

**CHRISTIANITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS:  
TRANSMISSION OF SACRED KNOWLEDGE AND  
ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS**

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**Abstract**

The contemporary ecological crisis has provoked renewed theological reflection on humanity's relationship with the natural environment. Christianity, as a faith tradition grounded in sacred revelation, offers a rich ethical framework for environmental responsibility through its doctrines of creation, stewardship, incarnation, and eschatological hope. This paper examines Christianity's

contribution to environmental ethics by analyzing how sacred knowledge is transmitted and how ecological consciousness is cultivated within Christian theology, scripture, tradition, and praxis. Drawing from biblical texts, patristic thought, ecclesial teachings, and modern ecological theology, the study argues that Christian environmental ethics is not a peripheral concern but an integral expression of faith and discipleship. The paper further explores the pedagogical and communal mechanisms through which ecological values are communicated, emphasizing the church's role in shaping moral consciousness for sustainable living.

**Keywords:** Christianity, environmental ethics, sacred knowledge, ecological consciousness, stewardship, creation theology

## **Introduction**

Environmental degradation, climate change, biodiversity loss, and ecological injustice have emerged as defining moral challenges of the twenty-first century. These crises are not merely scientific or economic issues but deeply ethical and spiritual concerns that question humanity's understanding of its place within the natural order. Religious traditions, particularly Christianity, have increasingly been called upon to articulate moral frameworks capable of inspiring ecological responsibility and sustainable practices (Berry, 2009). Christianity as a monotheistic religion centered on faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, grounded in the biblical revelation of God as Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of the universe. The

Christian worldview affirms the goodness of creation and humanity's unique role within it (Genesis 1–2).

Historically, Christianity has been accused of fostering anthropocentrism and ecological exploitation, especially through interpretations of the biblical mandate to “subdue” the earth (Genesis 1:28). Genesis 1 repeatedly declares creation as “good,” culminating in God’s assessment of creation as “very good” (Gen. 1:31, New Revised Standard Version). Humanity, created in the *imago Dei*, is entrusted with dominion (Gen. 1:26–28), a concept that has often been misinterpreted as exploitative control. Genesis 2:15 further clarifies humanity’s ecological vocation, stating that God placed humans in the garden “to till it and keep it.” The Hebrew terms ‘abad (to serve) and shamar (to preserve) suggest a relationship of service and protection rather than domination. The Psalms and prophetic literature also reflect ecological consciousness by portraying nature as participating in the praise of God (Ps. 104; Ps. 148) and condemning environmental destruction as a consequence of human sin (Hos. 4:1–3). In the New Testament, ecological concern is implicit in Christology and eschatology. The incarnation affirms the material world, as God enters creation in bodily form (John 1:14). Pauline theology presents Christ as the cosmic reconciler through whom “all things” are restored (Col. 1:15–20), indicating that salvation encompasses both humanity and the wider creation (Moltmann, 1993).

However, a theological reading situates dominion within responsible stewardship, care, and accountability to God (Wright, 2004). The contemporary Christian theology has re-examined these interpretations, recovering a more holistic and relational understanding of creation. This paper, however, investigates how Christianity transmits sacred knowledge that informs environmental ethics and nurtures ecological consciousness among believers. The contemporary ecological crisis—manifested in climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and environmental degradation—poses a profound moral challenge to humanity. Within this context, Christianity has increasingly engaged environmental issues through ethical reflection and practical action. Christian environmental ethics is grounded in biblical theology, shaped by doctrinal traditions, and expressed through concrete environmental praxis. This paper examines the relationship between Christianity, ethics, and environmental praxis, arguing that Christian faith provides a robust moral framework for ecological responsibility rooted in stewardship, justice, and love of neighbor.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

The basic concepts of this study which include; environmental ethics, sacred knowledge in Christianity, and ecological consciousness, is clarified here for proper understanding of the researchers' convictions of the subject. Environmental ethics here refers to the moral principles governing human interactions with the natural environment. It addresses questions of responsibility, value, justice, and sustainability in relation to ecosystems and

non-human life (DesJardins, 2013). Ethics generally refers to the systematic reflection on moral values, principles, and norms guiding human conduct. Christian ethics derives its moral vision from Scripture, tradition, reason, and lived experience, emphasizing obedience to God's will and responsibility toward others, including future generations (Gula, 2010). Within religious contexts, environmental ethics often emerges from theological reflections on creation, divine sovereignty, and moral obligation.

Sacred knowledge in Christianity encompasses divinely revealed truths transmitted through scripture, tradition, reason, and lived faith. This knowledge shapes moral norms and worldviews, guiding believers' understanding of reality and ethical responsibility (McGrath, 2017). When applied to environmental concerns, sacred knowledge provides theological meaning to ecological care. Ecological consciousness on the other hand denotes an awareness of the interconnectedness of all life forms and a moral sensitivity toward environmental integrity. In Christian thought, ecological consciousness is rooted in the recognition of creation as God's handiwork and humanity's vocation as caretakers rather than exploiters (Conradie, 2011).

### **Biblical Foundations of Christian Environmental Ethics**

The Bible provides a rich and coherent foundation for Christian environmental ethics. Through the doctrines of creation, stewardship, covenant, sin, redemption, and eschatological hope, Scripture affirms the intrinsic value of the environment and humanity's moral responsibility

toward it. Christian environmental ethics, grounded biblically, calls believers to faithful stewardship, ecological justice, and participation in God's redemptive care for the whole creation. Christian environmental ethics is rooted in the biblical vision of creation as God's purposeful and valuable work, entrusted to humanity for responsible care rather than exploitative domination. The Bible provides a coherent theological framework that grounds environmental responsibility in doctrines of creation, stewardship, covenant, sin, redemption, and eschatological hope. From Genesis to Revelation, Scripture affirms that the natural world belongs to God and that human beings are accountable moral agents within creation.

The scriptural texts which is basically contained in Genesis narratives provides the primary foundation for Christian environmental ethics. Genesis 1–2 presents the world as created intentionally by God and declared “very good” (Gen. 1:31, New Revised Standard Version [NRSV]). Creation is not accidental or morally neutral; it reflects divine wisdom and purpose. The repeated affirmation of goodness underscores the intrinsic value of the non-human world apart from its utility to humanity (Horrell et al., 2010).

Nature is not a product of chance but a sacred reality imbued with divine purpose. This theological vision confers intrinsic value upon the non-human world, independent of its utility to humanity (Horrell et al., 2010). Biblical stewardship emphasizes responsible care rather than domination. The Hebrew concept of *radah* (dominion) is best understood as governance modeled after God's

benevolent rule—protective, sustaining, and just. Humanity’s role as steward (oikonomos) implies accountability to God for the use of creation. Psalm 24:1 reinforces this theology by affirming divine ownership: “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it.” This confession establishes a moral limit to human exploitation of nature, as the environment is ultimately God’s possession, not humanity’s property. Genesis 1:26–28 has often been misinterpreted to justify ecological domination. However, the biblical mandate to “have dominion” (radah) must be interpreted within the broader canonical and cultural context. In Genesis 2:15, humanity is placed in the garden “to till it and keep it,” terms that connote care, service, and preservation rather than destruction (Wright, 2004).

Scripture also presents a covenantal vision that includes the natural world. God’s covenant with Noah explicitly encompasses “every living creature” (Genesis 9:9–10), underscoring creation’s participation in divine purposes. This inclusive covenant challenges narrow anthropocentric ethics and supports ecological responsibility. The Bible remains the primary medium through which ecological ethics are transmitted. Liturgical readings, sermons, catechesis, and theological education serve as channels for interpreting scriptural teachings on creation care. When ecological themes are emphasized, scripture becomes a powerful catalyst for moral transformation.

Christian tradition, including patristic and medieval theology, offers valuable ecological insights. Church Fathers such as Basil the Great and Francis of Assisi

articulated a sacramental view of nature, perceiving creation as a reflection of God's glory. These traditions continue to inform contemporary eco-theological discourse (Santmire, 2000). Modern ecclesial documents have reinforced Christian environmental ethics. Encyclicals and synodal statements emphasize environmental stewardship as a moral and spiritual obligation. Such authoritative teachings function as formal mechanisms for transmitting sacred ecological knowledge to the faithful.

The stewardship model emphasizes responsibility, accountability, and restraint. Humans are vice-regents who manage creation on God's behalf, reflecting divine care and justice. This ethical vision challenges anthropocentric and utilitarian approaches to the environment. Biblical covenants extend beyond humanity to include the whole created order. In Genesis 9:8–17, God establishes a covenant not only with Noah and his descendants but also “with every living creature.” This inclusive covenant affirms God's enduring concern for animals and ecosystems, thereby grounding ecological responsibility in divine promise (Bauckham, 2010).

The Mosaic Law further expresses this concern through environmental regulations such as Sabbath rest for the land (Lev. 25:1–7) and protections for animals (Deut. 25:4). These laws demonstrate that environmental care is integral to covenant faithfulness. The biblical narrative associates environmental degradation with human sin. Genesis 3 depicts how disobedience fractures relationships between God, humanity, and the earth, resulting in toil, suffering, and alienation. The prophets often link ecological

devastation to moral failure and injustice (e.g., Hos. 4:1–3; Jer. 12:4).

This theological connection suggests that environmental crises are not merely technical or economic problems but also spiritual and ethical ones. Christian environmental ethics therefore calls for repentance, moral reform, and renewed obedience to God. The New Testament expands environmental ethics through the doctrine of redemption. Romans 8:19–22 portrays creation as groaning in anticipation of liberation, bound to humanity’s redemption in Christ. Salvation is thus cosmic in scope, encompassing both humanity and the natural world (Moltmann, 1985). Christ’s reconciling work is described as restoring “all things” to God (Col. 1:15–20), indicating that ecological renewal is part of God’s redemptive plan. Christian environmental ethics is therefore eschatological, grounded in hope for the renewal rather than the annihilation of creation. Biblical eschatology does not legitimize environmental neglect. Revelation 11:18 warns of divine judgment against those who “destroy the earth,” affirming accountability for ecological harm. The vision of a new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21–22) portrays continuity and transformation rather than total replacement, reinforcing the ethical obligation to care for creation in the present.

### **Ecological Consciousness in Christian Theology**

Ecological consciousness refers to an awareness of the intrinsic value of the natural environment and humanity’s ethical responsibility toward its preservation and flourishing. In Christian theology, ecological consciousness

is rooted in biblical revelation, doctrinal reflection, and moral theology. Contemporary ecological crises—such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation—have compelled Christian theologians to revisit traditional teachings on creation, stewardship, and human responsibility. Far from being a modern imposition, ecological concern is deeply embedded within the Christian theological worldview, which understands creation as God’s good gift and humanity as a responsible participant in its care (Conradie, 2015).

Ecological consciousness in Christian theology is not a peripheral concern but a central implication of biblical faith, doctrinal reflection, and ethical responsibility. By affirming the goodness of creation, recognizing humanity’s role as steward, and envisioning cosmic redemption, Christian theology provides a robust framework for addressing contemporary ecological challenges. In a world facing unprecedented environmental crises, Christian ecological consciousness calls believers to faithful action grounded in reverence for God, love for neighbor, and care for creation.

Christian ecological consciousness finds practical expression in environmental ethics. Stewardship remains a central ethical principle, calling believers to manage natural resources responsibly for present and future generations. Love of neighbor, a core Christian ethic, extends to future generations who will bear the consequences of

environmental neglect (Deane-Drummond, 2008). Ecological degradation disproportionately affects the poor and vulnerable, particularly in the Global South. Christian theology therefore links ecological concern with social justice, emphasizing that care for creation is inseparable from care for humanity (Pope Francis, 2015). This perspective resonates strongly within African Christian contexts, where environmental harm directly threatens livelihoods, culture, and communal well-being.

Modern Christian theology has increasingly engaged ecological issues through movements such as eco-theology and creation spirituality. Theologians have called for ecological conversion—a transformation of attitudes, values, and lifestyles in response to environmental crises (Francis, 2015). Churches and Christian institutions are now integrating ecological awareness into worship, education, and social action, reflecting a growing recognition that ecological responsibility is an essential dimension of Christian discipleship.

In African theology, ecological consciousness is often reinforced by indigenous cosmologies that emphasize harmony between humanity and nature. When integrated with Christian theology, these perspectives enrich ecological ethics and promote sustainable practices rooted in both faith and culture (Conradie, 2015).

The doctrine of the Incarnation affirms the material world as a legitimate locus of divine presence. By taking on flesh, Christ sanctifies material reality, challenging dualistic tendencies that devalue nature. This incarnational theology fosters ecological reverence and ethical responsibility (Edwards, 2006). Christian theology recognizes ecological degradation as a manifestation of human sin—greed, exploitation, and alienation from God and creation. Redemption, therefore, encompasses not only human salvation but the healing of the entire cosmos (Romans 8:19–22). Christian doctrines significantly shape ecological consciousness. The doctrine of creation emphasizes that the world belongs to God, not humanity (Ps. 24:1). This theological conviction challenges anthropocentric attitudes that treat nature as mere property or resource. Creation theology thus grounds an ethic of reverence, humility, and responsibility toward the environment (Santmire, 2000). The doctrine of sin explains ecological degradation as a manifestation of disordered human relationships—with God, neighbor, and nature. Environmental destruction is therefore not merely a technical or economic problem but a moral and spiritual crisis (Horrell et al., 2010). Conversely, the doctrine of redemption offers hope for ecological restoration. Christian eschatology envisions not the annihilation of the earth but its renewal, as expressed in the promise of a “new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1). Trinitarian theology also contributes to ecological consciousness by emphasizing relationality. The interconnectedness within the Trinity provides a model for understanding the interdependence of all creation. This relational ontology encourages Christians to view the

ecological community as a network of mutual dependence sustained by God's sustaining presence (Edwards, 2006). Above all, Christian eschatology envisions the renewal rather than the annihilation of creation. The promise of a "new heaven and new earth" (Revelation 21:1) encourages active participation in ecological restoration rather than passive indifference.

### **Christianity, Ethics, and Environmental Praxis**

Environmental praxis denotes the practical application of ethical and theological insights to environmental action. It involves lifestyle changes, advocacy, policy engagement, and communal efforts aimed at ecological sustainability and justice (Deane-Drummond, 2017). Christian worship shapes ecological consciousness through prayers, hymns, and sacramental practices that affirm gratitude for creation. Liturgical seasons, such as harvest thanksgiving, reinforce environmental awareness and moral responsibility. Christian environmental praxis translates ethical principles into action. Churches and faith-based organizations engage in tree planting, waste management campaigns, climate advocacy, and environmental education. In African contexts, including Nigeria, Christian communities increasingly address issues such as deforestation, erosion, oil pollution, and climate-induced poverty through ecumenical and grassroots initiatives. Liturgical practices, such as harvest thanksgiving and creation-focused worship, also reinforce ecological consciousness. Theological education and sermons play a vital role in shaping environmental awareness among clergy and laity alike, fostering an ethics of care for the earth.

The church functions as a moral community where ecological values are nurtured through collective action, advocacy, and lifestyle transformation. Faith-based environmental initiatives demonstrate how sacred knowledge translates into ethical praxis. The Bible provides the foundational framework for Christian environmental ethics. The creation narratives portray the world as God’s good creation (Genesis 1:31), entrusted to human care. The mandate to “till and keep” the garden (Genesis 2:15) implies responsible stewardship rather than exploitative domination. The Psalms celebrate creation as a testimony to God’s glory (Psalm 24:1), while the prophets condemn environmental destruction linked to injustice and moral decay (Hosea 4:1–3). In the New Testament, Jesus’ teachings emphasize love, humility, and care for the vulnerable—principles that extend to ecological concern. Pauline theology further affirms the cosmic scope of redemption, envisioning the reconciliation of all creation in Christ (Romans 8:19–22).

Stewardship is central to Christian environmental ethics. Humans are caretakers of God’s creation, accountable for how they use natural resources. This principle challenges unsustainable exploitation and calls for conservation and responsible management of the environment (Wright, 2006). Environmental justice is integral to Christian ethics, as ecological degradation disproportionately affects the poor and marginalized. Christian ethics insists that environmental policies and practices must promote fairness, equity, and the protection of vulnerable communities (Conradie, 2015). The commandment to love one’s neighbor (Mark 12:31) extends beyond present

human relationships to include future generations. Environmental harm today threatens the wellbeing of those yet unborn, making ecological responsibility a moral obligation (Horrell, Hunt, & Southgate, 2008). Formal theological education and religious instruction play a critical role in embedding environmental ethics within Christian moral formation. Integrating ecological themes into curricula ensures the continuity of sacred ecological consciousness across generations.

### **Challenges in Transmitting Ecological Ethics**

Despite its rich resources, Christianity faces challenges in effectively transmitting ecological ethics. These include theological literalism, economic pressures, and the persistence of anthropocentric worldviews. However, the growing field of eco-theology and interfaith environmental collaboration presents opportunities for renewed engagement and relevance. In African Christian contexts, including Nigeria, integrating indigenous ecological wisdom with Christian theology can deepen environmental ethics and promote sustainable living. This contextual approach enhances the transmission of sacred knowledge in culturally meaningful ways.

The transmission of ecological ethics—the moral principles guiding human interaction with the natural environment—has become a pressing concern in the face of climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation. While religious traditions, particularly Christianity, possess rich ethical resources for environmental stewardship, the

effective transmission of these ecological values faces significant challenges. These challenges arise from cultural, theological, educational, socio-economic, and institutional factors that hinder the internalization and practical application of ecological ethics. This section examines the major obstacles confronting the transmission of ecological ethics in contemporary society. One of the foremost challenges in transmitting ecological ethics is the lack of conceptual clarity surrounding environmental responsibility. In Christian contexts, divergent interpretations of biblical texts—especially Genesis 1:26–28—have often promoted an anthropocentric worldview that legitimizes domination rather than stewardship of nature (White, 1967). Although, contemporary eco-theologians advocate reinterpretations, emphasizing care, responsibility, and covenantal relationships with creation, these perspectives have not been uniformly integrated into popular religious consciousness (Horrell, Hunt, & Southgate, 2008). The persistence of exploitative readings continues to undermine ecological ethics at the grassroots level.

The transmission of ecological ethics also encounters resistance from theological frameworks that prioritize spiritual salvation over material and ecological concerns. In some Christian traditions, environmental issues are perceived as secondary or even irrelevant to the core mission of evangelism and eschatological hope. This dualistic separation between the sacred and the material world weakens ecological moral teaching and discourages sustained environmental engagement (Conradie, 2011). Moreover, apocalyptic interpretations that anticipate the

imminent end of the world may reduce motivation for long-term ecological responsibility. Another critical challenge lies in inadequate environmental education, particularly within religious institutions. Many theological curricula, catechetical programs, and sermons fail to integrate ecological ethics systematically. Where environmental themes are addressed, they are often treated as optional or peripheral rather than as integral to moral formation and discipleship (Orr, 2004). The absence of interdisciplinary approaches that link theology, ethics, science, and local ecological realities further limits the effectiveness of ecological ethics transmission.

Socio-economic realities significantly affect the reception and practice of ecological ethics. In many developing contexts, including parts of Africa, poverty, unemployment, and resource insecurity compel communities to prioritize immediate survival over long-term environmental sustainability. Practices such as deforestation, bush burning, and unregulated resource extraction may persist despite ethical awareness because economic alternatives are lacking (Gathogo, 2017). Under such conditions, ecological ethics may be perceived as elitist or impractical, weakening their moral appeal. Ecological ethics transmission also faces challenges arising from cultural dissonance. Ethical frameworks developed within Western environmental discourse may fail to resonate with indigenous worldviews unless carefully contextualized. While African Traditional Religions often embody strong ecological sensibilities, colonial and missionary legacies sometimes displaced these values without adequately replacing them with constructive

Christian ecological ethics (Daneel, 2001). The failure to integrate indigenous ecological wisdom into contemporary ethical teaching hampers effective moral communication.

Institutional inertia and weak policy implementation further obstruct the transmission of ecological ethics. Religious institutions may issue environmental statements or declarations, but these often lack enforcement mechanisms or practical follow-through. Additionally, limited collaboration between religious bodies, governments, and civil society organizations reduces the societal impact of ecological ethical teachings (Francis, 2015). Without institutional modeling and advocacy, ethical principles remain abstract and disconnected from lived realities.

## **Conclusion**

The transmission of ecological ethics is confronted by multifaceted challenges that span theological interpretation, education, socio-economic realities, cultural contexts, and institutional commitment. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that integrates sound theological reflection, contextual education, economic justice, and institutional accountability. For ecological ethics to be effectively transmitted and embodied, they must be presented not as optional moral add-ons but as central to human identity, faith, and responsibility within the community of creation. Christianity offers a robust and holistic framework for environmental ethics grounded in sacred knowledge and ecological consciousness. Through scripture, tradition, theology, and communal praxis, the Christian faith transmits values that affirm the intrinsic

worth of creation and humanity's moral responsibility toward it. Far from being an optional concern, environmental ethics is central to Christian discipleship and witness in a world facing ecological crisis. Renewed theological reflection and intentional ethical formation are essential for translating Christian belief into transformative ecological action. Christianity, ethics, and environmental praxis are inseparably connected. Grounded in biblical revelation and ethical reflection, Christian environmental ethics calls believers to responsible stewardship, justice, and love expressed through concrete ecological action. In responding to the global environmental crisis, Christianity offers not only moral critique but also transformative praxis capable of contributing to sustainable and just human–earth relationships.

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