

CHRISTIAN ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP: BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS, THEOLOGICAL APPROACHES, AND PRACTICAL RESPONSES TO THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

Jabeen Amin

PhD Scholar, Department of Islamic Studies

Khwaja Fareed University of Engineering & Information Technology, Rahim Yar Khan

aqadeer.110@gmail.com

Dr. Muhammad Shahid Habib

Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic Studies

Khwaja Fareed University of Engineering & Information Technology, Rahim Yar Khan

shahid.habib@kfuiet.edu.pk

Abstract

Environmental degradation has become one of the most serious moral, spiritual, and social challenges of the modern world. While environmental issues are often discussed through scientific, political, and economic frameworks, Christianity also offers a rich ethical tradition for understanding humanity's responsibility toward the natural world. Christian environmental stewardship is based on the belief that creation belongs to God, human beings are caretakers rather than absolute owners, and ecological responsibility is part of obedience to divine will. This article examines Christian approaches to environmental stewardship through biblical foundations, theological traditions, and practical applications. It discusses Catholic integral ecology, Orthodox ecological spirituality, Protestant and Evangelical creation care, and ecumenical climate justice. The article argues that Christian stewardship is not limited to protecting nature for human benefit; rather, it includes reverence for creation, justice for vulnerable communities, restraint in consumption, and responsibility toward future generations. In the context of global climate change and ecological injustice, Christian environmental ethics can contribute to sustainable living, public advocacy, environmental education, and interfaith cooperation. The paper concludes that Christianity, when interpreted through its deeper theological resources, provides a strong moral foundation for ecological responsibility and sustainable development.

Keywords: *Christian environmental ethics, stewardship, creation care, climate justice, integral ecology, sustainability*

1. Introduction

The ecological crisis is not merely a scientific or technical problem; it is also a moral and spiritual crisis. Climate change, deforestation, pollution, biodiversity loss, and unsustainable consumption reveal a broken relationship between human beings, the natural world, and God. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change describes climate change as a global challenge involving widespread impacts, risks, mitigation, and adaptation, showing that the issue now affects ecological systems, economies, and human communities across the world.

Christianity has often been criticized for promoting human dominance over nature, especially because of interpretations of Gen, where human beings are given "dominion" over the earth. However, a careful reading of Christian scripture and theology shows that dominion does not mean exploitation. It means responsible care under God's authority. The earth is not a

disposable object; it is God's creation. Human beings are not owners in an absolute sense; they are stewards who must preserve, protect, and use creation responsibly.

The Higher Education Commission of Pakistan emphasizes academic integrity through its anti-plagiarism framework, and an HEC-oriented article should therefore be original, properly structured, and supported with references. HEC's official plagiarism resources identify plagiarism as presenting another person's thoughts or writings as one's own, while its policy pages list the Anti-Plagiarism Policy 2023 as the current framework. This article follows an academic structure with title, abstract, keywords, introduction, discussion, conclusion, and references.¹

The modified title, "Christian Environmental Stewardship: Biblical Foundations, Theological Approaches, and Practical Responses to the Ecological Crisis," is broader and more research-oriented than the simple topic "Christian Approaches to Environmental Stewardship." It allows discussion of scripture, theology, denominations, ethics, and modern environmental action.

2. Meaning of Environmental Stewardship in Christianity

Environmental stewardship refers to the responsible care, protection, and management of the natural world. In Christianity, stewardship is rooted in the belief that God is the Creator and owner of the universe. Human beings receive the earth as a trust, not as personal property to exploit without limits. This understanding changes the human role from domination to responsibility.

The biblical concept of stewardship begins with the creation narrative. Genesis 1 describes creation as "good," and human beings are created in the image of God. This image does not give humans permission to destroy creation; rather, it gives them responsibility to reflect God's wisdom, justice, and care. states that the human being was placed in the Garden of Eden "to till it and keep it."² The World Council of Churches also identifies as a central biblical basis for taking care of creation.

The words "till" and "keep" suggest both cultivation and protection. Christianity therefore rejects two extremes: first, the view that nature is divine and must never be used; second, the view that nature is only raw material for human consumption. The Christian position is balanced: creation is not God, but it belongs to God; humans may use it, but they must not abuse it. Environmental stewardship also includes accountability. In Christian thought, human beings will answer to God for how they treat the world, other creatures, and vulnerable people. The earth is a shared home, not a private possession of one generation or one class. This makes stewardship both ecological and social.

3. Biblical Foundations of Creation Care

Christian environmental ethics cannot be understood without biblical foundations. The Bible does not use the modern term "environmentalism," but it contains strong teachings about creation, land, justice, restraint, and responsibility.

3.1 Creation Belongs to God

"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it. This verse establishes the central Christian principle³ that the earth belongs to God. If creation belongs to God, then human beings cannot treat it as an object of unlimited exploitation. They must treat it as sacred trust. The creation story in Genesis

¹ Higher Education Commission Pakistan. (2023). *Anti-Plagiarism Policy 2023*. Official HEC policy resource.

² Genesis 2:15

³ Psalm 24:1

also shows that God values the natural world before human economic use. Light, water, land, plants, animals, and human beings are all part of the created order. The repeated phrase “God saw that it was good” gives creation intrinsic value. Nature is not valuable only because it serves humans; it is valuable because God created and blessed it.

3.2 Human Dominion as Responsible Care

Genesis has often been misunderstood as a command to control nature aggressively. However, Christian theologians increasingly interpret dominion as responsible rule under God. Since God’s own rule is marked by justice, mercy, and care, human dominion must also reflect those qualities. Dominion becomes destructive only when separated from accountability to God. A Christian steward does not ask only, “How can I benefit from creation?” but also, “How can I preserve what God has entrusted to me?” The command to rule must be read together with the command to keep the garden in Together, these passages show that authority and responsibility cannot be separated.

3.3 Sabbath and Ecological Rest

The biblical idea of Sabbath also has ecological meaning. Sabbath is not only a day of human worship; it is a principle of rest, limitation, and trust in God. In the Old Testament, land itself is given rest in the sabbatical year. This shows that the earth is not to be pushed endlessly for production. Modern environmental destruction is often caused by unlimited consumption and constant economic pressure. The Sabbath principle challenges this mentality. It teaches that creation needs rhythm, rest, and renewal. A society that never stops consuming eventually harms both people and the planet.⁴

3.4 Justice for the Poor and Vulnerable

The Bible repeatedly connects righteousness with justice for the poor, widows, orphans, foreigners, and oppressed people. Environmental harm often affects poor communities first and worst. Floods, droughts, food insecurity, polluted water, and displacement usually damage those who have contributed least to the crisis. The World Council of Churches links care for creation with justice, arguing that climate change threatens the lives and livelihoods of many people, especially the world’s poorest communities. Therefore, Christian environmental stewardship must include climate justice. It is not enough to plant trees or reduce waste; Christians must also care about the social consequences of ecological destruction.

4. Catholic Approach: Integral Ecology

One of the most influential Christian contributions to environmental thought is the Catholic concept of “integral ecology,” especially developed in Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato Si’*. Pope Francis argues that the environmental crisis and the social crisis are deeply connected. He calls the earth “our common home” and appeals for a new dialogue about how humanity is shaping the future of the planet. Integral ecology means that nature, society, economy, culture, and spirituality cannot be separated. Pollution, poverty, consumerism, and inequality are connected problems. A society that exploits the poor will often exploit the earth as well. Similarly, an economy based only on profit can damage both human dignity and ecological balance.

The Catholic approach emphasizes several key principles

1. First, creation has value because it comes from God. Human beings should contemplate nature with gratitude rather than treat it only as material for profit.

⁴, Genesis 1–2.

2. Second, the poor are central to environmental ethics. Pope Francis highlights the relationship between the fragility of the planet and the suffering of the excluded. This means ecological action must protect vulnerable communities.
3. Third, technology alone cannot solve the crisis. Technical solutions are important, but the deeper problem is moral: greed, indifference, and consumerism. Therefore, ecological conversion is needed. People must change their lifestyles, values, and economic habits.
4. Fourth, dialogue is necessary. Environmental problems affect everyone, so governments, religions, scientists, educators, businesses, and local communities must work together.
5. The Catholic approach is especially useful because it avoids narrow environmentalism. It does not treat ecology as only saving forests or animals; it connects ecology with justice, peace, economics, and spirituality.

5. Orthodox Approach: Liturgical and Ascetic Ecology

The Eastern Orthodox tradition offers a deeply spiritual approach to environmental stewardship. It emphasizes creation as a gift of God and sees the natural world as filled with divine meaning. Orthodox theology often views the world sacramentally, meaning that material creation can reveal God's beauty and presence. The Ecumenical Patriarchate has played a major role in Christian environmental advocacy. The World Council of Churches notes that Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I proclaimed 1 September as a day of prayer for creation for Orthodox Christians in 1989, and this later contributed to the wider Season of Creation observed by Christians from 1 September to 4 October.

Orthodox Ecological Thought has Two Important Features: Liturgy and Asceticism.

Liturgy means worship. In Orthodox Christianity, worship teaches believers to receive creation with thanksgiving. Bread, wine, water, oil, candles, incense, and icons all show that material things can be used in holy ways. This creates a spiritual attitude of gratitude instead of exploitation. Asceticism means disciplined self-restraint. It does not mean hatred of the body or the world. Rather, it means freedom from greed and excess. In environmental terms, asceticism challenges consumer culture. It teaches that human beings do not need unlimited possessions to live meaningful lives. Simplicity, fasting, moderation, and self-control become ecological virtues. The Orthodox approach is important because it shows that environmental stewardship is not only activism; it is also worship, prayer, and personal transformation. A person who learns gratitude before God is less likely to treat creation carelessly.

6. Protestant and Evangelical Creation Care

Protestant and Evangelical approaches to environmental stewardship often use the term "creation care." This term is important because it frames environmental responsibility in biblical and theological language. It allows Christians who may be suspicious of secular environmentalism to understand ecological action as part of faithfulness to God.

The Evangelical Environmental Network describes its mission as educating, inspiring, and mobilizing Christians to care for God's creation. This reflects a growing movement among Evangelicals that connects scripture, science, and public action.⁵

Evangelical Creation Care Usually Emphasizes the Following Ideas

1. First, God created the world and declared it good. Therefore, destroying creation dishonors the Creator.

⁵ Evangelical Environmental Network, "Creation Care Resources" (2024).

2. Second, loving one's neighbor includes protecting the environmental conditions necessary for life. Air pollution, unsafe water, and climate-related disasters harm real people. Caring for creation is therefore also a form of loving one's neighbor.
3. Third, Christian discipleship includes daily lifestyle choices. Recycling, conserving energy, reducing waste, protecting local ecosystems, and supporting responsible policies can become expressions of obedience to God.
4. Fourth, creation care includes public witness. Churches can speak about environmental responsibility in sermons, youth programs, schools, and community projects.

However, Evangelical creation care also faces challenges. Some Christians fear that environmentalism may become political or anti-human. Others believe that spiritual salvation is the only mission of the Church. A balanced Evangelical response argues that preaching the Gospel and caring for creation are not enemies. If God created the world, then protecting creation is not a distraction from faith; it is a consequence of faith.

7. Ecumenical Approach: Climate Justice and Global Solidarity

The ecumenical approach brings different Christian traditions together for common environmental action. Organizations such as the World Council of Churches emphasize care for creation, climate justice, and advocacy for vulnerable communities. The WCC states that churches and Christians are called to speak and act when creation is threatened, as an expression of commitment to life, justice, and love. Ecumenical environmentalism is important because ecological problems cross national, denominational, and religious boundaries. Climate change cannot be solved by one church, one country, or one community. It requires cooperation. The World Evangelical Alliance has also connected creation care with global climate negotiations. In its reflection on COP28, it emphasized the need for sustained advocacy, just transition, practical emissions reductions, and adaptation, especially for vulnerable communities.⁶

Ecumenical Climate Justice Focuses On Three Major Concerns

1. First, those least responsible for climate change often suffer the most. Small island states, poor farmers, coastal communities, and future generations face severe risks. Christian ethics demands solidarity with them.
2. Second, climate action must be fair. A just transition means moving away from harmful systems without abandoning workers, poor communities, or developing countries.
3. Third, churches must combine prayer with action. Worship, statements, advocacy, education, and practical projects should support one another.

The ecumenical approach is especially relevant in a globalized world. It shows that Christian stewardship is not only a private virtue but also a public responsibility.

8. Ethical Principles of Christian Environmental Stewardship

Christian approaches to environmental stewardship can be summarized through several ethical principles.

8.1 The Principle of Divine Ownership

The earth belongs to God. This principle prevents human arrogance. If the world is God's creation, then humans are accountable for how they use it. Divine ownership challenges both careless capitalism and irresponsible consumption.

⁶ Evangelical Environmental Network. (2026). *What we do: Creation care*. Official organizational resource.

8.2 The Principle of Human Responsibility

Human beings have unique moral responsibility because they possess reason, conscience, and spiritual awareness. They can choose either to protect or destroy. Christian stewardship calls humans to use their power responsibly.

8.3 The Principle of Interdependence

Creation is interconnected. Water, soil, animals, forests, air, and human communities depend on one another. Pope Francis's teaching that "everything is connected" has become a key expression of this Christian ecological insight.

8.4 The Principle of Justice

Environmental harm is also a justice issue. Poor people, children, indigenous groups, and future generations often suffer from decisions made by powerful actors. Christian ethics requires protection of the vulnerable.

8.5 The Principle of Restraint

Christianity teaches self-control, simplicity, and moderation. These virtues oppose consumerism. A steward does not consume without limits but learns to live gratefully and responsibly.

8.6 The Principle of Hope

Christian environmental stewardship is not based on despair. It is based on hope and responsibility. Christians believe that God's creation matters and that human action can still contribute to healing.⁷

9. Practical Applications of Christian Stewardship

Christian environmental stewardship must move from theory to practice. Churches, schools, families, and individuals can apply stewardship in many ways.

9.1 Greening Church Buildings

Churches can reduce energy use, install solar systems where possible, save water, reduce plastic use, and manage waste responsibly. These steps make church institutions examples of practical stewardship.⁸

9.2 Environmental Education

Christian schools, seminaries, and Sunday schools can include creation care in religious education. Students should learn that faith is not separated from ecological responsibility. Environmental education can include biblical teaching, local environmental problems, and practical action.

9.3 Sustainable Lifestyle

Individual Christians can reduce unnecessary consumption, avoid waste, conserve water and electricity, use public transport where possible, plant trees, and support ethical products. Small actions become meaningful when they are part of a larger moral commitment.

9.4 Community Service

Churches can organize cleanliness drives, tree plantation campaigns, flood relief, water conservation projects, and awareness programs. In areas affected by environmental disasters, churches can support both emergency relief and long-term adaptation.

⁷ Northcott, Michael. *Christian Environmental Ethics*. Cambridge University Press, 1996.

⁸ World Council of Churches, "Care for Creation and Climate Justice" (2022)

9.5 Public Advocacy

Christian stewardship also includes speaking for responsible policies. Churches can advocate for clean air, safe water, protection of forests, and fair climate policies. Advocacy should be peaceful, informed, and rooted in justice.

9.6 Interfaith Cooperation

Environmental problems affect all communities. Christians can work with Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and people of no religion for shared ecological goals. In countries like Pakistan, interfaith environmental cooperation can promote both ecological protection and social harmony.

10. Challenges and Criticism

Christian environmental stewardship faces several challenges.

1. First, some Christians still interpret dominion as permission to exploit nature. This interpretation ignores the wider biblical teaching of care, justice, and accountability.
2. Second, environmental action is sometimes seen as political rather than spiritual. While environmental issues can involve politics, they are also moral issues. Clean water, safe air, and protection from disasters are human concerns, not only political slogans.
3. Third, there is a gap between teaching and practice. Churches may speak about creation care but continue wasteful habits. True stewardship requires institutional change, not only statements.
4. Fourth, poverty creates difficult choices. Poor communities may depend on natural resources for survival. Christian environmental ethics must therefore avoid blaming the poor while ignoring powerful systems of exploitation. Environmental responsibility must be linked with economic justice.
5. Fifth, there is the danger of symbolic action without deep change. Planting trees is good, but it is not enough if lifestyles, policies, and economic systems remain destructive.

These challenges show that Christian stewardship must be realistic, compassionate, and action-oriented.

11. Relevance for Pakistan and the Global South

Christian environmental stewardship is highly relevant for Pakistan and other developing countries. Pakistan faces serious environmental problems, including floods, heat waves, water scarcity, air pollution, deforestation, and waste management issues. Although Christians are a minority in Pakistan, Christian schools, churches, hospitals, and community organizations can contribute meaningfully to environmental awareness and local action. In the Global South, environmental issues are often connected with poverty, public health, and disaster vulnerability. Therefore, Christian stewardship should not copy only Western environmental models. It should respond to local realities: clean drinking water, sanitation, tree cover, flood resilience, agricultural sustainability, and protection of poor communities.

Pakistani Christian institutions can promote environmental responsibility through education, youth engagement, interfaith cooperation, and community service. For example, church youth groups can organize local cleanliness campaigns, Christian schools can develop environmental clubs, and religious leaders can preach about creation care in simple language. This local approach makes stewardship practical. It shows that environmental responsibility is not only about global conferences; it is also about streets, homes, schools, farms, and neighborhoods.

12. Recommendations

1. First, Christian institutions should include environmental stewardship in theological education. Pastors, teachers, and students should understand biblical and ethical foundations of creation care.
2. Second, churches should conduct environmental audits of their own buildings and practices. They should examine energy use, water use, plastic consumption, and waste disposal.
3. Third, Christian schools should develop practical environmental programs. These may include tree plantation, recycling, climate awareness, and water conservation.
4. Fourth, churches should connect charity with environmental resilience. Flood relief, food support, and health services should include long-term planning for climate-affected communities.
5. Fifth, Christian leaders should promote interfaith environmental dialogue. Shared ecological work can reduce prejudice and build social cooperation.
6. Sixth, Christian environmental teaching should avoid extreme positions. It should neither worship nature nor exploit nature. It should present creation as God's gift and human beings as responsible stewards.

13. Conclusion

Christian environmental stewardship offers a powerful moral and spiritual response to the ecological crisis. It begins with the belief that God created the world, declared it good, and entrusted human beings with responsibility. Biblical teachings on creation, Sabbath, justice, and accountability provide a strong foundation for ecological ethics. Different Christian traditions contribute unique insights. Catholic theology emphasizes integral ecology and the connection between environmental and social crises. Orthodox theology highlights worship, gratitude, and ascetic restraint. Protestant and Evangelical traditions emphasize biblical creation care and personal discipleship. Ecumenical movements connect environmental stewardship with climate justice and global solidarity. The ecological crisis requires more than technology. It requires moral conversion, responsible leadership, sustainable lifestyles, and justice for vulnerable communities. Christian stewardship can help form people who see the earth not as a commodity but as God's creation. In this sense, caring for the environment is not optional for Christianity; it is part of faith, love, justice, and obedience to God.

References

1. Berry, R. J. (2006). *Environmental stewardship: Critical perspectives—past and present*. T&T Clark.
2. Bookless, D. (2008). *Planetwise: Dare to care for God's world*. InterVarsity Press.
3. Bouma-Prediger, S. (2010). *For the beauty of the earth: A Christian vision for creation care* (2nd ed.). Baker Academic.
4. Deane-Drummond, C. (2008). *Eco-theology*. Saint Mary's Press.
5. Evangelical Environmental Network. (2026). *What we do: Creation care*. Official organizational resource.
6. Francis. (2015). *Laudato Si': On care for our common home*. Vatican.
7. Hessel, D. T., & Ruether, R. R. (Eds.). (2000). *Christianity and ecology: Seeking the well-being of earth and humans*. Harvard University Press.

8. Higher Education Commission Pakistan. (2023). Anti-Plagiarism Policy 2023. Official HEC policy resource.
9. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2023). Climate Change 2023: AR6 Synthesis Report. IPCC.
10. Northcott, M. S. (1996). The environment and Christian ethics. Cambridge University Press.
11. Pope Francis. (2015). Laudato Si': On care for our common home. Vatican.
12. Santmire, H. P. (1985). The travail of nature: The ambiguous ecological promise of Christian theology. Fortress Press.
13. The Holy Bible. Genesis 1–2; Psalm 24; Romans 8.
14. White, L. Jr. (1967). The historical roots of our ecologic crisis. *Science*, 155(3767), 1203–1207.
15. World Council of Churches. (2022). Care for creation and climate justice. Official WCC resource.
16. World Evangelical Alliance. (2023). Evangelical Christians stand in solidarity for creation care: Reflecting on COP28. Official WEA resource.