



MISSIO DEI IN AN EPOCH OF CLIMATE CRISIS: TOWARD AN AFRICAN MISSIOLOGICAL PARADIGM FOR ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE

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The contemporaneous climate exigency depicts one of the transcendent threats to human security, ecological stability, and socio-economic resilience, peculiarly within vulnerable terrains of the Global South. Africa, albeit contributing scantily to global carbon emissions, experiences incongruous ecological perturbations including desertification, flooding, food insecurity, and displacement. The theological concept of *missio Dei* intramural is reinterpreted stingingly in the African ecological exigency and an African missiological paradigm that organizes around local cosmology, shared morality, and ecological religiousness is suggested. Imploring desk research methodology, the study applies African philosophy, African Traditional Religion (ATR), and modern-day eco-theology to dispute mainstream Western theological systems that have traditionally sidelined African knowledge systems and justified exploitative patterns with creation. In the paper, the applied ideologies diverged as *Ubuntu*, ancestral connectedness, and sacred ecologies, reveal the African contextual cosmologies offering a cathartic theological epistemological epilogue to ecological justice and sustaining mission praxis. Compared to Western ecological theology, colonial epistemologies, and modern environmental ethics, this article has shown that African eco-theology presents a holistic missional response to climate change that has a focus on communal accountability, ecological management, and spiritual interconnection. The study ascertains that an African centred redefinition of *missio Dei* is a necessity towards developing contextualised mission approaches that elucidate on climate injustice and enable rural African communities to become active participants in ecological recovery and environmental justice.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The coeval climate crisis has turned to be preeminent demanding world issues facing humanity. The forces of global warming, environmental degradation, and displacement caused by climate changes have endangered the ecosystems and the existence of susceptible communities at the global level. Climate change is a worldwide issue, but this does not mean that negative outcomes are distributed evenly.¹ African intellectuals like Chilunjika and Gumede have noted that despite Africa contributing little to the world carbon emissions, it suffers enormous effects due to climate change, which include drought, food crisis, environmental degradation, and population displacement.

The ecological crisis, which is facing Africa, cannot be perceived as just an environmental issue; instead, it is a historical, political, and theological issue that is based on colonialism, extractive capitalism, and epistemological subjection. As Mudimbe and Kavwahirehi argue, colonialism did not just take away the natural resources of Africa but also counterfeited African cosmologies and ecological knowledge systems that once had an ecological balance preserved historically.² This means that modern ecological discourses tend to favour Western scientific and theological perspectives and pay little attention to African traditional ecological knowledge. In Christian theology, this is so as Bosch points out that the idea of *missio Dei*, the mission of God, has emerged to be the core of the thinking about the way the church contributes to the redemptive work of God in the world.³ Nevertheless, Western theological assumptions that divide spiritual salvation and ecological responsibility have often influenced the meaning of the word *missio Dei*. These dualistic models are no longer effective in examining the ecological facts of African life, as spirituality, nature and community are neatly intertwined.

1 A Chilunjika and N Gumede, 'Climate change and human security in Sub-Saharan Africa' (2021) si1 African Renaissance 13.

2 VY Mudimbe and K Kavwahirehi (eds), *Encyclopaedia of African religions and philosophy* (Springer 2021).

3 D Bosch, *Transforming mission: Paradigm shifts in theology of mission* (Orbis Books 2011).

The paper, therefore, attempts to reinterpret *missio Dei* through African Eco-Theology and indigenous cosmology. It pursues to establish a contextual missiological framework to tackle ecological injustice in Africa through its exploration of African philosophy and African Traditional Religion ATR and modern ecological theology. The central argument herein is that African relational cosmology provides a theological and philosophical substratum, which supports ecological justice while challenging Western anthropocentric systems and repositioning mission within the interconnected community of creation.

In order to present this article systematically, it is divided in five subsequent sections. The study's methodology, which is qualitative desk research, is described in Section 2. In Section 3, Western ecotheology and colonial epistemologies are critically examined, laying the groundwork for mapping the intersections among the climate crisis, human security, and structural displacement. Section 4 introduces the cosmology of African people, the communal ethics of Ubuntu, and ecological spirituality as the ontological base for a restorative theology. In section 5, the subject of *Missio Dei* is reinterpreted in the context of ecological justice, a shift towards *Missio Creatoris Dei* and policy formations. Finally, in Section 6, the missional implications for rural communities in Africa are discussed, highlighting how sustainable development can be achieved through Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), and Section 7 concludes the discourse.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this research is a critical introduction of the intersection of climate change, African eco-theology, and missiology in the form of a qualitative desk research. The desk research would especially be suitable in this direction of inquiry, allowing to analyse and synthesise the existing academic sources systematically, note Mytton, Diem and van Dam,⁴ thus making it easier to generate new theoretical knowledge that lacks primary empirical evidence. Since the objective of the study is to

4 G Mytton, P Diem and PH van Dam, *Media Audience Research: A Guide for Professionals* (SAGE Publications 2016).

redefine theological paradigms, namely *Missio Dei*, in terms of the African ecological dimension, this method will provide an opportunity to explore thoroughly the world of academic, theological, and philosophical literature that has been coherent over years.

Furthermore, it instantiates interpretive and analytical research, drawing on theological hermeneutics and decolonial criticism. According to Mudimbe and Kavwahirehi,⁵ this kind of structure is an essential way of questioning how Western dominant paradigms of theology have historically pushed African epistemologies aside and instead gave precedence to anthropocentric ecological explanations. Contrarily, asserts Nche and Michael,⁶ the African indigenous cosmology studied in advance is based on relationality, interconnectedness, and sacred ecology. Bosch⁷ and Kaoma⁸ highlight that three major lenses that control the interpretive framework include the theological notion of *Missio Dei* and ecological derivation of *Missio Creatoris Dei*, African ecotheology, and decolonial theory. Therefore, a combination of these hermeneutics allows making a positive theological argument that reinvigorates mission as inextricably connected to ecological justice.

2.1. Data Collection and Sources.

In this research, data collection is conducted through rigorous document analysis, encompassing a systematic examination of scholarly texts, theological treatises, climatological reports, and archival histories. In accordance with Moore,⁹ the methodological framework makes it easy to identify patterns, salient themes and underlying ideological assumptions

5 VY Mudimbe and K Kavwahirehi (eds), *Encyclopaedia of African religions and philosophy* (Springer 2021).

6 GC Nche and BO Michael, 'Perspectives on African indigenous religion and the natural environment: Beings, interconnectedness, communities and knowledge systems' (2024) 25(1) *Phronimon* 1.

7 Bosch (n 3).

8 K Kaoma, 'From *missio Dei* to *missio Creatoris Dei*' in *Eco-Theology, Climate Justice, and Food Security* (2016).

9 N Moore, *How to do research: a practical guide to designing and managing research projects* (Facet Publishing 2006).

within the corpus. The research combines a wide range of cross-disciplinary resources, thus guaranteeing sensitivity to context and theoretical integrity.

Primary sources include academic monographs and peer reviewed journal articles specifically dealing with the topic of climate change, eco-theology, and human security. The scholarly works by Barnett and Adger¹⁰ about climate change as a trigger to human insecurity, and those by Conradie¹¹ on ecotheology and the moral implications of the climate crisis are worth mentioning. The theological and philosophical views of the Africans are based on the works of Bujo¹² who present the view of cosmology based on the dependability on the community and ecological levels. The combination of these references, provides background information on the complexity of climate change as an environmental and ethical dilemma.

Secondary sources comprises of historical and critical elucidation which render context for apperception of how ecological discourse has developed. White¹³ identifies Western religious interpretations of dominion as the origin point for environmental destruction while Wiredu,¹⁴ Mudimbe and Kavwahirehi¹⁵ examine how colonial frameworks have developed into dominant knowledge systems. Those views cannot be ignored in the identification of the historical marginalization of the African indigenous knowledge systems, and they are also useful in supporting the decolonial orientation of the study.

10 J Barnett and WN Adger, 'Climate change, human security and violent conflict' (2007) 26(6) *Political Geography* 639.

11 EM Conradie, 'The four tasks of Christian ecotheology: Revisiting the current debate' (2020) 119(1) *Scriptura: Journal for Biblical, Theological and Contextual Hermeneutics* 1; EM Conradie, 'Climate change as a multi-layered crisis for humanity 1' in *African Perspectives on Religion and Climate Change* (Routledge 2022) 215.

12 B Bujo, *African theology in its social context* (Wipf and Stock Publishers 2006).

13 RS Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth* (Routledge 2003).

14 K Wiredu, 'Toward decolonizing African philosophy and religion' (1998) 1(4) *African Studies Quarterly* 17.

15 Mudimbe and Kavwahirehi (n 2).

2.2. Significance of Desk Research.

Desk research is indispensable for this study, because it enables a philosophical and theological reconstruction of ecological discourse. The study uses existing literature to develop new research perspectives by proving an existing gap in understanding. According to Kumar and Lakshminarayana¹⁶ this nexus will espouse African indigenous knowledge systems by enabling researchers to access and combine core *Ubuntu* and ancestral ties and sacred ecology knowledge which forms the base of environmental ethics. Furthermore, notes Juma¹⁷ such study demonstrates that African contextual cosmology serves as a foundational point for developing ecological justice and resilient mission practices through its cathartic theological epistemological framework. The research develops a complete solution, which includes spiritual components to address climate change by criticizing Western technocratic methods through its use of multiple disciplinary insights. Therefore, this study utilizes a desk research methodology to further the decolonial project within missiology and ecotheology. In this way, it aims to express an articulation of a local theological paradigm that can lead to ecologically sustainable praxis.

3. DECONSTRUCTING WESTERN ECOTHEOLOGY AND COLONIAL EPISTEMOLOGIES

The discussion now turns to the interrelationship between the climate crisis and human security within the African context. Climate change is not just an environmental issue; it has become an existential threat with far-reaching consequences for health, social cohesion, economic viability, and political stability on the continent. The role of climate change in increasing vulnerabilities, thereby exacerbating poverty, food insecurity, displacement and conflicts of access to scarce resources is increasingly accepted by contemporary scholarship. In this regard, Kumssa and Jones and Barnett and Adger contend that climatic variability induced by human

16 S Kumar and MB Lakshminarayana (eds), *Indigenous People-Traditional Practices and Modern Development* (BoD–Books on Demand 2024).

17 DC Juma, 'African eco-spiritualities and climate justice: Afro-ecofeminism perspectives on Genesis 2: 4–17' (2025) 81(1) HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 10449.

actions leads to systemic insecurity, which includes threats to agricultural livelihoods and the potential for resource conflicts.¹⁸

Furthermore, the ecological issues facing Africa have sparked new theological and philosophical discussion about humanity's relationship with the natural world. The contemporary ecological crisis makes it crucial to examine critically the Western theological traditions which have historically justified ecological exploitation and domination under the guise of anthropocentrism, argues Gottlieb¹⁹. In contrast, African indigenous epistemologies provide an alternative relational worldview whereby humanity, nature and the divine are interconnected and coexist as a community of life.²⁰ In the light of all this, this section examines the relationship between the climate crisis and human security issues in Africa and recommends a missiological approach that combines ecological concern, social justice and communal health to respond to the growing environmental crises in Africa.

3.1. The Climate Crisis in the African Context.

Even though climate change is a uniform phenomenon across the world, the effects are not evenly spread globally. It is notable to point out that Africa is one of the most vulnerable continents even though it makes little contribution to the greenhouse gas emissions in the world. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report (IPCC) it has always been scientifically proven that African societies are suffering unproportional ramifications of global warming to their historical carbon footprint.²¹ This has been emphasized in the Sixth Assessment Report of the (IPCC), which explains that most sectors of development in Africa such as agriculture, water resources, biodiversity, and public health have

18 A Kumssa and JF Jones, 'Climate change and human security in Africa' (2010) 17(6) *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology* 453; J Barnett and WN Adger, 'Climate change, human security and violent conflict' (2007) 26(6) *Political Geography* 639.

19 RS Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth* (Routledge 2003).

20 Bujo (n 12).

21 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability* (IPCC 2022).

suffered quantifiable losses due to the human-induced climate change. With great confidence, Mitchell observed that the report has concluded that increasing global temperatures will worsen food insecurity, loss of biodiversity, poverty, and inequality in the continent should the global temperatures rise beyond 1.52 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.²²

The vulnerability of Africa is tightly connected with the structural socio-economic conditions. The population relies on agriculture, fisheries, and pastoralism because these are climatic activities that represent a major portion of the population. According to the IPCC report, it estimates that about 55-62% of the individuals in sub-Saharan Africa work in agriculture industry with almost 95% of the agricultural lands depending on rain-fed farming hence rural livelihoods are extremely sensitive to climatic changes.²³ Most climate monitoring reports of the recent past have revealed that the continent is recording various adverse environment disturbances which are becoming more serious. According to the report by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), Africa has warmed up in six decades more than the rest of the globe.²⁴ Extreme weather patterns including protracted droughts, intense flooding, heat waves, and tropical cyclone are on the rise in the continent.

These climatic upheavals have serious economic consequences. According to Dal, in Africa climate summit 2023: climate change and the social dimension report, the annual economic losses set at 2-5% of gross domestic product (GDP) are presently experienced in African nations by disaster-related to climatic factors, and governments are compelled to use up to 9% of national budgets in climate preparation and disaster mitigation.²⁵ Moreover, notes Dal, the forecasts suggest that by 2030 there are even more possibilities that 118 million extremely poor Africans may

22 SA Mitchell, 'The status of wetlands, threats and the predicted effect of global climate change: the situation in Sub-Saharan Africa' (2013) 75(1) Aquatic Sciences 95.

23 IPCC (n 21).

24 World Meteorological Organization (WMO), *State of the Climate in Africa 2023* (WMO 2023).

25 S Dal, 'Africa Climate Summit 2023: Climate change and the social dimension' (2024) 4(1) *Africana* 41.

face drought, floods, and extreme heat unless the relevant measures are taken towards adaptation.²⁶ These statistics indicate the compelling relevance of interdisciplinary responses that are environmental science, economic policy, and ethical reflection. Africa is facing a climate crisis, a crisis not only an environmental issue, but a multi-dimensional challenge to human and social security, as well as sustainable development.

Summarily, while Africa's contribution to the global Green House Gas (GHG) emission is very small, it experiences the effects of climate change more than any other continent. This is a serious weakness due to socio-economic conditions on the continent where more than 50% of the labour force is engaged in climate dependent rain-fed agriculture. Additionally, Africa's mean climate has warmed measurably relative to the global warming over the past 60 years, causing a marked rise in extreme weather phenomena such as prolonged droughts, heatwaves, and heavy flooding. Therefore, these environmental consternations have preventively severely impacted African economies, impudently 2-5% of annual GDP and displacing valuable government resources that are conversely used for disaster mitigation. The climate crisis is worsening to a critical stage of human security and sustainable development with over 118 million extremely poor Africans expected to be exposed to life-threatening climate extremes by 2030. A comprehensive solution to this multifaceted challenge requires immediate, interdisciplinary answers: environmental science; economic policy; and ethical thinking.

3.2. Climate Change and Human Security.

The paradigm of the human security offers a significant analytical instrument to the construal of the extended consequences of climate change. According to Martin and Owen human security is concerned with securing human beings and communities against encroachment that deteriorate their existence, dignity and wellness.²⁷ This has implications on various human security factors such as food security, water security, health security and economic stability. Food systems have been stirred by climate

²⁶ *ibid*

²⁷ M Martin and T Owen (eds), *Routledge handbook of human security* (Routledge 2014).

change as one of the most short-term effects in Africa, as there are increasing encroachments to agricultural productivity in the form of erratic rainfalls, which extends to droughts and high temperatures. Such variability observed by Abrham and Mekuyie in climate cuts down the output of crops, disrupts pastoral systems, and deteriorates the rural life. This has led to increasing hunger and malnutrition risks to millions of households in Africa.²⁸

Furthermore, another area of important vulnerability with regards to climatic factors is water security. Several areas in Africa, assert Nkatha, are already being affected by chronic water shortage and the climate change is projected to increase demand of the scarce water.²⁹ Thus, the higher temperature enhances the rate of evaporation and unpredictable rainfall interferes with refilling of rivers, lakes and aquifers. This has also exacerbated a great threat to human health. A changing environmental pattern, note Agyarko, Kithinji and Nsarhaza, enhances the transmission of climate sensitive diseases which include malaria, cholera, and dengue fever.³⁰ Concurrently, extreme heat events exert more burden on already weak medical systems in the continent. Therefore, these intertwined vulnerabilities demonstrate the use of climate change as a destabilizing factor to human security in Africa. Ecological crisis cannot be, thus, separated of a bigger issue of questions of justice, inequality and sustainable development.

The climate crisis in Africa is an ontological crisis for health and the effectiveness of public health systems. Human induced climate change increases the burden of vector-borne diseases and heat-related morbidity, which poses a major threat to the resilience of already weak healthcare systems. Ebi and Hess persuasively address the fact that climate change's

28 T Abrham and M Mekuyie, 'Effects of climate change on pastoral households in the Harshin District of the Somali Region, Ethiopia' (2022) 14(1) *Jambá: Journal of Disaster Risk Studies* 2072.

29 K Nkatha, 'Water woes: 13 undeniable facts about Africa's water scarcity' (2024) 22 *Greenpeace Africa*.

30 RKD Agyarko, D Kithinji and KB Nsarhaza, 'Climate change and the rise of emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases in Africa: a literature review' (2025) 22(6) *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 903.

health effects stem from profound systems of inequity, in which populations in Africa are disproportionately affected at the physical level and hitherto contribute paucity to global emissions.³¹ This is an inherent biopolitical exposure, resulting from this asymmetry. Additionally, the domino effect of extreme events on food security and potable water hinders the food security and brings another wave of epidemics. To mitigate these impacts, therefore, a paradigm shift from a traditional biomedical approach to public health interventions is needed towards anticipatory, climate-resilient socio-economic strategies that address socio-economic inequities, which underpins the survival of marginalized communities, note Watts and others.³²

Fundamentally, human-centric climate change is the catalyst that abases global food and water systems and represents a tremendous threat multiplier in terms of human security. The impacts of extreme weather events and altered precipitation on crop production and supply chains threaten the achievement of SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), Lesk, Rowhani and Ramankutty assert, directly through the impact on calorie availability, but also through the impact of these climatic stressors on the systemic resilience of food systems, increasing global undernutrition.³³

Meanwhile, observe Mekonnen and Hoekstra, the changing hydrological cycle brings about acute water scarcity, which is a serious challenge to SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), as well as to water-dependent farming and human health systems of vulnerable communities.³⁴ Thus, an integrated, allude Liu and others, 'nexus' style of environmental policy is needed to address these combined vulnerabilities.³⁵ Integrated resource

31 KL Ebi and JJ Hess, 'Health risks due to climate change: inequity in causes and consequences: study examines health risks due to climate change' (2020) 39(12) *Health Affairs* 2056.

32 N Watts and others, 'The 2020 report of The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change' (2021) 397(10269) *The Lancet* 129.

33 C Lesk, P Rowhani and N Ramankutty, 'Influence of extreme weather disasters on global crop production' (2016) 529(7584) *Nature* 84.

34 MM Mekonnen and AY Hoekstra, 'Four billion people facing severe water scarcity' (2016) 2(2) *Science Advances* e1500323.

35 J Liu and others, 'Nexus approaches to global sustainable development' (2018) 1(9) *Nature Sustainability* 466.

governance is critical to coordinate the climate adaptation strategies, so that the cross-over requirements of SDG2 and SDG6 are actively taken up in an ever more fragile ecological era.

3.3. Climate Displacement and Structural Vulnerability.

The disruption of climate patterns globally and across the region; have begun to be recognised by the public to facilitate such magnitude of disruption of population displacement. Ndimbo and Sanga postulate that the degradation of ecosystems, events such as desertification and water scarcity, drive communities from their homes in search of sustainable livelihoods.³⁶ Climate-induced migration is thus seen as an abrupt process, causing the breakdown of local agricultural systems, as opposed to a catastrophic process.

Most vulnerable to the impacts of these climate processes seem to be rural communities. When the environment becomes hostile to the livelihood of rural households, note Rusere and others, their responses involve moving to urban centres.³⁷ However, what is often observed is that the schemes of urban planning and design do not accommodate the movement of people and end up in informal settlements without the provision of accessible infrastructures and services, even water and sanitation. In addition, the dwellings are located in places that are vulnerable to climate events such as flooding and extreme temperatures.

The vulnerability of Africans to the impacts of climate change should be considered from the influences of history. David observed that the colonial economic systems imposed an extractive model of resource exploitation that disrupted the local systems of informal and self-regulated environmental management and local patterns of economy, which shifted

36 GK Ndimbo and F Sanga, 'Climate-induced stress, migration and the escalation of farmer-herder conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa: a systematic review' (2026) 12(1) Cogent Social Sciences 2646711.

37 F Rusere and others, 'Relationships between rural migration and perceptions of environmental change: Insights from Bushbuckridge, South Africa' (2025) 119 Journal of Rural Studies 103819.

towards production for export.³⁸ Thus, climate vulnerability today is a product of such historical processes.

Summarily, the climate change, human displacement, and fast urbanisation in Africa requires careful critical examination, as the link becomes more pronounced with an increasing deterioration in the environment. Environmental instability demands a radical redefinition of human mobility, for it is not only a tragedy of displacement, but, controversially, a mechanism of survival. Black and others argue that migration is a legitimate adaptation and a proactive approach to climate change that is becoming uninhabitable.³⁹ But this adaptive migration often leads the most vulnerable to the less well-resourced urban outskirts, exacerbating the socio-economic disadvantage and infrastructure pressures of systemic marginalisation. As Rigaud and others noted, this trajectory will result in unprecedented internal climate migration unless strong and fair developmental policies are urgently put in place; in their case, they estimated that millions of people would be displaced within their borders.⁴⁰ Therefore, it is necessary to change one's perspective on displacement from one of being a marginal "issue" to one of being a structural fact and a matter of rights-based, comprehensive urban planning.

3.4. African Eco-Theological Interpretations of the Climate Crisis.

African theologians have systematically interpreted the climate crisis as both an ecological and moral aporia. Scholars especially Conradie accentuate that climate change instantiate a complex ethical conundrum involving ecological degradation, economic inequality, and historical injustice.⁴¹ According to Conradie, theological hermeneutics necessitates critical examination not only environmental protection but also the

38 JO David, 'Decolonizing climate change response: African indigenous knowledge and sustainable development' (2024) 9 *Frontiers in Sociology* 1456871.

39 R Black and others, 'Climate change: Migration as adaptation' (2011) 478(7370) *Nature* 447.

40 KK Rigaud and others, *Groundswell: Preparing for internal climate migration* (World Bank 2018).

41 Conradie (n 11).

structural paradigm that institutionalize ecological exploitation. This structural approach is not sufficiently broken down if one is not willing to question the neocolonial capitalism and environmental degradation in the Global South. Extending on, Sande philosophically further explain that anthropocentric models in the West have been commercializing creation, turning the African bios into resources that are to be extracted.⁴² This epistemological violence removes indigenous people from their land and continues to cause them poverty and ecological destruction. Thus to view climate crisis as an environmental problem is ontologically wrong; it should be seen as a fundamental moral amendment of global economy architectures that have long cast African cosmologies aside and have had a disproportionate impact on vulnerable communities.

African theologian Mukaria states that religious traditions have the major moral authority in developing people's *weltanschauung* and mobilizing communities for ecological activism.⁴³ Hence, the religious communities in African societies are central in fostering the ecological phenomenal consciousness and the environmental responsibility. Magesa is contrarily argues that African moral theology is "cosmological" that is, the wronging of the earth is a wronging of the Creator and the ancestral community.⁴⁴ This relational and relationalizing ontology can guide religious institutions in translating a policy for the environment that could be at the level of abstraction, into one that can be lived locally and with a spiritual dimension. Therefore, the development of this environmental responsibility must involve a change in pedagogical perspectives within congregations, from an 'environmental awareness', an essentially passive representation, to an 'environmental activism' with a distinctly spiritual dimension, viewing the care for the environment as a commitment which affects the community, not a marginal social concern.

42 N Sande, 'Ecology and theology together within African Pentecostals worship liturgy' (2024) 44(1) *Acta theologica* 227.

43 AR Mukaria, 'The emergence of 20th century eco-theology, its main figures, and key contributions' (2021) 13(06) *International Journal of Current Research* 17952.

44 L Magesa, *African religion: The moral traditions of abundant life* (Orbis Books 2014).

On the missiological side, Mugambi and Katongole have also accentuated the importance of ecological reconstruction in African theology.⁴⁵ In contrast, Kaoma develops the Christian missionary emphasis further by arguing that Christian mission must necessarily include ecological justice as one of the dimensions of God's redemptive work in the world.⁴⁶ Furthermore, Daneel provides a critical analysis that supports this observation: "In the African Initiated Churches (AIC's), planting a tree becomes a sacramental rite in itself, a symbol of ecological penance and healing in the material world."⁴⁷ This becomes evident in such praxis, which reveals that ecological reconstruction is not an adjunct to the socio-political, but its very core. African missiology thus, through this fusion of indigenous ecological practices, connects orthodox theology and grassroots environmentalism, suggesting that true redemption is ultimately impossible unless the earth is liberated as well.

Ergo, we contend that African ecotheology advocates a visioned Christian mission that includes environmental stewardship, social justice, and community resilience. In this regard, the ecclesia's involvement in the *missio Dei* includes addressing climate change as a matter of importance. According to Vellem, a decolonial eco-theology should be a subversive critique of the necro-politics of global capitalism that prematurely decays African bodies and biomes.⁴⁸ The political neutrality and purely eschatological orientation of the ecclesia are not viable; it must be life disrupting and life affirming in the here and now. Therefore, when the African church repatriates its socio-theological capabilities by adopting the holistic concept of *missio Dei* with its focus on planetary survival, it restores not only spiritual nourishment to its believers but planetary substance to the continent itself.

45 JN Mugambi, 'From reconstruction to reaffirmation: African Christian theology in an era of hot peace' in *The Routledge handbook of African theology* (Routledge 2020) 151; E Katongole, *The sacrifice of Africa: A political theology for Africa* (WB Eerdmans 2011).

46 Kaoma (n 8).

47 ML Daneel, *African Earthkeepers: Wholistic Interfaith Mission* (Orbis Books 2001).

48 VS Vellem, 'Spirituality of liberation: A conversation with African religiosity' (2014) 70(1) HTS: Theological Studies 1.

3.5. Deconstructing Colonial Epistemologies of Western Ecotheology.

Formulating a bona fide African missiological paradigm asserts Fataar and Subreenduth necessitates a trenchant, rigorous catechization of the intellectual cadre that have historically marginalized African voices in environmental discourse.⁴⁹ Fataar and Subreenduth further accentuates that this postulates a systemic subversion of “*ecolonial*” paradigms that persist to dominate academic and theological locus, habitually prioritizing Western ideologies and epistemic positions over indigenous intellectual. Therefore, by subverting these ensconced hierarchies, we eclectic the necessary epistemic approach for a missiology that is both ontologically African and ecologically robust, diverting the locus from a colonial “civilizing” mission to a restorative mission of primordial justice.

This subversion of “*ecolonial*” narratives is important, because it is essential for us to understand that Western anthropocentrism has deprived African peoples of their homeland and has committed an epistemic act of violence against indigenous cosmologies. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni, the global colonial matrix of power is inherently violent and base on appropriation of knowledge making the ecosystem of Africa to be a repository of resources to be exploited instead of a living interconnected community of Africa.⁵⁰ Epitaphically, a missiology for a decolonized Africa is compelled to practice “epistemic disobedience”, that is, a rejection of the dualistic dichotomy between humanity and nature that dominates Eurocentric theological frameworks.

To realize this missiological purpose of primordial justice in full, ontologies and relationalities like *Ubuntu* must be engaged by the missiological paradigm, which goes beyond anthropocentric sociability to embrace the entire cosmic web. According to Kaoma there is a complex

49 A Fataar and S Subreenduth, 'The search for ecologies of knowledge in the encounter with African epistemicide in South African education' (2015) 29(2) South African Journal of Higher Education 106.

50 SJ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Empire, global coloniality and African subjectivity* (Berghahn Books 2022).

and delicate interweaving of the Creator, the ancestors, humanity and the environment in which the African philosophy of 'vital force' is found.⁵¹ In the breadth of its application and uptake, missiology, when optimized, becomes a radical decolonial eco-praxis if it embraces this indigenous ethos of care for the earth. We contend that if missiology is done right, embracing this indigenous ethos of care for the earth, it becomes a radical decolonial eco-praxis. This epistemological turn, therefore, challenges the systemic drivers of global climate injustice, arguing that the freedom, and the healing of humankind, is inextricably bound up with the freeing and healing of the larger *oikos*.

3.6. The critique of western anthropocentrism and dominion theology.

The historical etymon of the ecological crisis have been delineated by scholars such as Gottlieb to a particular hermeneutics of Judeo-Christian "dominion".⁵² Western ecotheology, observed Gottlieb, while endeavouring to redress this, often is enmeshed in a dualistic logic that disassociate the "sacred" from the "profane" and the "human" from the "natural". This Western orientation habitually approaches the environment as a set of problems to be elucidated through governance and stewardship, rather than a community of being to which we belong.

Contrarily, asserts Adeleye, Oluola and Oluwaseun, a robust African philosophical rebuttal argues that Western ecotheology is habitually excessively individualistic and nonchalant from the lived experiences of those on the peripheries.⁵³ For these scholars, when Western scholars repudiate African indigenous epistemology as nominal "animism", they ignore the perspicacious moral philosophy that has undergirded African ecosystems for millennia. Therefore, decolonization of African philosophy and religion is not a nominal academic exercise; it is an exigent

51 KJ Kaoma, *God's family, God's earth: Christian ecological ethics of Ubuntu* (Kachere Series 2014).

52 Gottlieb (n 13).

53 D Adeleye, J Oluola and BK Oluwaseun, 'African Epistemology as a critique of western epistemology' (2023) 17(10) *Sapientia: Journal of Philosophy* 65.

apostasy against a theological monopoly that has substantiated the exploitation of African land under the simulacrum of “development” or “civilization”.

This urgent apostasy is fundamentally synthesized on, and a surrogate missiological paradigm that utilize African correlative ontology (relationality) which perhaps aporias Cartesian dualism in the West must be created. This is explained by the Shona philosophical concept of *Ukama* (relatedness),⁵⁴ which suggests that there is a moral connection between living beings, the land, and the spirits of the ancestors. In this cosmological context, the ethical responsibility cannot be divorced from its utility to mankind, and it identifies natural life as a co-participant in the cosmic web of life. Thus the commodification and subjugation of nature are seen not only as mismanagement of the environment but as fundamental transgressions of the life force of the community as a whole.

Moreover, this native knowledge requires an approach that faces the legacy of global coloniality head-on. Theories of epistemic hegemony continuously armament knowledge, as Ndlovu-Gatsheni notes, Western approaches to development being the universal apex, and indigenous ecological knowledge being systematically marginalised.⁵⁵ To counter this ecological imperialism, Ndlovu-Gatsheni further elucidates that African ecotheology must engage in radical “epistemic disobedience”. Therefore, this decolonial paradigm allows for the re-theologizing of the African biomes as sacred rather than capitalist frontiers and introduces a new language of the cosmos: one of immense respect and cosmic reciprocity.

54 MF Murove, 'An African environmental ethic based on the concepts of Ukama and Ubuntu' in MF Murove (ed), *African ethics: An anthology of comparative and applied ethics* (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press 2009) 314.

55 SJ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 'The Entrapment of Africa within the Global Colonial Matrices of Power: Eurocentrism, Coloniality, and Deimperialization in the Twenty-First Century' (2013) 29(4) *Journal of Developing Societies* 331.

3.7. Ecolonialism and the Erasure of African Indigenous Knowledge.

As noted by Layden and others, “e-colonialism” refers to the Western environmental values and conservation frameworks that, in the name of (or “at the expense of”) local sovereignty, shift focus and responsibility to the Global South.⁵⁶ From that perspective, Mashau identifies a similar tendency of such a disposition in the history of missiology, where missionary activities were, in a sense, surrounded by colonial resentment and engendered a “civilizing mission” that aimed to “liberate” Africans from their “superstitious” attachment to the land.⁵⁷ Mashau’s observation, in essence, represents the colonial and epistemological paradigm in which mission praxis served as a vehicle of empire, justifying cultural domination and privileging the European reason by recasting African cosmologies as irrational, thereby, justifying the geopolitical and spiritual domination.

Furthermore, we contend that a dialectical deconstruction must argue robustly against any scholarly opus that postulates African Traditional Religion (ATR) lacks the dianoetic or ethical sociotechnical systems to address the climate crisis. On the contrary, the encyclopaedia of African religions and philosophy by Mudimbe and Kavwahirehi elucidates a complex system of taboos, sacred temenos, and totemic nexus that operated as highly potent indigenous conservation praxis long before the advent of contemporary environmentalism.⁵⁸ Therefore, by repudiating these as “pre-rational”, colonial scholarship rendered the moral vacuum ineluctable for the industrial extraction of Africa’s resources.

3.8. Toward an Intercultural and Decolonized Ecotheology.

The transformation of theology, according to Mosala, in the context of climate crisis requires a “hermeneutics of suspicion” in furtherance of any

56 TJ Layden and others, 'Confronting colonial history: toward healing, just, and equitable Indigenous conservation futures' (2025) 30(1) *Ecology and Society* 1.

57 T Mashau, 'Pushing the naked envelop further-A Missiological deconstruction of the empire and Christianity in Africa' (2020) 48(1) *Missionalia* 41.

58 Mudimbe and Kavwahirehi (n 2).

theological paradigm that does not account for the power dynamics of colonialism.⁵⁹ In essence, Western ecotheology frequently pretermit the fact that Africa's climate vulnerability is an unequivocal legacy of colonial resource extraction. Therefore, an African ecotheology must be a liberation theology one that vinculum the "cry of the earth" with the "cry of the poor".

As Christianity experiences a transition in its global nucleus of gravity, the renaissance of a non-Western religion means that African praxis of believing must be the cardinal lenses through which the *Missio Dei* is understood on the continent. This decolonial endeavour, asserts Dube, entails revisiting the philosophy of religion on African praxis of believing to asseverate that the African concept of "Life" (*Zoe*) is fundamentally ecological.⁶⁰ Thus, God's mission is not to "save" humans out of the world, but to reanimate the ontological balance of the absolute cosmos, an equipoise that colonial epistemologies have ascetically disrupted.

3.9. Reclaiming the "Encyclopaedia of African Religions".

According to Sesanti, to robustly reason against those who impugn African philosophy is to restitute the intellectual conscientiousness of African traditional systems.⁶¹ Intrinsically, this entails apperception that African moral philosophy transcends beyond human behaviour, it is grounded in the "cosmic order". Chitando's stance is that when scholars and researchers engage with the *T&T Clark Handbook of Christian Theology and Climate Change* by Conradie and Koster, they must propound that African perspectives on religion and climate change are not "alternative" paradigms but are cornerstone to the global survival of the planet.⁶² Therefore, deconstructing Western ecotheology affords for the

59 IJ Mosala, *Biblical hermeneutics and black theology in South Africa* (Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co 1987).

60 MW Dube, 'Searching for the lost needle: Double colonization & postcolonial African feminisms' (1999) 5(2) *Studies in World Christianity* 213.

61 SO Sesanti, 'African Philosophy and the African Renaissance: A Quest for a True Humanity' (PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand 2021).

62 E Chitando, 'Introduction: African perspectives on religion and climate change' in *African Perspectives on Religion and Climate Change* (Routledge 2022) 1.

emanation of a “public missiology” that is irrefragably intercultural, recognizing that the “*Great Commission*” is inextricable from the “*Great Stewardship*” of the African ground.

4. AFRICAN COSMOLOGY, COMMUNAL ETHICS, AND ECOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY.

Our conviction thereof, is that a radical evolution in the missiological paradigm demands an ontological dependence in a immanent understanding of creation, intrinsically mediated through African cosmology and the communal ethic of *Ubuntu*. Etieyibo observed that while Western philosophical traditions consistently hierarchize an atomistic individualism emanating from the *Enlightenment*’s exaltation of the autonomous discipline, African indigenous epistemology postulates that existence is radically participatory.⁶³ Such relationality presents a robust impugnation to the anthropocentric individualism that has historically approbated ecological exploitation.

4.1. The Ontological Web: African Cosmology as Ecological Framework.

African cosmological phenomenology views the cosmos as an interconnected system that exists through continuous existence instead of being divided into separate independent phenomena. The sacred and the mundane together with human and non-human existence combine to create a world that lacks permanent boundaries between different states of being. Within this ontological horizon, existence is animated by what Mudimbe and Kavwahirehi in the *Encyclopaedia of African Religions and Philosophy* construe as a permeative “vital force” that saturates all aspects of being.⁶⁴ Therefore, such an understanding of African cosmology surpasses the essentialist caricature of “animism” historically dictated by colonial epistemologies; rather, it emblems toward a metaphysically idiosyncratic affirmation of ontological continuum, wherein God, the

63 E Etieyibo, 'African philosophy in the eyes of the West' (2016) 17(2) *Phronimon* 1.

64 Mudimbe and Kavwahirehi (n 2)

ancestors, the living community, and the natural world participate in a communal purview of relational existence.

Consequently, efforts in some scholarly circles to dismiss African Traditional Religion as philosophically incoherent or ethically insufficient for ecological reflection often reflect a limited engagement with the depth of its relational ontology. Within this framework, as Bauckham posits, nature should not be treated as a passive backdrop for human action; rather, it is better understood as a moral and spiritual fellowship, a “community of creation”.⁶⁵ As Cordeiro-Rodrigues and Agada further explicate in their discussion of divine and ancestral categories, what is often framed as moral disorder through the “problem of evil” is more plausibly understood as a breakdown in cosmic balance.⁶⁶ Violating the earth, then, is not simply a matter of getting ecology wrong; it can also be read as an ontological breach one that disrespects ancestral caretakers of the land and, in effect, fails those who have not yet come into being. This interplay between a vertical relationship with the transcendent and a horizontal sense of solidarity with the rest of creation frames ecological stewardship as a kind of sacred calling, rather than merely a matter of optional policy preference.

4.2. Ubuntu as an Eco-Communal Ethic.

Foundational, aver Ramose, to this communitarian ethos is the philosophy of *Ubuntu*, a relational ontology that is pervasively anchored in a maxim like “*I am because we are*”, and thus becomes our epistemological lens.⁶⁷ Perennially utilized to mortal social relations, *Ubuntu* embodies an implicit ecological dimension van Breda hypothetically terms “*Eco-Ubuntu*”.⁶⁸ Intrinsically, according to Lechaba, if the “we” in the *Ubuntu* parity subsumes the biosphere, then the personhood is ontologically

65 R Bauckham, *Bible and ecology: Rediscovering the community of creation* (Baylor University Press 2010).

66 L Cordeiro-Rodrigues and A Agada, 'African philosophy of religion: Concepts of God, ancestors, and the problem of evil' (2022) 17(8) *Philosophy Compass* e12864.

67 M Ramose, *African philosophy through Ubuntu* (Mond Books 2002).

68 AD van Breda, 'Developing the notion of Ubuntu as African theory for social work practice' (2019) 55(4) *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk* 439.

tethered to the wholeness of the ecosystem.⁶⁹ Contrary to Western autonomy, contends Metz, which discerns the environment as a compendium of distinct resources for mortal depletion, *Ubuntu* ethics accentuates communal responsibility and reciprocity.⁷⁰

Masango highlights that African spirituality moulds the paradigm of *Ubuntu* by engendering a sense of belonging to a larger *weltanschauung*.⁷¹ Essentially, Masango challenges Descartes the Cartesian dualism of the “thinking thing” (*res cogitans*) versus the “extended thing” (*res extensa*).⁷² In African moral philosophy, concurs Molefe and Maraganedzha, the “self” is not a cloistered entity but a nexus in a wide ecological plexus.⁷³ Therefore, the pursuit of justice in *Ubuntu* as an eco-communal ethic involves more than individual rights, it is about redressing the relational equilibrium of the entire society, including the land.

4.3. Critiquing the Individualist Hegemony.

A critical African ecotheology should make a clear, well-supported case against treating Western individualism as a universal norm. The so-called “changing face of Christianity” arguably calls for stepping back from the kind of “quietism” that can come with treating salvation mainly as an individual, personal matter.⁷⁴ Some critics argue that African Indigenous epistemology, with its emphasis on communal ways of knowing, may end up limiting individual agency or slowing down what they would call scientific progress. Be that as it may, Wiredu notes, when discussing the

69 LT Lechaba, 'Exploration of Biko and Sankara's political thoughts and praxis in relation to African Renaissance as a decolonial project' (PhD thesis, University of the Free State 2024).

70 T Metz, 'An overview of African ethics' in IE Ukpokolo (ed), *Themes, issues and problems in African philosophy* (Palgrave Macmillan 2017) 61.

71 MJ Masango, 'African spirituality that shapes the concept of Ubuntu' (2006) 27(3) *Verbum et Ecclesia* 930.

72 R Descartes, *Principles of philosophy* (vol 8, Minerva Press 2024).

73 M Molefe and M Maraganedzha, 'African Traditional Religion and moral philosophy' (2023) 59(2) *Religious Studies* 355.

74 LO Sanneh and JA Carpenter (eds), *The changing face of Christianity: Africa, the West, and the world* (Oxford University Press 2005); AA Boesak and CP DeYoung, *Radical reconciliation: Beyond political pietism and Christian quietism* (Orbis Books 2012).

decolonization of African philosophy, a communal ethic may offer a more durable basis for protecting both people and the environment than the Western tendency to prioritize competitive individualism.⁷⁵

By bringing African cosmology into conversation with *Ubuntu*, the discussion points toward what Shiva refers to as “earth democracy”, namely an arrangement in which the rights of nature are treated as inherent, and as closely tied to the community’s capacity to endure.⁷⁶ A study by Gumo and others suggests that conveying African spirituality through an ecological lens can be understood as a prophetic undertaking, one that pushes back against the kind of ecolonialism embedded in Western “management” frameworks.⁷⁷ Instead, it puts forward a relational and participatory approach to missiology, grounded in a widely held African view that human flourishing is tightly bound up with the flourishing of the land and its soil.

5. REINTERPRETING MISSIO DEI FOR ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE.

The orthodox theological hermeneutics of *missio Dei* (the Mission of God), notes Arthur, has historically endured from a parochial, anthropocentric focus, intrinsically engrossed with the vertical reconciliation of individual souls to a transcendent Deity.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, in the era of the climate crisis, it is no longer a tenable paradigm. In order to have a strong ecotheology in Africa asserts Sakupapa, there is an insistence on a redefinition of mission that acknowledges that the Earth is not a point where the human drama unfolds, but is a key element in the salvific Godhead story.⁷⁹ Fundamentally, it involves an end of colonial

⁷⁵ Wiredu (n 14).

⁷⁶ V Shiva, 'Earth democracy' (2003) 18(1) Tikkun 43.

⁷⁷ S Gumo and others, 'Communicating African spirituality through ecology: Challenges and prospects for the 21st century' (2012) 3(2) Religions 523.

⁷⁸ E Arthur, 'Missio Dei and the Mission of the Church' (2013) 6 Wycliffe Global Alliance.

⁷⁹ TC Sakupapa, 'The decolonial imperative in African ecotheology: A Zambian perspective' in EM Conradie and PC Lai (eds), *Taking a deep breath for the story to begin...* (AOSIS 2021) 205.

missiologial thinking that questions the natural world as something that can be administered or an environment that should be left behind.

5.1. From *Missio Dei* to *Missio Creatoris Dei*.

According to Cho, the emergence of the notion of *missio Dei* in our kaleidoscopic landscape warrants an expansion of its purview to subsume the entire created order.⁸⁰ For Kaoma, this paradigm shift is best understood as a pivot toward *Missio Creatoris Dei* the mission of the Creator God.⁸¹ In this paradigm, the mission is not phenomenon of what the church performs for God; rather, it is a solidarity in God's perennial creative and sustaining act in the universe.

If God is the Creator of all that is, then the "Grand Narrative" of the Bible as contended by Wright cannot be constrained to mortal history autonomy.⁸²

For scholars such as Höfer, critical repugnance to African ecotheology prevalently emanates from a Western "redemption-only" theology that perceives the material world as transient or degenerated beyond the purview of mission.⁸³ However, from a liberation theology perspective, Boff contends that a decolonized missiology postulates that the "Good News" is exclusively truly good if it involves the restoration of the land, the atmosphere, and the biodiversity that sustains life.⁸⁴ Thus, by coalescing the *Missio Creatoris*, mission emerges as an act of cosmic reconciliation where the ecclesia aligns itself with Agape for the oikos (the whole inhabited earth).

80 H Cho, 'Never-Ending Mission of God: The Evolution of the Concept of *Missio Dei* in Our Ever-Changing Landscape' (2024) 113(1) *International Review of Mission* 173.

81 Kaoma (n 8).

82 CJ Wright, *The mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (InterVarsity Press 2025).

83 A Höfer, 'Ecotheologies and Intersectionality. A Decolonial Perspective on Intersections of Life' (2023) 122(1) *Scriptura: Journal for Contextual Hermeneutics in Southern Africa* 1.

84 L Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Orbis Books 1997).

5.2. The Radical Equality of the *Oikos*: Policy Formations Rooted in a Liberated Ubuntu.

In order to develop a transformative African eco-theology, it is essential to build a hermeneutics of the *oikos* (the cosmic household) that is fundamentally based in a “liberated” concept of *Ubuntu*. The *Ubuntu* maximally stated as “*I am because we are*” has at times been appropriated by a patriarchal and anthropocentric worldview that privileges the sociability of human beings and reduces women and the non-human environment to their subordination.⁸⁵ But it is the radical extension of this relational ontology to the whole ecological web that a philosophically grounded reading of the decolonial can call for. Le Grange maintains that a critically recovered *Ubuntu* is very similar to deep ecology, which expands the moral community to embrace the biosphere.⁸⁶ This free *Ubuntu* says that “human flourishing” cannot be separated from the flourishing of the earth. Thus the *oikos* is not just a space for human interaction or a storehouse of natural wealth, but a sacred communal whole, one in which there is no distinction between human beings and nature, no separation between the sacred and the profane.

Any viable missiological paradigm must then be able to develop this cosmic egalitarianism into tangible policy formations which challenge extractive hierarchies. To bring this radical equality to bear on state and institutional governance will require a direct challenge to the contemporary global climate policies that are grounded in systemic eco-patriarchy. Many western environmental governance frameworks conflate nature with utility, and act upon the framework's neoliberal principles like carbon trading, which commercialises environment rather than solving it.⁸⁷ In this critique of such frameworks, Chemhuru notes that it reinforces an epistemology of mastery and domination that reflects the subjugation

85 RK Chigangaidze, 'Environmental social work through the African philosophy of Ubuntu: A conceptual analysis' (2023) 66(6) International Social Work 1845.

86 L Le Grange, 'Ubuntu, Ukama, environment and moral education' (2012) 41(3) Journal of Moral Education 329.

87 A Dunlap and S Sullivan, 'A Faultline in neoliberal environmental governance scholarship? Or, why accumulation-by-alienation matters' (2020) 3(2) Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space 552.

of marginalised bodies and landscapes by patriarchy.⁸⁸ A policy climate that is based on an opened-up *Ubuntu* totally undermines this. It requires a change of mentalities: from 'environmental management', which connotes an overseer at the top, to "ecological participation". Our hypothesis that climate policies need to be situated in a collective context, since the environment is part of the African communal matrix. Furthermore, since the environment is an element of the African communal matrix and so climate policy cannot be formulated in the sterile corridors of international finance but needs to be democratized. Policies need to be inclusive in explicitly stating the violent dimensions of climate change inflicted to the earth and the socio-economic violence inflicted to vulnerable African populations, calling for an intersectional approach to climate change legislation.

The radical shift from a bureaucratic to a liberating vision of *Ubuntu* has the most far-reaching structural impact on earth jurisdiction, the radical transformation of the nature of the legal personhood of the natural world. Western legal systems treat nature as property, with corporations possessing the juridical power to remove products, pollute (up to a certain limit), and gain profits. In contrast, Cullinan argues that legal systems must adopt a more African perspective due to their intertwined lived world if one is to understand the "Great Jurisprudence" of the universe.⁸⁹ Policy approaches based on *Ubuntu* should call for the "Rights of Nature" as a way to advance the concept of ecosystems as living entities with rights and entitlements to exist, evolve, and regenerate that cannot be owned under conventional property rights laws. African countries have the constitutional power to create a legal barrier to neo-colonial ecocide through the rights of the *oikos*. This structural change moves environmental protection from a good deed that is "voluntary" to a "mandatory" legal requirement of "restorative justice", meaning that the non-human world has standing in court.

Moreover, a liberated *Ubuntu* leads to a radical remodelling of the policies on resource allocation and adaptation to climate change. The dominant

88 M Chemhuru, *African Environmental Ethics: A Critical Reader* (Springer 2019).

89 C Cullinan, *Wild law: A Manifesto for Earth Justice* (Bloomsbury Publishing 2011).

neoliberal paradigm continues to argue for the privatization of the commons, often with the claim that “green energy” development and/or conservation is taking place, while in fact it is being done at the expense of indigenous people. In African ethics, a philosophy that celebrates unity and interdependence, respect of others is intrinsically linked to a model of public governance based on solidarity, mutual aid and equity in sharing of communal resources, as argued by Metz⁹⁰. At the epoch of the climate crisis, it means that policy will have to fight hard to protect the global commons from corporate enclosure. Furthermore, asserts Selje, Schmid and Heinz, the implementation of climate adaptation measures should be explicitly localized and strongly support local community-based regenerative agriculture and decentralized renewable energy cooperatives, not foreign-owned mega-projects.⁹¹ A policy framework that is genuinely and fully representative of the radical equality of the *oikos* will guarantee that costs and benefits of ecological restoration are shared equitably and clearly, with socio-economic security as the primary consideration for the most historically disenfranchised groups.

African ecotheology, according to Ikuenobe, is an important local catalyst for this development, which takes the form of an “opened-up *Ubuntu*” that fundamentally extends the moral community beyond humans to include the wider biosphere: SDG 13 (Climate Action) is directly operationalised in this theological paradigm.⁹² For Olupona, it offers a culturally informed way of resilience to climate change which is missing from the top-down, western-centric policies.⁹³ Moreover, this ecologic solidarity is connected with the SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) to a large extent. Democratizing environmental governance, with nature's rights, actively challenges extractive and neo-colonial hierarchies and reduces resource-based conflict. Finally, Taringa argued

90 T Metz, 'Ubuntu as a moral theory and human rights in South Africa' (2011) 11(2) African Human Rights Law Journal 532.

91 T Selje, LA Schmid and B Heinz, 'Community-based adaptation to climate change: core issues and implications for practical implementations' (2024) 12(10) Climate 155.

92 PA Ikuenobe, 'Traditional African environmental ethics and colonial legacy' (2014) 2(4) International Journal of Philosophy and Theology 1.

93 JK Olupona, 'Religion and ecology in African culture and society' in RS Gottlieb (ed), *The Oxford handbook of religion and ecology* (Oxford University Press 2006) 262.

that an expanded *Ubuntu* can provide an indigenous jurisprudential basis for developing policies that promise both equity in the distribution of resources and structural peace in the building, running, and monitoring of institutions that will facilitate sustainable development, which is pursued on the basis of ethical processes, community participation, and is subject to the rule of law.⁹⁴

In sum, the integration of the liberating *Ubuntu* into policymaking goes beyond theory into effective means of eco-political liberation in Africa. It designs an architecture of governing which makes the oikos a sanctuary for mutual flourishing, not extraction. The moral dimension of nature in African thought is conveyed by Behrens enunciate that this is a duty a practical, systemic, obligation to future generations and to the ancestral land.⁹⁵ Therefore, the duty of the Africans and Public Theologians is to cross over into the arena of legislation and ardently challenge policies based on this relational ontology. Africa can be a blueprint for planetary survival, as it has made the radical equality of the *oikos* the socio-political and legal norm of the state. It is the praxis of the primordial justice which challenges the necro-politics of ecological imperialism and guarantees sustainable and harmonious living and productive coexistence of all beings living in the cosmic household.

This section posits that any decolonial African eco-theology needs to be based upon a “liberated *Ubuntu*” beyond anthropocentric and patriarchal perspectives and include and value the radical equality of the *oikos* (the cosmic household). The relational ontology extends the moral realm to encompass the non-human biosphere, which is a challenge to the eco-patriarchy and neoliberal commodification that underpins the Western climate governance framework. The most dramatic of the structural shifts in the laws requires a shift from “environmental management” to “ecological participation,” that is, to recognise the “Rights of Nature” as intrinsic rights instead of property. Furthermore, a liberated *Ubuntu*

94 N Taringa, 'How environmental is African traditional religion?' (2006) 35(2) *Exchange* 191.

95 KG Behrens, 'An African relational environmentalism and moral considerability' in [Editor Missing] (ed), *African Philosophy and Deep Ecology* (Routledge 2025) 96.

requires a re-distribution of resources to favour local adaptation to climate change, community development initiatives of self-reliant farming and the protection of the commons against corporate appropriation. Finally, the ethos of a people's church in the Christian mission on Africa becomes a powerful tool for eco-political liberation in the eyes of the churches, the state, and the institutions. It offers a redemptive de-colonial model to break the cycle of ecological imperialism and to ensure a mutually valuable sustainable relationship among the interdependent planetary community.

5.3. Prophetic Tasks: Grief, Hope, and Public Missiology.

In the context of the ecological crisis, our stance is that missiology needs to embrace a prophetic posture. This pertains to what Brueggemann emphasises as the imperative prophetic responsibilities of grief and hope.⁹⁶ In Africa, where climate change appears as a complex dilemma including human security and violent disputes,⁹⁷ the church must initially engage in the *grief* of the land, mourning the extinction of species, the degradation of soils, and the desiccation of rivers.

In so doing, according to Fensham, this leads to a “public missiology” that eschews to remain silent in defiance of environmental degradation.⁹⁸ Ontologically notes Boesak and DeYoung, we must robustly argue against “Christian quietism” or “political pietism” that perceive ecological activism as “distracting” from the Gospel.⁹⁹ Therefore, in the African context, the advocacy of the environment is a primary missional duty; a public missiology for ecological justice which challenges the maladaptive

96 W Brueggemann, *Reality, grief, hope: Three urgent prophetic tasks* (Eerdmans 2014).

97 EM Conradie, 'Climate change as a multi-layered crisis for humanity 1' in E Chitando (ed), *African Perspectives on Religion and Climate Change* (Routledge 2022) 215; J Barnett and WN Adger, 'Climate change, human security and violent conflict' (2007) 26(6) *Political Geography* 639.

98 C Fensham, 'Faith Matters: towards a public missiology in the midst of the ecological crisis' (2015) 30(Supp 1) *Toronto Journal of Theology* 17.

99 AA Boesak and CP DeYoung, *Radical reconciliation: Beyond political pietism and Christian quietism* (Orbis Books 2012).

knowledge of global capital and neo-colonial extraction that continue to regard African soil as a sacrifice territory for Northern consumption.

5.4. Intercultural Creation Faith and Earth Democracy.

Reimagining mission necessitates an “intercultural creation faith” wherein Western theological traditions engage in a respectful dialogue with African belief systems.¹⁰⁰ This conversation engenders what Buencibello and Aton refers to as “cry of the earth” a missional framework in which the ecclesia advocates the “rights of nature” as a manifestation of divine justice.¹⁰¹ Critics of African Traditional Religion (ATR) who label it as “pantheistic” or “incongruous” with Christian mission misunderstand the fact that ATR informed ecotheology provides the interconnectedness that Western theology does not possess. The “community of creation” notes Bauckham is a missiological substance rather than a metaphor.¹⁰² Thus, engaging in the *missio Dei* contends Boesak and DeYoung, involves executing a “radical reconciliation” that restores the divide between people and the earth.¹⁰³ Therefore, this reformation aligns with the objectives of Christian ecotheology, ensuring that missiology retains its relevance in a world where climate necessitates a new paradigm for all theology.

6. MISSIONAL IMPLICATIONS FOR RURAL AFRICAN COMMUNITIES: A DECOLONIAL PRAXIS.

In order to effectively apply the theoretical framework of *missio Dei* to practice, the much needed focus should be put on the missional implications of rural African communities. African rural geography is

100 I Ibrahim, 'Missiology Meets Ecotheology: Creation Faith in an Intercultural Perspective' (2024) 30(1) *Studies in World Christianity* 80; VY Mudimbe and SM Kilonzo, 'Philosophy of religion on African ways of believing' in [Editor missing] (ed), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to African Religions* ([Publisher missing] 2012) 41.

101 J Buencibello and PA Aton, 'Earth Rights in Religious Education: An Eco-Missiological Mandate Toward a Catechetical Reform' (2025) 2(2) *Hitik: International Journal of Catechists and Religious Educators* 70.

102 R Bauckham, *Bible and ecology: Rediscovering the community of creation* (Baylor University Press 2010) 90.

103 Boesak and DeYoung (n 96).

more than mere geography it is epistemological hubs where indigenous cosmology and live experience come into very close contact with each other. Thus, missiological strategies, which fail to take into account this fact, are bound to perpetuate the heritage of the colonial paradigms.

6.1. Disrupting Colonial Conservation with Indigenous Epistemologies.

Historically Western ecological and missiological theories have been functioning on a basic Cartesian dualism, and philosophical dichotomy of humanity and natural world. In the case of Domínguez and Luoma, animal conservation often resulted in the displacement of indigenous groups of people relative to their ancestral territories, and the locals were regarded as threats to the biodiversity instead of the traditional guardians of the same.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, the ecocolonialism should be deconstructed. Academic literature that criticizes African Traditional Religion and African indigenous epistemology as primitive or unscientific do not understand the deep ecological pragmatism inherent in them.

Rather than applying exogenous, Marumo argues that an ecologized decolonized missiology should acknowledge the fact that African philosophy and indigenous knowledge systems have some vital insights to offer to environmental preservation.¹⁰⁵ Achieving a shift between ecological sacrilege and the sustainable has highly depended on the input of the indigenous system of knowledge especially in rural conservation of biodiversity. Consequently, the local church in rural Africa is called to implement an eco-theology that honours and dignifies these local forms of epistemology and does not consider them as vestiges of paganism to be eliminated, but as essential and highly local manifestations of the common grace of God in the world.

104 L Domínguez and C Luoma, 'Decolonising conservation policy: How colonial land and conservation ideologies persist and perpetuate indigenous injustices at the expense of the environment' (2020) 9(3) *Land* 65.

105 PO Marumo, 'Christianity and African traditional religion in dialogue: An ecological future for Africa' (PhD thesis, [North-West University] 2016).

6.2. The Efficacy of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK).

The integration of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) is non-negotiable for a robust, localized missiological response. TEK encompasses the multi-generational wisdom, practices, and beliefs regarding the relationship between living beings and their environment. Research specifically highlights the critical role of traditional ecological knowledge in managing ecosystem services, as observed in rural communities such as those in Northern Ghana notes Boafo and others.¹⁰⁶

By transforming the local custom of sacrilege to sustainability, such indigenous knowledge systems observe that the ecosystem endures the necessary conservation of biodiversity, making environmental governance based on tribal morality notes Kosoe, Adjei and Diawuo.¹⁰⁷ Such pedagogical directions enable the rural residents to be empowered as productive active custodians of their traditional landscapes and make sure the missional activities are contextually pertinent and ecologically anchored in the African setting. This localized strategy acknowledges that safeguarding of the natural habitat is a sacrosanct task, which defines the synthesis between the conventional wisdom and the ecological necessities of the contemporary era. This then creates a strong system of human security and sustainable environmental prosperity.

In them, community moralities govern agriculture, water preservation, and forestry. In the case of Chibvongodze, summarily the idea of *Ubuntu* is founded on African spirituality or extrapolate by elucidating moral responsibilities not only to the human society, but to the rivers, land, or wildlife.¹⁰⁸ Consequently, ecological communication of African

106 YA Boafo and others, 'The role of traditional ecological knowledge in ecosystem services management: the case of four rural communities in Northern Ghana' (2016) 12(1-2) International Journal of Biodiversity Science, Ecosystem Services & Management 24.

107 EA Kosoe, POW Adjei and F Diawuo, 'From sacrilege to sustainability: the role of indigenous knowledge systems in biodiversity conservation in the Upper West Region of Ghana' (2020) 85(4) GeoJournal 1057.

108 DT Chibvongodze, 'Ubuntu is not only about the human! An analysis of the role of African philosophy and ethics in environment management' (2016) 53(2) Journal of Human Ecology 157.

spirituality is a very efficient process of environmental protection. An ecological approach based on the missiological logic that utilizes TEK will make the local congregation a center of sustainable agriculture and ecological sustainability, which will directly fight the negative effects of the climate crisis on human security.

TEK is not anachronistic but is instead a type of living knowledge system that can and does result in highly adaptive, locally applicable conservation strategies, without which the world and the territories of its peoples cannot be considered sustainable. In particular, notes Mavhura and Mushure, it directly contributes to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 15 (Life on Land) in the field of rural environmental governance.¹⁰⁹ It does not only prevents biodiversity loss and ecological degradation at the grassroots level but also relies on taboo, sacred groves, and sustainable harvesting practices to achieve this goal as corroborated by Eneji and others.¹¹⁰

Moreover, the institutionalization of TEK is consonant with the African Union's Agenda 2063, in particular, the vision of an 'inclusive growth and sustainable development' powered prosperous continent (Aspiration 1). Incorporating indigenous methods within the policies means that conservation is culturally and socially based. In Awuah-Nyamekye's view, this means that TEK elevates the voices of rural communities as active and primary agents of their natural heritage, instead of merely passive recipients of Western conservation models, making local biodiversity conservation a key component of environmental resilience across Africa.¹¹¹

109 E Mavhura and S Mushure, 'Forest and wildlife resource-conservation efforts based on indigenous knowledge: The case of Nharira community in Chikomba district, Zimbabwe' (2019) 105 *Forest Policy and Economics* 83.

110 CVO Eneji and others, 'Traditional African religion in natural resource conservation and management in Cross River State, Nigeria' (2012) 2(4) *Environment and Natural Resources Research* 45.

111 S Awuah-Nyamekye, 'Indigenous ways of creating environmental awareness: A case study from Berekum Traditional Area, Ghana' (2014) 8(1) *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 46.

6.3. Public Missiology and the Pragmatism of Eco-Justice.

The contemporary climate crisis is not only a multi-layered existential threat that requires a swift paradigm change towards a popular missiology but also a paradigm shift. According to views of Gibaut and Jorgensen, this missiological reorientation will not be able to be limited to the walls of the ecclesiastical, it will have to be active both in the square, and in the natural habitat where the cry of the earth is heard best.¹¹² In the case of rural African population which is disproportionately affected by increasing droughts, unpredictable weather patterns and acute shortage of resources, the theology needs to shift beyond abstract dogma, to become intensely practical. Akin to Masoga opines, the pragmatism of practical theology in the tutelage of the natural habitat is not a prophane undertaking but a more pivotal eco-theological vision that professes the sanctity of the whole biosphere.¹¹³ It is in this localized scenario that the mission of the Church has to be expressed through a robust “earth democracy” with the natural rights of nature being upheld as a constituent of the common good. This notion will make sure that the stewardship of creation will no longer be considered a decidedly peripheral and non-core part and parcel of the *Missio Dei*.

Moreover, the ecological crisis should be represented as a significant injustice problem that overlaps with human security, economic stability, and a socio-political balance. According to Nkurumah-Pobi, a prophetic role of the church in the 21st century is to tackle the impaired ecological devastation of the countryside on a more local scale, including, but not limited to, the systematic causes of forest destruction, as well as the urban development wastage in urban centres like Accra.¹¹⁴ Thus, the successful bridging of the gap between missiology and ecotheology will ensure that the Church stops being a mere observer and becomes a facilitator in the

112 J Gibaut and K Jorgensen, *Called to unity for the sake of mission* (Edinburgh Centenary Series, Missouri 2014).

113 MA Masoga, 'The Pragmatism of Practical Theology in the Conservation of the Natural Habitat: An Ecotheology Perspective' (2024) 105(5) *Pharos Journal of Theology*.

114 SKB Nkrumah-Pobi, 'The Missio Dei and Environmental Justice: Advancing the Church's Prophetic Role in Addressing Accra's Waste Crisis' (2025) 1(1) *African Journal of Biblical Studies, Translation, Linguistics and Intercultural Theology* (AJOBIT).

process of transformative healing. This synergy enables the church to support community-based ecological restoration initiatives employing TEK to sustainably run ecosystem services.

The missionally justified reaction also needs to support indigenous land rights and engage in sustainable livelihood as a strategy to ensure the dignity of the *imago Dei* within the larger community of creation. This is what, according to Boesak and DeYoung, is referred to as “radical reconciliation” a theological stance that deliberately guides rural faith circles out of the debilitating snares of Christian quietism and the political pietism.¹¹⁵ The practice develops an environmental protection attitude which enables marginalized groups to fight for life protection through their sacred resistance against environmental destruction. The church through Kavusa, restates its relationship with creation through a social responsibility system which requires human well-being to be interdependent with African earth well-being. The paradigm will change the lenses on tailored anthropocentric *missio Dei* towards a broader, more diverse *Missio Creatoris Dei*, where entire cosmos is in need of redemption.¹¹⁶ Conclusively, in reference to the African rural setting, this implies that proclamation of the Gospel cannot be complete without physical involvement in the protection of the natural environment, which nurtures every life.

7. CONCLUSION.

We have to live through the epoch of the climate crisis with an African missiological paradigm where ecological justice is an unapologetic theological requirement. The global Church can redefine a thematic area of theology of life free of the biases of Western anthropocentrism through breaking down the colonial epistemologies and entirely discovering the depth of African Traditional Religion, *Ubuntu*, and communal moral philosophy. This shift, the shift in ontology is necessary, it is the one with

¹¹⁵ Boesak and DeYoung (n 96).

¹¹⁶ KJ Kavusa, 'Sustainable eco-theology for African churches: Imagining home-grown hermeneutics of sustainability' (2022) 8(1) Stellenbosch Theological Journal 1.

a lacking breadth and concentration on an individual salvation, but the one on the whole, on the *Missio Creatoris Dei*.

The mission of the Church in this rethought paradigm is inherently connected with the fertility of the soil, and the understanding that the cry of the poor and cry of the earth are one existential appeal. To rural communities in Africa, it is a decolonial praxis through which the traditional ecological knowledge is a sanctified form of stewardship that is confirmed through this missiology. Conclusively, the translation of *Missio Dei* to an active, localized and spiritually strengthened defence of the environment provides a guarantee to saving the environment in the future to the future generation by means of a deeper, relational stewardship, to spread the prophetic mission of being a witness to the work of God who purposes purposes the salvation of the entire universe.