. Eco-theology is a version of contextual theology, much like feminist theology, Latin America Liberation theology, Africa theology, Asian theology, Black theology, Dalit theology, etcetera. Eco-theology offers a two-fold critique to creation degradation. As Conradie states, Eco-theology is critical to Christianity, and it is also a

Christian voice towards environmental challenges. Eco-theology offers a review of some of the existing theologies and misinterpretation of Biblical passages, part of creation degradation. However, eco-theology lifts the Christian voice, which insists that the natural world is God's creation and is good. Eco-theology has become a long discourse that highlights the whole 'household-Oikos' as God's creations (Conradie, 2005).

Lesslie Newbigin argues, all theologies are contextual-for the typical western Christian theology is contextual, having been arguably done in western culture (Newbigin, 1986). Christian theology was bound in time, space, language, technology and other forms of human civilization within a western context. Eco-theology as constructive theology goes beyond the western dimensions of interpreting the scripture and Christian traditions. It goes away from the controlling paradigm regarding issues affecting the creation. As a form of contextual theology, eco-theology can be categorized on the Praxis Model, one of the Stephens Bevans models of contextual theologies (Bevans, 1989). Theologies in Praxis Model "take inspiration from neither classic texts nor classic behaviour, but from present realities and future possibilities" (Bevans, 1989). Due to its hermeneutics demands to praxis, eco-theology is different from the traditional forms of theology, which can often be defined as western or European (Spenser, 2015).

### Two folds Eco-theological Development

**Stewardship and apologetic:** The proponents such as Joseph Sittler, Jurgen Moltmann, Robin Attfield, Douglas Hall, Paul Santmire, and Felix Wilfred, to name but a few, argued in defence of Christianity and the Christian faith-apologetic approach. The apologists defend Christianity against the claim that it is environmentally disastrous. They argued that White's paper was a misinterpretation, and his analysis was on the misappropriation of the tradition and not from the tradition itself (Case-Winters, 2007). Eco-theology, in this case, offered itself as a consciously different theology from the traditional Western theology, which is often, according to White, alienated the world because it dominated the ecosystem. The proponents argued that Christianity in its entirety is not to be blamed. The proponents argued that Christianity shows a much more earth-related understanding of faith and creation-both bible and theological traditions. Further, as Wilfred states, "the Christianity that is worth the blame is Christianity interpreted through the enlightenment anthropocentrism of the West, which fostered disenchantment with nature as a mark of progress and secular humanism." (Wilfred, 2009). These are more conservative in their approach. This category also includes eco-theologians like Laurel Kearns, Willis Jenkins, John Haught and Ernst Conradie, to name but a few.

**Revisionist and reconstructionist:** The proponents are John Cobb, Norman Faramelli, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sallie Mcfague, Leonardo Boff, Marthinus Daneel (South African), and Ben-Willie Kwaku Golo (Ghanaian), and Maathai Wangari (Kenya), to name but a few. These have worked towards reinterpretation and the creation of a more viable theology of nature-contextualization. This theology has made some significant efforts to formulate a more viable Christian theology of nature. Eco-theology, in this case, goes in line with Bevans' description of the Praxis Model, "it is a theology that includes the rights act as a necessary component in its epistemic foundation" (Bevans, 2004).

Ecotheological development took a different hermeneutical perspective in interpreting the scriptures and theological traditions. It mainly engaged the hermeneutics of suspicion in reading both the Bible and Christian traditions. Conradie argues, "not only is eco-theology suspicious of the content of scriptures, but it is also suspicious of traditional Christian doctrines" (Conradie, 2004). The hermeneutics interpretations are of recovery: resistance (reconstruction) and liberation. The 'revisionists' are willing to reform Christianity to emphasize the environmental dimensions. However, they do this, holding to the basic teachings of classical Christianity. While the other group, the 'reconstructionist' are willing to make radical changes. Most eco-theologians fall in this category.

**Eco-theological reading of the Bible:** Ecological Biblical reading takes two perspectives. One, where the Bible is accused for the ecological degradation, and two, where the bible is read apologetically, an attempt to respond to the first accusation.

**Bible blamed:** From Lynn White and some critical to Christianity, the Bible is blamed for fostering eco-degrading teaching. Christianity, in general, has been charged with promoting an anthropocentric perspective of human salvation and redemption. In such a view, the rest of creation is marginalized and left out on the broader story. There are two biblical blame narratives depicting anthropocentrism. From the Old Testament, after the fall, there follows the story of the human election, particularly the people of Israel. The New Testament present the coming of Christ, the bearer of the salvation and redemption of the human being. Consequently, eschatology is where a human being will enter eternity, which happens after destroying the present world. Reading on the surface clearly shows that the rest of creation only serve the purpose of human salvation and sustenance.

**Biblical hermeneutics:** In response to the above challenge, eco-theologians have deployed different approaches and methodology of Biblical reading. This is where exegesis and hermeneutics are necessary away from eisegesis and surface reading. The term hermeneutics has its meaning from the Greek word *herm neu*. In this case the verb meant imitating the message of god, which was 'translated or transmuted' to a human understanding (Palmer, 1969). Therefore, hermeneutic, primarily comprised of stating divine matters into human speech. In theological scholarship, hermeneutics take different theoretical perspectives-African hermeneutics, Liberation hermeneutics, Feminist hermeneutics, ecological hermeneutics, to name but a few (Osmer, 2008). Ecotheology uses Ecotheological hermeneutics. This is where the meaning of the text and its context is sought, discovered, and then related and applied to ecological and environmental issues. Ecotheological hermeneutics focus is on retrieving the Biblical wisdom, knowledge and teaching in response to the ecological crisis. It has a three dimensions approach, reinvestigate, rediscover, and renew Christian traditions in the light of Bible and ecological crisis. The task of the ecotheological hermeneutics is going beyond what has been seen as common practice of interpretation. It is here where thorough exegesis is needed to generate new possibilities and new meaning away from the previously held. In doing so, the biblical text offers wisdom and creates new meaning that was hidden or misinterpreted throughout the Christian tradition. Thus, through hermeneutics,

the church is capable of renewing its theology and also re-evaluate the human nature relationship.

**Six Principles of Eco-theology:** Through hermeneutics interpretation from different scholars, there has been the development of six principles of eco-theology.

**These are**

- ) The principle of affirming the intrinsic worth of nature. In this case, eco-theology tries to understand that the universe, earth, and all its components have intrinsic value and worth. The goodness of the creation (1 Tim 4:1-5).
- ) The principle of interconnectedness-That earth is a community of interconnectedness of all living and non-living things, which all depends on each other- This is a premise of the created world (Genesis 4)
- ) The principle of the voice-the universe, earth as its voice as a living organism (Gaia hypothesis) and can resist injustices (Genesis 4:10, Number 22: 21-35).
- ) The principle of purpose- The universe and the earth and all its components were placed for a greater purpose (Roman 8:18-22).
- ) The principle of mutual custodianship-this reflects in the role of the humans with the earth. Instead of being masters on the earth, humans should view themselves as guests on it. Custodians of the host do not deny responsibility but include respect for the bonds between humans and other creatures (Psalms 8).
- ) The principle of the resistance-this principle claims that the earth and its components actively resist those injustice imposed by humans. Nevertheless, it does not divorce eco-justice from social justice but recognizes its claim on human lives by identification and being with the earth (Jeremiah 12:9).

In the light of all this, eco-theologians views environmental crisis and degradation of eco-systems as rooted in spiritual issues.

**20<sup>th</sup> Century eco-theology models and the main figures:** There are many historical precedents that we can attribute and acknowledge as leading to the contemporary eco-theological developments. The modern, however, falls back to 1967 to Lynn White. The models are interrelated with the two approaches presented earlier. These models are the process model (creation spirituality), stewardship model (apologist), ecofeminist model (social and eco-justice) and liberation model (eco-justice). The stewardship model proponents are more apologist, while those of the other three proponents of the three models fall either under revisionists or reconstructionist. I present each model below.

**Stewardship Model:** To Berry (2006), stewardship model is an eco-theological approach against biblical misinterpretation of 'dominion' and the Greek philosophical ideas of a hierarchal order of God-human-nature as viewed in the theology and traditions of Christianity of the West. The model holds that through Biblical misinterpretation, the creation came to be seen in strongly utilitarian terms, with creatures viewed as existing for the sake of human beings and inferior because human beings are the reasoning and spirit beings. The '*imago Dei*' is the uniqueness of the human expressed in terms of the distinction and superiority to other creatures. The 'spiritual

dimension' of the human, human rationality, or a more mystical conception of the uniqueness of the human to the divine is elevated. Thomas Aquinas, an influential western theologian, and philosopher accepted the Greek interpretation of a hierarchical world, where God rules over the human being, and human being rules over the non-human creation. (Berry, 2006). Provoked by this understanding, stewardship model scholars have tried to interpret 'dominion' as care and responsibility. The stewardship eco-theology model challenge the existing human being vs nature hierarchy. This is where human beings have allegedly been viewed above nature. (Berry, 2006). The model assert that hierarchy is a departure from God's intended goals. Joseph Sittler had argued, "today, man is no longer related to nature in God's intended way. Nor can be from within himself find his way to the blasted garden of joy. That, fundamentally, is why he plunders what he ought to tend..." (Sittler, 2000).

Douglas Hall (2006), cites how human domination of creation has objectified and made the earth a place of discovery, human experiment, and conquest, which he refers to as a dominant attitude of modern Western civilization. It is because of the term nature rather than creation. He quotes what Bertrand Russell wrote in the late 1920s, "to the modern man, his physical environment is merely raw material, an opportunity for manipulation." (Hall, 2006, p.133). The idea is that human being is nature's Lord and possessor, capable of making over what God put together in the first place. For the perspective is God-man-nature, but, which Sittler argued, they are meant for each other" (Berry, 2006, p.54). The stewardship model of eco-theology maintain that God places human beings as stewards. Thus, they are answerable to God, both for use and for the care of nature, just as a steward of an estate is answerable to its owners or trustees are answerable before the law for the goods they hold on trust (Attfield, 2006, p.76). They have also argued that the consequences of our dealing with nature are subject to ethical constraints. Another implication is that humans do not own the earth, nor its lands nor its oceans, but hold or possess them on a provisional basis: hence their answerability, for the earth and so are human being belongs to God. Stewardship is linked to moral agency. However, critical to the stewardship model states that; stewardship is objectionably anthropocentric, managerial, aloof from nature and thus not a valuable model for environmental ethics. Those argue in this case state that the anthropological view of the stewardship model has fostered domination of by human being, and to encourage humanity to regard itself as being not only above nature but 'custodian' of it, hence master (Hall, 2006). Others like Matthew Fox have suggested that belief in stewardship represents God as an absentee landlord and human as serfs. Clare Palmer criticism of the stewardship model separates God from the natural world (Palmer, 1992).

**Process Model:** Process Eco-theology traces its roots from the process theologians. John Cobb, of the Chicago school of theology with an influence of Alfred North Whitehead, was one of the earliest known proponents (Case-Winters, 2007). Process eco-theology takes a more 'spiritual' and 'philosophical perspective' It combines a critique of philosophical dualism with the problem of the desacralization of nature. It views how classical theism has been affected by this philosophical dualistic thinking, where the divine has been defined as perfect, over against the attributes of the natural world in a dualistic and oppositional framework, supernatural over against nature. Theologian also fights an attitude, where the

world is viewed as running countercurrent what Godly-a view of Godly and worldly is. The mysteries of God are preserved as those beyond anything we might know or describe in human terms. Apocalypticism becomes the most praised elements for its provision of escapism from the world to a Godly realm. Their arguments have taken a description of deity, which seems to place God and the world in a kind of polar opposition, from Case-Winters, 2007.

<i>God is</i>	<i>The World is</i>
Necessary	Contingent
Eternal	Temporal
Unchanging	Changing
Absolute	Relative

The process eco-theologians have argued that this arrangement makes it difficult for any credible account of divine presence or activity in the world. For they ask, how can an unchanging being relate to a changing world? How can a being who is eternal (in the sense of a temporal) act in a world that is caught up in time? They argue against such theological thoughts, which they view as the leading cause of the 'desacralization' of nature; there is an 'infinite qualitative distinction' between God and the world, the world is not God, and nothing in the world is God. They are also critical where divine transcendence is preserved at the expense of divine immanence, where they argue that the refusal to confuse God and the world or to acknowledge God in the world may have contributed to clearing the way for brutal violation and exploitation of nature that has attended the Western theology (Case-Winters, 2007).

**Ecofeminists Model:** Ecofeminism emerged in the 1970s, propelled by women such as Susan Griffin, Carolyn Merchant, the Colectivo Conspirando, Vandana Shiva, Sallie McFague, and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Case-Winters, 2007). These women believed that the oppression of women (and people of colour) and the devastation of the planet followed are two forms of violence perpetrated by ruling class males that reinforce and feed on one another. Eco-feminism was also a response to the domination of feminist rhetoric by light-skinned, upper-class women at the expense of low-income women of colour. Consequently, ecofeminism is complex and multi-faceted in how it re-envision a better world; unfortunately, I can only summarize a few of the perspectives here (Ress, 2008). Ecology and feminism brought together ecofeminism. Their goal is "earth healing, a healed relationship between men and women, between classes and nations, and between humans and the earth" (Ruether, 1992). Ecofeminists see the destructive downside of the dualistic framework of the western classical tradition. They present a dualistic perspective constructed under the classical tradition of God's relation to the world. This dualism is held as follows. Ecofeminism views dominating and destructive ties to the earth, which relates to gender, class and racial domination. They argue that to heal the world, therefore, does not require technology. Instead, it demands social reordering to bring about justice and the loving interrelationship between men and women, between races and nations, and between groups presently stratified into social classes (Case-Winters, 2007).

<b>God</b>	<b>World</b>
Man	Woman
Soul	Body
Culture	Nature
Mind	Matter

Light	Darkness
Good	Evil

Most ecofeminists are critical to male monotheistic God, a relationship they view as having created and construed a culture of male elevation. This is reinforced the symbolical male superiority over women, cosmos, masters over slaves and (male ruling-class) humans over animals and the earth. Ecofeminism argues that the domination of women has provided a critical link, both socially and symbolically, to the domination of the world, hence the tendency in patriarchal cultures to link women with earth, matter, and nature, while identifying males with the sky, intellect, and transcendent spirit (Ruether, 1992). Ecofeminism, therefore, entails speaking about nature, women and all those who are subjugated by the forces of patriarchy. McFaque shows that ecofeminism is a spiritual strand that celebrates women and nature as valuables—viewing both nature and women as mothers, with the ability to giving birth and the ability to propagate (McFaque, 1987). This is because women begot and nurture life like the earth produces and nurture all that is within it. They, therefore, contend that women have a unique connectedness to the world. At the same time, those in developing countries such as Wangari Maathai from Kenya and Vandana Shiva from India have argued from the productive role and the dependence and responsibility roles. They have shown that most farmers in India, Africa, and Latin America are women, most households in these parts of the world to women run. Thus, nature means more and connects more to women than men. The destruction of nature, therefore, represents the destruction of women and vis a vis. The concept held by women concerning nature is **Gaia** from Greek, meaning the mother of all life (Ruether, 1992).

**Liberation Eco-theology or 'Eco-Justice':** Eco-justice is mainly associated with Episcopal Priest Norman Faramelli. Faramelli said, "choosing [to work for] ecology instead of [against] poverty, or vice versa, is to make a bad choice;" the way ahead is to choose both (Faramelli, 1970). Eco-justice later grew into integrative ethics of ecology and justice. Boff argues that liberation theology and ecological discourse have something in common: they stem from two wounds that are bleeding. The first, damage of poverty and wretchedness, tears the social fabrics of millions and millions of poor people world all over. The second, systematic aggression against the earth, destroys the equilibrium of the planet, threatened by the depredations made by a type of development undertaken by the contemporary society, now spread throughout the world (Boff, 1995). Hence, eco-theology is a form of liberation theology. Boff states, "today, nature's most threatened creatures are not the whales or the giant pandas of China, but the poor of the world, condemned to die of hunger and disease before their time" (Boff, 1995). Liberation eco-theologians as well argue that the western Christian interpretation of the Bible is deeply anthropocentric. However, unlike the other model presented earlier, they view how anthropocentrism has contributed to the exploitation of nature and has marginalized and exploited people. Dieter Hessel advocates ecological and social justices in a world of predatory economic exploitation that had to widen the rich-poor gap (Hessel, 2007).

- ) Hessel writes that eco-justice has four basic norms:
- ) solidarity with other people and creatures – companions, victims, and allies – in earth community, reflecting a deep respect for diverse creation;

- ) ecological sustainability – environmentally fitting habits of living and working that enable life to flourish and utilize ecologically and socially appropriate technology;
- ) sufficiency as a standard of organized sharing, which requires bare floors and definite ceilings for equitable or "fair" consumption;
- ) socially just participation in decisions about how to obtain sustenance and to manage community life for the good in common and the interest of the commons (Hessel, 2007).

**Eco-theology an 'African perspective':** Eco-theology in Africa is relatively new, starting at the end of the 20th century, mainly in the 90s, though growing. There are several Africa eco-theologians within and without the Christian circles, such as Ernst Conradie (*Christianity and Ecological Theology*, 2006), Marthinus Daneel (*African Earthkeepers: Wholistic Interfaith mission*, 2001), JOY Mante (*Africa: theological and philosophical roots of our ecological crisis* (2004), Ben-Willie Kwaku Golo (*Towards an African earth theology of liberation. A study of deforestation in Ghana in a globalized world*, PhD (2006), Cyprian Obiora Alokwa (*the Anglican Church, Environmental and Poverty: Constructing a Nigeria Indigenous Oikotheology*, PhD (2009), Mary Getui and Emmanuel Obeng (*Towards the Recovery of African Identity*, 1999), Jesse Mugambi (*Christian Theology and Environmental Responsibility*, 2001), Samson Gitau (*The Environmental Crisis: A Challenge for African Christianity*, 2000), Sindima Harvey (*The Gospel according to the Marginalized-Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Studies in Religion, Culture and Social Development*, 2008), Wangari Maathai (*Replenishing the Earth: Spiritual Values for Healing Ourselves and the World*, 2010), and Andrew Ratanya Mukaria, *Towards Constructive Ecotheology: The Mau Forest Complex and the Response of the Church* (2017), to name but a few.

In an article, *Constructing a four-generation of Christian Ecological motifs and the need for African traditional ecological knowledge as the firth*, Cyprian ObioraAlokwa divides eco-theology into five categories. These are the first generation: dominion thinking, the second generation: stewardship, the third generation: eco-theology and fourth generation: Oiko-theology, and fifth-generation: African traditional ecological knowledge, which involves using the indigenous cultural knowledge (Alokwa, 2015). For a comprehensive eco-theological discourse and practice in Africa, eco-theology has to take its position within the indigenous ecological ethics, indigenous knowledge, and values.

The current eco-theology in Africa has six dimensions, which all emerge from many challenges experienced in the context. I cite few cases of Africa eco-theologians. However, the measurements are including, but not limited to, the cited proponents.

- ) Colonial past and westernization of Africa-here, the proponents present the degradation and destruction of the indigenous cultural knowledge (Maathai, 2010).
- ) Cultural dimensions-The proponents, in this case, argue how the degradation of cultural knowledge has undermined the organic cosmic relationship which existed (Daneel, 2001, Alokwa, 2009).
- ) Social dimension-the rising issues of poverty, the gap between the rich and flawed due to capitalism and market

forces coming from within and without. Diseases like AIDS and other social stigmatization (Golo, 2006, Alokwa, 2009).

- J Political dimensions- the challenges of ethnopolitics, entrenched in political hegemony, corruption and impunity, tribal classes and unstable states in Africa. Rising cases of insecurity and terror activities (Getui and Obeng, 1999, Sindima, 2000).
- J Gender disparities dimension -issues of patriarchy affecting women and ecological degradation having a profound effect on women (Maathai, 2010).
- J Ecological and nature degradation dimension-there is massive degradation of nature in this context, which draws critical attention to Christian theology and biblical narratives (Conradie, 2006, Mukaria, 2017).

The eco-theology in Africa is arising from the consciousness of the African context. It has a hermeneutic interpretation of Christian scriptures and traditions in collaboration with the local cultures and challenges experienced. It is incorporating approaches presented earlier (stewardship, apologetic, revisionist and revolutionist). However, it is uniquely African, intervening on the context's socio-economic, cultural, spiritual, and political issues. The eco-theology in this case (like its predecessors) questions the western Christian theology to the issues affecting the environment and Africa context. Some eco-theologians like Ernst Conradie and Mugambi follow the stewardship and apologetic approaches. Others like Daneel, Mante, Sindima and Maathai are revisionist and revolutionist, going far in correcting some historical injustices and critiquing the economic production process (blaming industrialization and neoliberal capitalism) affecting the local context. They are also critical to how nature and Africa culture were desacralized Africa, mainly through western Christianity and colonialism. Both nature and culture were subjected to the colonial discourses, which reduced the cultures and generated an 'environmental colonialism.' For the progressive degradation of the culture, nature was left venerable, and the forest was commercialized. To Maathai, Africans held the sacredness of nature, and they communally owned the land. This was before the Christianization and colonialism of the African context. (Maathai, 2010).

Wangari further contends, Christianity in the context taught followers not to uphold the sacredness of nature, and through that, the sacred was exploited and desecrated. African who opposed the teachings and confided in nature are regarded as syncretic, and any association is considered a fetish-a result of ignorance (Mante, 2004). Henceforth, Mante contends that the natural world's fear and respect disappeared, indiscriminate cutting down of trees, burning of the forest, and other exploitation of the ecology became a norm. Indigenous culture knowledge was lost, and the new lifestyle is now civilization, enlightenment, and modernity (Mante, 2004). Nevertheless, the challenges facing ecotheological thinking within the Sub-Saharan African context has to do with the theological differences exhibited by Christian denominations. We find how different denomination's traditions, mission principles, and policies influence the theological thinking of their members towards ecology. As Mukaria (2017) shows, at least four factors have narrowed down the ecotheological review:

- J The meaning of the kingdom of God, salvation and the definition of eschatology has different meaning between

the evangelicals and ecumenical groups, and the groups competing for membership.

- J The challenge related to the rise of the prosperity gospel-prosperity Gospel sees material blessings as spiritual blessings.
- J The loss of social concern and African communality-the gospel has been reduced to individual circumstances, and the sacrificial aspect of the mission is lost.
- J Nature reduced to be a centre of gathering material and possession.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, we find that there have been attempts to address the current ecological crisis since the emergence of Lynn White's essay, '*the Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis.*' Nonetheless, such attempts seem not to agree with each other, or there seem to be various disparities. Additionally, it seems none of these attempts has adequately addressed the real issue or the real cause of the ecological crisis. Thus, the environmental crisis is still escalating, cemented in a philosophy, determining beliefs, and a lifestyle. Therefore, this paper calls for continued studies, and further, the teaching of ecological and ecotheological related tasks to cement a clear understanding of the human beings roles in the current environmental crisis.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alokwa, Cyprian Obiora. 2015. Constructing a four generation of Christian Ecological motifs and the need for African traditional ecological knowledge as the firth. *International Journal of Theology and Reformed Tradition*, 7, pp. 141-158.
- Atkinson, David. 2013. Eco-theology is not new: it's foundational to faith. *Church times*. <http://test.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2013/13-september/comment/opinion/eco-theology-is-not-new-it-s-foundational-to-faith>. Accessed, 8 June. 2018.
- Attfield, Robin. 2006. *Creation, Evolution and meaning*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Berry, R. J. 2006. *Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspective-Past and Present*, London, New York: T&T Clark International.
- Bevans, B. Stephens. 2004. *Models of Contextual Theology*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books.
- Boff, Leonardo. 1995. *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the poor*. Mary Knoll: Orbis Books., pp.
- Case-Winters, Anna. 2007. *Reconstructing a Christian Theology of Nature: Down to Earth*, Chicago: Ashgate.
- Cobb, John. 2010. *Spiritual Bankruptcy: A Prophetic call to action*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- Conradie, M. Ernst. 2005. *An Ecological Christian Anthropology: At Home on Earth?* London, New York: Routledge.
- Deane-Drummond, Celia. 2008. *Eco-theology*, Darton: Longman and Todd.
- Faramelli, Norman. 1970. *Ecological Responsibility and Economic Justice*. In the *Andover Newton Quarterly*, 11., pp. 81-93.
- Hall, John Douglas. 2004. *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship*, Eugene, Oregon: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

- Hessel, T. Dieter. 2007. Eco-Justice Ethics. in *The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale*. <http://fore.yale.edu/disciplines/ethics/eco-justice/>. Accessed 8 June. 2018.
- Kakoma, A. Itonde. 2005. *Worship in African Contexts of holism and crisis*, Geneva: Lutheran World Federation.
- Lesslie, Newbigin. 1995. *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*, London: SPCK.
- Maathai, M. Wangari. 2010. *Replenishing the Earth: Spiritual Values for Healing ourselves and the world*, New York: Random House Inc.
- Mante, JOY. 2004. *Africa: The theological and philosophical roots of our ecological crisis*. Accra: Sonlife Press.
- McFague Sallie. 1987. *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Mukaria, A. R. 2017. *Towards Constructive Ecotheology: the Mau forest complex degradation and the response of the Church*. Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Oslo: Norwegian School of Theology.
- Osmer, R. R. 2008. *Practical Theology: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Palmer, Clare. 1992. *Environmental Ethics and Process Thinking*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Palmer, R. E. 1969. *Hermeneutics*, Evanston: North-Western University Press.
- Ress, J. Mary. 2008. *Remembering Who We Are: Reflections on Latin American Ecofeminist Theology*. In *The Journal of the Britain & Ireland School of Feminist Theology*. 16 3., pp. 383–396.
- Ruether, Rosemary Radford. 1992. *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, San Francisco: Harper.
- Santmire, H. Paul. 1985. *The Travail of Nature*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Sittler, Joseph. 2000. *Evocations of Grace: the writings of Joseph Sittler on Ecology, Theology, and Ethics*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Wilfred, Felix. 2009. *Toward an Inter-Religious Eco-theology*. In Wainwright Elaine, Carlos Luiz, and Wilfred Felix eds., *Ecotheology*. London. SCM Press., pp. 43-54.

\*\*\*\*\*