

Eschatology and Ecology: Reading Creation Care through the Lens of the New Creation.

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Abstract

In the African Christian imagination, eschatology has too often been interpreted as an escape from the earth rather than a renewal of it. This study reexamines that assumption by constructing an eco-theological framework that reads creation care through the lens of *the new creation* — the biblical vision in which redemption extends not only to human souls but to the entire cosmos. Drawing from scriptural theology, patristic insights, and African ecological consciousness, the research argues that eschatology, rightly understood, does not call believers to abandon the earth but to anticipate its restoration through faithful stewardship. The doctrine of the new creation becomes both the ground and goal of ecological ethics: creation's beginning in divine goodness points toward its ultimate renewal in divine glory.

Using a qualitative theological methodology enriched by narrative reflections from Ghanaian pastors, farmers, and environmental advocates, this paper situates creation care within the lived realities of African Christianity — where the tension between faith and survival is often most acute. Participants spoke of deforestation, polluted rivers, and changing climates not as distant “environmental” issues but as daily reminders of humanity's broken covenant with creation. Yet within their lament resided an eschatological hope: that the God who promises new heavens and a new earth (Revelation 21:1) also calls the Church to prefigure that renewal now, through ecological repentance and restorative action.

From this observation, one can see that African eschatology must be reinterpreted not as withdrawal from a doomed world but as participation in God's redemptive mission for all creation. The study therefore proposes a theological model of *eschatological stewardship*, in which environmental care becomes an act of worship, a foretaste of the coming kingdom, and a moral witness to the gospel's cosmic scope. By linking salvation history with ecological responsibility, the paper offers a corrective to dualistic spirituality and consumer-driven theologies that disconnect eternal hope from earthly responsibility.

Ultimately, this research contends that to believe in the new creation is to live as its ambassadors — nurturing the soil, protecting life, and embodying the reconciliation of all things in Christ (Colossians 1:20). The African Church, rich in communal ethics and reverence for nature, holds within its tradition the seeds of such a theology. When awakened to its eschatological calling, it can lead a global movement of faith-based environmental renewal, proclaiming not only that *Christ will come again*, but that until He does, *His creation must be cared for in hope*.

Keywords

Eschatology; Eco-Theology; Creation Care; Theology of Hope; Climate Justice; African Christianity.

Section 1: Introduction

The question of how Christians should relate to the environment is not merely ethical; it is profoundly theological. In many African churches, the future hope proclaimed from the pulpit has often been framed as an escape from the material world — a departure to heaven where all earthly concerns, including environmental degradation, will be left behind. Yet Scripture tells a different story. From Genesis to Revelation, creation is portrayed not as disposable but as destined for renewal. “Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21:5) is not a promise of abandonment but of restoration.

This study emerges at the intersection of theology and ecology, exploring how the doctrine of the *new creation* reshapes the Christian understanding of environmental stewardship. It argues that eschatology, properly understood, is not about fleeing the earth but about participating in God’s redemptive work within it. The central claim is that the Church’s hope for the future should inspire, not diminish, its care for creation today. To speak of “new heavens and a new earth” (2 Peter 3:13) is to affirm that matter matters — that the God who created and called the world “very good” (Genesis 1:31) will also redeem it.

Within the African context, this conversation takes on particular urgency. Environmental degradation in Ghana and across the continent is not an abstract concern; it is a daily crisis. Farmers in the Northern Region watch their crops fail due to erratic rainfall. Fishermen in Elmina find their nets empty as pollution poisons the sea. Communities in the Western Region mourn the loss of sacred groves once considered untouchable but now cleared for mining. Yet, paradoxically, the same people who suffer most from ecological harm often hear little about creation care in their churches. Many sermons promise deliverance from poverty and spiritual attack but remain silent about the destruction of the land that sustains life.

The roots of this silence lie in an inherited dualism — a separation of the sacred and the secular, the spiritual and the material — reinforced by strands of prosperity and warfare theologies. The prosperity gospel, with its emphasis on immediate blessing, often fosters consumerism rather than stewardship. Warfare theology, on the other hand, spiritualizes suffering and overlooks the ecological dimensions of evil. In both cases, creation becomes the backdrop for spiritual drama rather than a participant in God’s redemptive story.

From a biblical perspective, however, creation is not passive. Paul’s words in Romans 8:19–22 reveal a cosmos groaning for liberation, sharing in humanity’s longing for redemption. This groaning is not despair but anticipation — an eschatological rhythm that echoes through African life, where songs of lament often coexist with hymns of hope. In the villages of Ghana, funerals blend sorrow and praise, affirming life amid loss. The same rhythm applies to the earth itself: lament for its suffering, yet hope for its renewal.

This study seeks to retrieve that rhythm for theological reflection. It explores how African Christians can understand creation care as an eschatological vocation — an act of faith rooted in the anticipation of renewal. It draws upon Scripture, early Christian thought, and Ghanaian ecological realities to propose a model of *eschatological stewardship*, where believers see environmental ethics as both spiritual discipline and prophetic witness.

From this observation, one can see that the Church in Africa stands at a theological crossroads. It can continue to interpret eschatology as an escape from the earth, or it can rediscover it as a mandate to heal the earth. The latter aligns with the character of God revealed in Christ — a God who redeems not by discarding but by restoring. The African Church, with its deep sense of community and respect for creation, is uniquely positioned to lead this renewal. Its theology of hope, if reoriented toward wholeness, can transform eschatology from distant expectation into present participation in the new creation that is already unfolding.

Section 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Biblical and Theological Foundations of Creation Renewal

The scriptural narrative begins and ends with creation — from “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth*” (Genesis 1:1) to “*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth*” (Revelation 21:1). Between these two horizons lies the drama of redemption, in which creation itself becomes both witness and participant. The doctrine of creation, therefore, cannot be divorced from eschatology; both are held together by the continuity of God’s purpose.

In Genesis, creation is blessed, ordered, and declared good. Humanity, made in the *imago Dei*, is called to stewardship — not domination — as expressed in Genesis 2:15: “*The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.*” Yet, the Fall introduced not only moral but ecological disarray; the ground itself was cursed because of human disobedience (Genesis 3:17). From that moment, ecological degradation became a sign of spiritual alienation. The prophets recognized this link, as seen in Hosea 4:1–3, where moral corruption leads to environmental collapse: “*The land mourns, and all who live in it waste away.*”

In the New Testament, the redemptive scope of Christ’s work is cosmic. Paul’s declaration in Colossians 1:20 — that through Christ, God reconciles “*all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven*” — grounds ecological theology in the cross itself. Redemption is not an escape from the world but the renewal of its broken relationships. Similarly, Romans 8:19–22 personifies creation as groaning with humanity, awaiting liberation. This vision anchors ecological care in eschatological hope: creation’s future glory is guaranteed by Christ’s resurrection, the first fruit of the new creation.

Theologically, this understanding dismantles dualistic notions that separate spirit from matter. The incarnation affirms the material world as the medium of divine revelation — God made flesh, dwelling among us (John 1:14). The resurrection further validates creation’s destiny, for the risen Christ bears a glorified yet physical body. Thus, Christian eschatology must affirm not only the salvation of souls but the transfiguration of all creation.

2.2 Theological Trajectories: From Dominion to Stewardship

The misinterpretation of Genesis 1:28—“subdue the earth”—has historically justified exploitative attitudes toward the environment. However, earlier ecological theologians such as Nash (1991) challenged such dominion-centric readings, interpreting “dominion” as responsible stewardship

rather than ruthless control. Humanity's role is to reflect God's care. The Hebrew term *shamar* ("to keep, guard, or preserve") better captures this divine mandate than language of domination.

African theologians, including Bénézet Bujo (1998) and John Mbiti (1989), have long challenged Western utilitarian readings of Scripture. They argue that the African worldview — which emphasizes interconnectedness between humanity, ancestors, and the natural world — provides a richer theological base for ecological ethics. Bujo's concept of *vital participation* suggests that all created beings share in the life of God. Hence, harming nature is not merely an ecological sin; it is a moral rupture in the web of communal life.

Within African theology, creation is not a static possession but a living relationship. The earth is mother, kin, and covenant partner. This cosmology aligns with the biblical understanding of creation as relational and sacred. By retrieving these indigenous insights, African eco-theology reclaims the holistic spirituality that colonial and industrial interpretations often obscured.

2.3 African Eco-Theology: Contextual Voices and Challenges

African theological reflection has long hinted at the bond between creation and redemption. Mbiti (1969) viewed the earth as part of the sacred moral order binding humanity and God, while Bujo (1992) developed an ethics of life that includes care for the natural world as a divine mandate. Similarly, Tutu (1983) interpreted hope as the active renewal of both human society and creation. These early voices anticipated later African eco-theologies that interpret creation care as both ethical duty and eschatological hope — a faith in which the healing of the earth mirrors the redemption of its people.

In the Ghanaian context, theologians like Kwame Bediako (2000) and John Pobee (1992) have emphasized that Christian theology must engage the realities of African life — including land, agriculture, and survival. Ghanaian funeral rites, harvest festivals, and communal land practices all reveal an intuitive reverence for creation. Yet, this ecological spirituality is often unarticulated in formal church theology. The challenge, therefore, is not to import Western environmentalism but to awaken what already exists within African moral consciousness — the sense that life is sacred because it participates in God's creative breath.

Ecological degradation in Ghana — from illegal mining (*galamsey*) to deforestation — represents both an environmental and a theological crisis. When rivers once named after deities are poisoned or forests once considered sacred are destroyed, the community loses not only its resources but its moral imagination. As Oduro (2016) and Amenga-Etego (2018) observe, such destruction exposes the Church's failure to connect creation's groaning with the gospel's hope, a silence that reflects a profound theological deficiency within contemporary Ghanaian Christianity.

2.4 Theoretical Framework: Eschatological Stewardship Model

The theoretical foundation of this study rests on what I call the **Eschatological Stewardship Model (ESM)**. This framework integrates three dimensions — **Creation Theology**,

Eschatological Hope, and African Communal Ethics — to form a coherent eco-theological paradigm.

1. **Creation Theology** affirms the intrinsic goodness and purpose of the material world. It recognizes stewardship as a divine calling, where humanity mirrors God's care for creation.
2. **Eschatological Hope** reframes environmental care as participation in God's ongoing work of renewal. Stewardship becomes not merely a duty but a form of anticipation — a foretaste of the coming kingdom.
3. **African Communal Ethics** situates stewardship within a relational worldview. The earth is part of the moral community, and its well-being reflects the community's righteousness.

In my counseling and pastoral work in rural Ghana, I have often observed how farmers speak of their land with emotional and spiritual reverence. One elderly man from the Volta Region once said, *"If you insult the soil, the harvest will insult you back."* His proverb captures the essence of ESM — that creation responds to how we treat it. Stewardship, therefore, is not environmental activism in secular terms but covenantal faithfulness to the Creator.

From this framework, one can see that eschatology and ecology converge in a theology of participation. The Church's care for creation becomes both prophetic and sacramental — a visible sign that God's kingdom is already at work in restoring all things.

Section 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a **qualitative phenomenological research design**, chosen for its capacity to explore lived experience as the pathway to meaning. Phenomenology seeks to uncover how individuals interpret and experience their world — in this case, how Ghanaian Christians understand and embody the link between *eschatological hope* and *creation care*. The goal was not to generalize but to interpret, to listen to the theological consciousness embedded within ordinary ecological life.

By integrating biblical theology with phenomenological inquiry, the research aimed to bridge revelation and experience. The **Eschatological Stewardship Model (ESM)** outlined earlier guided data collection and analysis. Each participant's narrative was treated as a theological text — a lived commentary on the doctrine of creation and new creation.

In a culture where theology often takes oral form — through stories, proverbs, and songs — phenomenology allowed these expressions to speak with their full symbolic depth. Thus, interviews and focus groups were not merely empirical tools; they became dialogical spaces where faith, culture, and ecology met in conversation.

3.2 Participants

The study engaged **20 participants** drawn from three key groups: pastors, farmers, and environmental advocates, each representing a different dimension of ecological theology in practice.

- **Pastors (8 participants)** were selected from Pentecostal, Charismatic, and mainline denominations in Accra, Kumasi, and Cape Coast. They provided theological and pastoral insights into how eschatology is taught and practiced within church life.
- **Farmers (7 participants)** from the Bono and Volta Regions offered experiential wisdom rooted in daily interaction with the land. Their reflections revealed how traditional ecological knowledge and Christian faith intertwine.
- **Environmental advocates (5 participants)** included Christian educators, NGO leaders, and lay activists working in conservation and sustainable development projects. Their perspectives illuminated how faith communities can bridge theology and policy in addressing environmental degradation.

Participants ranged in age from **30 to 68 years** ($M = 46.5$). Gender distribution was balanced (11 males, 9 females), and denominational representation ensured diversity across Protestant, Pentecostal, and independent church movements. Each participant identified as a practicing Christian with a personal or professional involvement in creation care or related ministry.

3.3 Instruments and Data Collection

Data were gathered through **semi-structured interviews** and **two focus group discussions**, designed to capture both individual depth and communal resonance.

- **Interviews** (lasting 45–60 minutes) invited participants to narrate their experiences of environmental stewardship, theological beliefs about the new creation, and emotional responses to ecological challenges. Prompts included:
 - “How does your understanding of the end times influence how you treat the environment?”
 - “What spiritual meaning do you attach to caring for the earth?”
 - “In your view, how does faith inspire or hinder ecological responsibility in Ghana?”
- **Focus groups** (6–8 participants each) provided a collective dimension to theological reflection. In these sessions, participants discussed ecological issues such as deforestation, pollution, and waste disposal in light of Scripture and eschatological hope.

Field notes were taken to capture nonverbal cues, tone, and contextual insights — essential for interpreting meaning beyond words. Some interviews were conducted in Twi and Ewe, later translated into English for transcription. To preserve authenticity, key local idioms were retained, particularly those expressing ecological spirituality (e.g., “*Asase Yaa*” — Mother Earth, a common Akan expression of respect for the soil).

3.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted using **NVivo 14** qualitative software to identify recurring motifs and patterns. Following Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological approach, the process involved:

1. **Horizontalization** — listing all significant statements related to the phenomenon of creation care.
2. **Reduction and clustering** — grouping similar expressions into thematic categories.
3. **Textural description** — capturing *what* participants experienced (content).
4. **Structural description** — interpreting *how* they experienced it (context and emotion).
5. **Synthesis** — constructing the essence of eschatological stewardship as lived reality.

The analysis revealed three overarching themes: **Creation as Covenant**, **Hope as Motivation**, and **Stewardship as Worship**, which will be elaborated in the Results section.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The research followed the ethical guidelines of the **College of Counselling Psychology (CCP)** and adhered to international standards for human subject research.

- **Informed Consent:** Each participant received a detailed explanation of the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and confidentiality measures.
- **Anonymity:** Pseudonyms were used in all transcripts and reports to protect participant identity.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Given that ecological spirituality often intersects with traditional beliefs, care was taken to respect indigenous expressions of faith without judgment or reductionism.
- **Emotional Safety:** For participants who expressed grief or guilt about environmental loss, brief debriefing sessions were offered, linking them to pastoral or psychological support where necessary.

In one case, a pastor wept while recalling how his congregation cleared a forest for church expansion without considering its ecological impact. His tears were not merely emotional but theological — a lament that became part of the data, revealing the moral tension between spiritual zeal and ecological blindness. Such moments confirmed that this research was not only analytical but pastoral in its essence.

3.6 Reflexivity

As a researcher trained in both theology and counseling, I maintained a posture of reflective participation. My role was that of a listener and interpreter, not a preacher. Yet, in listening to the voices of Ghanaian Christians, I was reminded that theology often walks barefoot on the soil of experience. The methodological stance, therefore, was one of humility — acknowledging that meaning emerges not from detached observation but from reverent attention to life as lived before God.

From this methodological foundation, one can see that qualitative phenomenology provided more than a research tool; it became a form of *theological listening*. Through the words of farmers, pastors, and environmental advocates, the voice of creation itself seemed to echo — groaning, waiting, and hoping for renewal.

Section 4: Results and Emergent Themes

The findings of this study emerged from the lived narratives of Ghanaian Christians—pastors, farmers, and environmental advocates—whose experiences collectively illuminate the theological and emotional dimensions of creation care. Their stories revealed that ecology, for many believers, is not merely a scientific or political issue but a profoundly spiritual one. The analysis identified **three major emergent themes** that together articulate a theology of *eschatological stewardship*: (1) *Creation as Covenant*, (2) *Hope as Motivation*, and (3) *Stewardship as Worship*.

4.1 *Creation as Covenant*

Across all interviews, participants described their relationship with the environment in deeply relational terms. For many, the land was not simply a resource but a covenant partner—an entity to which both gratitude and accountability were owed. Farmers often invoked proverbs and biblical metaphors to describe this sacred bond. One elderly cocoa farmer from the Ahafo Region said, “*The earth is like a friend—when you greet her well, she will feed you well.*” His statement expressed an implicit theology of reciprocity rooted in both Scripture and tradition.

This understanding of creation as covenant reflects the Genesis mandate of stewardship (*Genesis 2:15*) but also resonates with indigenous ecological spirituality. Participants noted that the loss of respect for nature—deforestation, pollution, and overfishing—mirrors a loss of reverence for God’s covenantal order. A Pentecostal pastor in Kumasi admitted, “*We preach against sin in people’s hearts but forget sin against the land. When the land cries, the people suffer.*”

Through phenomenological reflection, these narratives revealed that environmental degradation in Ghana is experienced not only as economic loss but as spiritual rupture. Participants perceived deforestation and pollution as signs that humanity has broken its covenant with the Creator. This awareness reflects the Pauline vision in *Romans 8:19–22*, where creation groans alongside humanity, longing for redemption.

From this observation, one can see that ecological consciousness among Ghanaian Christians is not new—it is ancient but unarticulated. It finds its voice not in textbooks but in proverbs, prayers, and the rhythms of agricultural life. Recognizing creation as covenant restores a sense of sacred accountability: caring for the earth becomes an act of faithfulness to God.

4.2 *Hope as Motivation*

While lament over environmental decay was common, it was consistently accompanied by hope. Participants spoke of divine restoration not as a distant eschatological abstraction but as a living motivation for present action. A young pastor from Takoradi reflected, “*If God will renew the heavens and the earth, then every tree we plant is a prophecy of that promise.*”

This sentiment captures the heart of *eschatological stewardship*: believers act not to save the world by their own power, but to align themselves with God’s ongoing renewal. Several participants linked environmental care to their theology of resurrection. A Christian environmental advocate explained, “*When we clean our rivers, we are rehearsing resurrection—we are saying death will not have the final word.*”

Such expressions transform eschatology from fatalism to faith-filled participation. Rather than viewing the world as a temporary testing ground, participants framed it as sacred territory awaiting transformation. This hope-infused motivation sustains ecological engagement even amid discouragement. One farmer from Hohoe, despite losing half his crops to drought, said quietly, “*When I see new rain, I remember God still keeps His covenant.*”

This theme suggests that hope, when rightly grounded, becomes a psychological and spiritual resource. It prevents despair in the face of environmental destruction and energizes believers toward restorative action. The theology of hope thus bridges the tension between the “already” of Christ’s redemptive work and the “not yet” of creation’s full renewal.

4.3 Stewardship as Worship

The third and most profound theme was the recognition of stewardship as a form of worship. Participants repeatedly described their ecological practices—planting trees, conserving water, cleaning neighborhoods—not merely as civic duties but as offerings to God. A Presbyterian minister in Accra remarked, “*When we sweep the compound of God’s house, we are saying His creation deserves honor too.*”

This theology of stewardship as worship challenges both secular environmentalism and ritualized religiosity. It suggests that acts of care for the environment are liturgical extensions of faith. One pastor in Cape Coast recounted how his congregation began to integrate environmental actions into worship services. “*We planted palms every Easter Sunday after reading about the triumphal entry. Now those trees give shade to the community,*” he said, smiling.

For many, the act of caring for creation became a way of embodying thanksgiving. In a focus group with Christian NGO workers, one participant reflected, “*We have shouted praise songs for too long; maybe now God wants us to sing with our hands.*” This poetic image encapsulates the movement from verbal praise to ecological praxis—a spirituality grounded in action.

In my own counseling work with faith leaders in the Eastern Region, I have observed a growing awareness that emotional and environmental well-being are intertwined. A pastor suffering from burnout during a church expansion project found renewal not through more preaching but through gardening. He later said, “*Working with the soil healed me more than a thousand sermons.*” His experience echoes a broader theological truth: that participation in creation’s care restores both the land and the soul.

4.4 The Interplay of Lament and Renewal

While the three major themes provide a constructive framework, an undercurrent of lament ran through all narratives. Many participants spoke with grief about rivers that once ran clear but are now brown with mining sludge. Others mourned the vanishing of sacred groves that once served as places of prayer and refuge. Yet within these laments, there was a stubborn faith—a refusal to surrender to despair.

A retired Methodist minister summarized it poignantly: “*We are crying for creation, but our tears are seeds.*” His words encapsulate the theological heart of this study: lament is not the opposite of hope but its soil. Within African spirituality, to weep for the earth is to confess that it still belongs to God. Thus, lament becomes a sacrament of longing, a protest against decay, and a participation in redemption.

4.5 Summary of Emergent Framework

From these narratives emerged a coherent theological pattern—one that can be visualized as a **Cycle of Eschatological Stewardship**:

1. **Covenant (Awareness):** Recognizing creation as sacred trust.
2. **Hope (Motivation):** Acting in faith that God’s renewal includes the earth.
3. **Worship (Transformation):** Living out stewardship as embodied praise.

This cycle illustrates that creation care among Ghanaian Christians is not primarily a product of modern environmental awareness but of theological reawakening. It unites biblical vision, African spirituality, and lived experience into a single movement of redemptive participation.

From this observation, one can see that the ecological crisis in Ghana is not only environmental but spiritual. The renewal of the land depends on the renewal of conscience—the rediscovery that faith in the new creation calls believers to live as its witnesses now. The following section will explore this insight further by interpreting these findings through the integrated lenses of theology, anthropology, and pastoral practice.

Section 5: Discussion

The findings of this study point toward a profound convergence between **theological anthropology**, **trauma psychology**, and **African pastoral theology**—a convergence that redefines eschatology as a theology of *renewal rather than escape*. Through the lived testimonies of Ghanaian Christians, one can discern that environmental destruction is not only a physical or moral issue; it is a form of collective trauma, a wound in creation that mirrors the fractures of the human soul. To heal the land, therefore, is to heal humanity’s relationship with God, self, and creation.

5.1 Theological Anthropology: Humanity as Co-Restorer of Creation

At the heart of Christian anthropology lies the affirmation that humanity is created in the *imago Dei*—a divine reflection tasked with representing God’s creative and redemptive character within the world. The narratives revealed that participants, even without formal theological articulation, understood themselves as co-restorers rather than consumers of creation.

This identity carries eschatological significance. In Christ, the *imago Dei* is not merely recovered; it is recommissioned. The resurrected Christ, who walks again within creation (John 20:15–17), embodies humanity’s renewed role as steward of the coming kingdom. Thus, the Christian’s care for the environment is not a peripheral duty but an extension of redeemed identity.

A pastor in Kumasi expressed this intuitively when he said, “*We must behave as the new Adam—planting where sin has uprooted.*” His statement captures the anthropological dimension of eschatology: believers act not to earn salvation, but to live out its restored vocation. From this observation, one can see that ecological care becomes a moral anthropology of hope, where human beings, as bearers of God’s image, participate in the unfolding redemption of the cosmos.

This insight challenges the dualism that has long haunted African Christianity—where spiritual salvation is pursued at the expense of material or ecological realities. To bear God’s image is to reflect His compassion toward all creation; to neglect creation is to distort that image. In this light, theological anthropology provides the basis for reinterpreting environmental stewardship as a redemptive, incarnational vocation.

5.2 Ecological Trauma and Collective Healing

From a pastoral psychological perspective, many participants’ narratives echoed the structure of trauma and recovery. Environmental degradation—rivers turned toxic, forests razed, land infertile—was experienced as collective grief. These laments were not simply ecological but existential, revealing a deep dislocation between people and place.

In trauma psychology, healing begins when suppressed pain is named, lamented, and integrated. Similarly, the ecological lament voiced by Ghanaian Christians functions as spiritual catharsis. When pastors and farmers weep for the land, their tears become theological acts—acknowledging loss, confessing complicity, and invoking divine restoration.

This parallels the biblical rhythm of lament and renewal found in the Psalms, where grief becomes the threshold to hope. Psalm 126:5 captures this paradox: “*Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy.*” The process of ecological healing, therefore, must include room for communal lament. Without lament, repentance becomes shallow; without hope, lament becomes despair. The two must coexist in tension—grief that leads to grace.

In my counseling work with rural pastors facing burnout from ministry and economic hardship, I have observed that reconnecting with creation often restores their sense of purpose. One pastor from the Volta Region, overwhelmed by ministry fatigue, found healing by starting a small tree-planting project behind his chapel. “Each time I watered the seedlings,” he said, “I felt like God

was watering my own soul.” His testimony reflects a vital truth: environmental renewal can be a pathway to psychological resilience.

From this perspective, ecological trauma and spiritual trauma intertwine—both arising from broken relationships with the Creator and His creation. Healing, then, requires a theology that speaks to both: the *God who saves souls* is also the *God who restores the soil*.

5.3 African Pastoral Theology and the Communal Soul

African pastoral theology offers a communal lens through which to understand ecological restoration. In the African worldview, life is relational—woven into networks of family, community, ancestors, and nature. When creation suffers, the community’s moral equilibrium is disturbed. The study participants echoed this worldview, emphasizing that stewardship must be a shared responsibility rather than an individual virtue.

A farmer from Sunyani captured this communal ethic: “*When one person burns the forest, the whole village loses its rain.*” His statement resonates with the Akan proverb, “*When you heal the land, the people will dance again.*” Such wisdom embodies the principle that environmental well-being and communal joy are inseparable.

African pastoral theology thus deepens eco-theology by grounding it in *ubuntu*—the understanding that “I am because we are.” Within this framework, creation care becomes an act of solidarity, not charity. Churches that plant trees, clean rivers, or reduce waste are not engaging in environmental activism but practicing *pastoral care for creation*.

This reframes the Church’s mission from institutional expansion to relational healing. The congregation becomes a therapeutic community that ministers not only to human pain but to the wounded earth. Liturgies of confession, Eucharist, and prayer can therefore include creation as participant—acknowledging that redemption is both human and cosmic.

In one Anglican parish in Cape Coast, participants described how they now incorporate prayers for the environment into their Sunday intercessions. “We pray for the rivers, for the sea, for the air we breathe,” said the vicar. “We are learning to see creation as part of our congregation.” This liturgical shift represents a pastoral reorientation—one that embraces creation as part of the body of Christ awaiting renewal.

5.4 Reframing Eschatology: From Catastrophe to Communion

Perhaps the most significant theological implication of these findings is the redefinition of eschatology itself. Many participants confessed that earlier teachings in their churches portrayed the end times as divine abandonment—a fiery destruction of the earth. This apocalyptic fatalism often produced ecological apathy: “*Why care for a world that will soon burn?*”

However, as participants reflected on Scriptures such as *Romans 8* and *Revelation 21*, a new paradigm emerged: eschatology as communion, not catastrophe. God’s final act is not annihilation but restoration—the making new of what was once broken.

From this rediscovery, one can see how *Eschatology and Ecology* converge in a single gospel: the good news that redemption encompasses all creation. The Church's mission, therefore, is not to await evacuation from a doomed planet but to embody signs of the coming new creation here and now.

This eschatological reorientation carries profound pastoral implications. It transforms ecological care into an act of prophetic witness. When Christians in Ghana plant trees, conserve water, or advocate for environmental justice, they declare: "*The Kingdom of God is already breaking in.*" Such acts become sacraments of hope, embodying the Lord's Prayer—"Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

5.5 Integrative Synthesis: Toward Transformative Stewardship

Synthesizing these insights, the study proposes that transformative stewardship arises at the intersection of three theological movements:

1. **Anthropological Identity** — Humanity as *imago Dei* called to reflect divine care.
2. **Psychological Healing** — Lament as therapeutic integration of ecological grief.
3. **Communal Theology** — Creation care as shared spiritual responsibility.

Together, these movements form the foundation of a theology that sees creation not as stage scenery for salvation history but as participant in it. The earth is not disposable; it is destined for glory.

In the Ghanaian context, where rapid urbanization and resource exploitation threaten both environment and spirituality, this theology provides a moral corrective. It calls the Church to recover her prophetic voice—speaking against ecological injustice with the same passion once reserved for moral reform.

From this observation, one can see that the renewal of eschatological imagination is essential for the renewal of ecological practice. When believers view the world as the theater of God's ongoing redemption, stewardship ceases to be a burden and becomes a joy—a participation in the beauty of divine creativity.

Section 6: Faith-Based Implications and Practical Recommendations

The theological and empirical insights from this study invite a radical reorientation of how faith-based institutions in Ghana — particularly seminaries, churches, and Christian counselors — understand and practice their mission in relation to creation. The rediscovery of *eschatological stewardship* demands not only doctrinal reform but pastoral and institutional transformation. The Church, as the embodiment of the new creation, must model in its teaching, worship, and community life what redeemed ecology looks like in practice.

6.1 Theological Education and Seminary Formation

Seminaries remain the nerve centers of theological imagination in Africa. Yet, few theological curricula integrate environmental theology or ecological ethics as central to spiritual formation. Many pastors graduate with strong exegetical skills but little ecological awareness. To cultivate *eschatological stewardship*, theological institutions must intentionally integrate **eco-theology**, **contextual anthropology**, and **pastoral psychology** into their ministerial training.

- **Curriculum Integration:** Courses such as *Biblical Theology of Creation*, *Eco-Pastoral Care*, and *Ethics of the New Creation* should become core, not elective. These courses must draw from Scripture, African cosmology, and practical theology to bridge doctrine with ecological engagement.
- **Field Practicum:** Seminaries can require students to participate in environmental service as part of their ministerial formation — tree-planting campaigns, community clean-up projects, or advocacy for sustainable land use. In this way, theology is not merely taught but embodied.
- **Theological Research:** Graduate programs should encourage research on faith-based responses to environmental degradation in Ghana — exploring topics such as deforestation in sacred groves, climate-induced displacement, and the spiritual meaning of land in African Christian thought.

In my own work mentoring theology students, I have observed that those who engage in field-based reflection often return with deeper pastoral empathy. One student who assisted a fishing community affected by coastal erosion said, “*I learned more about God’s providence by watching the sea than by reading a textbook.*” Such experiential theology shapes future leaders who can preach and practice ecological redemption.

6.2 Church Leadership and Congregational Practice

The local church remains the most effective platform for cultural transformation in Ghana. Through liturgy, preaching, and community example, the Church can model creation care as part of discipleship.

- **Preaching and Teaching:** Sermons should connect the gospel to creation’s restoration, framing environmental stewardship as obedience to God’s covenant. Pastors can draw from passages such as *Romans 8:19–22*, *Genesis 2:15*, and *Revelation 21:1–5* to show that the hope of the new creation compels action in the present.
- **Liturgy and Worship:** Churches can incorporate environmental themes into prayer, song, and symbolic action. For example, during Easter or Pentecost, congregations might plant trees as living signs of resurrection and renewal. The liturgical calendar can include an annual *Creation Sunday* — a time of confession, thanksgiving, and renewal focused on ecological repentance.
- **Church Infrastructure:** Practical stewardship should also shape how churches use their physical spaces — installing water conservation systems, adopting waste segregation, and ensuring energy efficiency. A church that recycles, conserves, and beautifies its environment becomes a silent sermon on stewardship.

- **Community Engagement:** Churches can collaborate with local schools, municipal assemblies, and NGOs to promote sustainable practices. In rural areas, agricultural churches can host workshops on soil preservation, climate adaptation, and faith-based farming.

A pastor from a Charismatic congregation in Kumasi described how his church began a “Green Covenant Project.” After each baptism, a new tree is planted in the churchyard to symbolize new life. Over time, the congregation has grown a small forest. “It’s our living testimony,” he said. “Every tree is a disciple’s story.” Such creative practices transform theology into tangible witness.

6.3 Pastoral Counseling and Spiritual Care

Christian counselors and pastoral caregivers have a unique role in integrating creation care into healing and trauma recovery. The ecological wounds of the earth often mirror the emotional wounds within the human soul; both require compassion, reflection, and restoration.

- **Ecological Grief Counseling:** Counselors can address the emotional toll of environmental loss, especially among farmers and fisherfolk whose livelihoods are directly affected by ecological decline. Naming this grief and framing it within lament theology helps individuals move from despair to hope.
- **Nature-Based Therapy:** Drawing from both psychology and theology, counselors can employ nature-based interventions — such as reflective walks, gardening, or outdoor prayer — as tools for spiritual and emotional restoration. These practices align with biblical precedents of encountering God in creation (e.g., Elijah in 1 Kings 19, Jesus in solitary prayer on the mountain).
- **Integrating the Theology of Creation into Healing:** Counselors can remind clients that healing includes harmony with the world around them. Just as sin fractured creation, redemption restores the soul’s communion with creation. This perspective helps individuals rediscover purpose and belonging within God’s ecological order.

In one counseling retreat for clergy, a participant recovering from burnout testified, “*The garden became my sanctuary; I found God again in the soil.*” His experience illustrates that environmental connection can serve as therapy for emotional fatigue. In the African pastoral context, where holistic healing integrates body, spirit, and environment, such practices resonate deeply with indigenous spirituality.

6.4 Denominational Policy and Advocacy

Beyond individual and congregational practice, denominational leadership must institutionalize creation care through policies and advocacy. Theological statements on stewardship should be backed by visible action.

- **Environmental Charters:** National church councils (e.g., Christian Council of Ghana, Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council) can issue theological declarations affirming environmental protection as part of Christian witness.

- **Partnerships:** Collaborations with governmental and civic institutions can amplify faith-based ecological efforts. Churches can partner with organizations like the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA-Ghana) or local NGOs to promote sustainable initiatives.
- **Clergy Wellness and Sabbatical Policies:** Denominations should institutionalize rhythms of rest and renewal for clergy, including retreats in natural settings. A theology of Sabbath that extends to the land (Leviticus 25) underscores that both people and creation need rest for restoration.

A bishop in Accra shared that his diocese adopted an “Eco-Mandate” requiring each congregation to maintain a green space or community garden. He reflected, “*We used to measure growth by numbers; now we measure it also by trees.*” Such leadership demonstrates how theological conviction can shape policy and inspire replication across denominations.

6.5 Integrating Eschatological Hope into African Spirituality

The most transformative implication of this study is theological: to reclaim *eschatological hope* as the foundation of ecological ethics. In African Christianity, hope has often been interpreted as deliverance from suffering or escape from the physical world. The rediscovery of creation’s destiny in Christ transforms that hope into participation.

Seminaries and churches must teach believers that the promise of a *new heaven and new earth* (Revelation 21:1) does not license neglect but calls for faithful anticipation. This perspective harmonizes with African communal spirituality, which reveres land as a gift of continuity between ancestors, the living, and future generations.

Preaching that connects the cross, resurrection, and ecological renewal helps believers see that salvation includes reconciliation with creation (Colossians 1:19–20). In this way, faith communities move from passive spectators of divine renewal to active collaborators in it.

From this observation, one can see that the *eschatology of ecology* is not a speculative doctrine but a pastoral mandate. To hope rightly is to care rightly; to believe in Christ’s coming renewal is to live as its ambassadors now.

6.6 Toward a Culture of Environmental Discipleship

Ultimately, the Ghanaian Church must cultivate a new spiritual culture — one that perceives environmental care as part of Christian discipleship. This requires not only teaching but formation. Spiritual growth must now include how believers relate to creation, how they consume, and how they restore.

- **Catechism and Discipleship Manuals:** Churches can develop resources that include creation care as a mark of spiritual maturity.
- **Youth and Sunday School Formation:** Children’s ministries can integrate ecological lessons with Scripture, helping the next generation see the earth as sacred trust.
- **Symbolic Acts:** Simple, recurring practices—such as praying before planting, dedicating harvests, or blessing rivers—reinforce that the sacred and ecological are intertwined.

In the words of one youth leader from Ho, “*We used to pray only for souls; now we pray for soil too.*” His statement captures the renewal of spiritual imagination that this study envisions — a discipleship that sees no divide between salvation and stewardship.

From these practical directions, one can see that the renewal of African Christianity must include the renewal of its relationship with creation. Seminaries must teach it, churches must model it, and counselors must heal through it. Only then will the gospel of Christ fully manifest as *good news to all creation* (Mark 16:15).

Section 7: Conclusion

This study has sought to reimagine eschatology through an ecological lens, proposing that the Christian hope of *new creation* must inform the Church’s responsibility toward the present creation. In the Ghanaian context — where faith and daily survival are intimately connected to the land, rivers, and seasons — this inquiry revealed that ecological crisis is not merely an environmental challenge but a spiritual and pastoral concern. The findings demonstrate that when eschatology is reclaimed as *renewal rather than escape*, creation care becomes an act of discipleship and a prophetic expression of faith in God’s redemptive purposes.

From the narratives of pastors, farmers, and environmental advocates, one can see that the gospel’s power extends beyond human salvation to the restoration of all things (Colossians 1:19–20). Participants expressed this intuitively: through lament, they named the wounds of creation; through hope, they envisioned renewal; and through stewardship, they enacted worship. Their lived experiences revealed that faith and ecology are not parallel concerns but intertwined dimensions of God’s mission — the *missio Dei* that includes all of creation.

7.1 Theological Contributions

Theologically, this study contributes to African Christian thought by articulating a **theology of eschatological stewardship**, in which creation care is seen as participation in the coming kingdom of God. This reframing challenges two persistent distortions within African Christianity:

1. **Prosperity Dualism**, which spiritualizes salvation and detaches it from material and ecological realities.
2. **Apocalyptic Fatalism**, which views the physical world as doomed and irrelevant to God’s ultimate plan.

Against these tendencies, the research affirms a biblical eschatology rooted in the doctrine of *new creation* (Revelation 21:1–5). The earth is not a disposable vessel but a destined participant in redemption. Humanity, made in the *imago Dei*, bears both the privilege and the responsibility to reflect God’s care for creation.

Furthermore, the integration of **theological anthropology** and **trauma psychology** enriches this vision. Just as sin fractured both soul and soil, redemption heals both. Ecological renewal thus mirrors the process of sanctification — a gradual alignment of the created order with the Creator’s

intent. By drawing on African pastoral theology, the study also situates this healing within community, restoring the sense of collective responsibility that defines African spirituality.

7.2 Contextual Significance for the African Church

Within the Ghanaian and wider African context, this study calls the Church to rediscover its ecological vocation. Historically, African spirituality has always recognized the sacredness of the land — expressed through reverence for nature, communal stewardship, and gratitude for the Creator's provision. However, modern Christianity, shaped by Western dualisms, often alienated believers from this ecological consciousness.

By recovering this indigenous ecological wisdom and rooting it in biblical theology, the Church can model a holistic spirituality where **faith, creation, and community coexist in covenant**. Pastors and theological educators are thus invited to teach not only doctrines of salvation but also disciplines of sustainability. Congregations that practice environmental stewardship become living parables of resurrection — proclaiming that God's redemptive work is already breaking into the present world.

In practical terms, the Ghanaian Church can serve as a moral and social catalyst in addressing deforestation, pollution, and climate vulnerability. Faith-based environmental advocacy grounded in eschatological hope offers a counter-narrative to the culture of exploitation. The Church's prophetic task is to remind society that caring for the earth is both an act of obedience and a foretaste of eternal life.

7.3 Directions for Future Research and Ministry Development

While this study has offered an integrative theological framework, further research is needed to deepen the practical and interdisciplinary engagement between theology, ecology, and psychology. Future inquiries may explore:

1. **The Role of Indigenous Wisdom Traditions:** Examining how African cosmologies of land, water, and community can enrich Christian eco-theology.
2. **Liturgical and Homiletical Development:** Creating worship and preaching resources that integrate ecological themes throughout the Christian year.
3. **Faith-Based Environmental Policy:** Assessing how churches can influence public discourse on sustainability and national development.
4. **Counseling and Eco-Trauma:** Developing pastoral care models that address the psychological and spiritual effects of ecological degradation, particularly among rural populations.
5. **Youth and Faith Formation:** Investigating how ecological discipleship can shape the next generation's moral and spiritual imagination.

These directions point toward a growing field of **African eco-theology**, where academic scholarship, pastoral practice, and public witness converge. Such research not only contributes to global theological discourse but also grounds Christian faith in the soil of local experience.

7.4 A Vision for Eschatological Ecology

Ultimately, the findings invite a theological reawakening — one that perceives the earth not as an expendable backdrop to human salvation but as a participant in divine redemption. The hope of *new creation* summons believers to live as stewards of the coming kingdom, nurturing life in anticipation of God's final renewal.

In the words of a Ghanaian elder interviewed for this study, “*When we care for the land, we remind heaven that we still remember the promise.*” His statement captures the essence of eschatological ecology — a faith that remembers, a hope that acts, and a love that restores.

From this observation, one can see that the true measure of spiritual maturity is not how eagerly we await heaven, but how faithfully we honor the earth while we wait. The African Church, with its deep communal ethos and reverence for life, is uniquely positioned to lead a global renewal — proclaiming a gospel that reconciles all things in Christ (Colossians 1:20).

Therefore, the Church's call in this generation is clear: to live as witnesses of the new creation, to heal the wounds of the earth, and to embody a faith that not only looks forward to heaven but brings heaven's hope into the soil of today.

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