



The Role of Christian Education in Strengthening Ecotheological Character for Environmental Stewardship

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ABSTRACT

The global ecological crisis demands a systematic theological and pedagogical response from religious institutions, including the church. This article explores how church education can be systematically designed to integrate ecotheological values into the formation of the church's character for nature stewardship, and how well such approaches can address contemporary ecological challenges. Through a qualitative approach that combines literature reviews and field studies, this study examines the Christian paradigm, grounded in biblical narratives (Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation/CFRC), as a transformative learning framework. The study's findings indicate that church education can transform the anthropocentric paradigm that leads to environmental destruction by fostering spiritual understanding. Integrating ecotheological values into church education through liturgy, sermons, Sunday school, training, and concrete action can shape the congregation's character to be ecologically responsible and actively engaged in the mission of restoring God's creation. Thus, ecotheology-based church education not only fosters spiritual faith but also serves as a strategy for forming relevant and sustainable ecological character.

Keywords: Church Education, Creation Care, Character Building, Ecotheology

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INTRODUCTION

Within the framework of creation theology, humanity is God's special creation. Humans were created in the image and likeness of God and entrusted with the mandate to steward God's created world, as written in Genesis 2:15. The call to care for God's creation is a spiritual calling inherent in man from the moment of creation. As stated by Moltmann (1993) that the care of creation is part of humanity's service to God. As humans were created in the image of God, they bore the responsibility to care for God's creation. As an institution for forming and educating the congregation's faith, the Church has a duty to instill awareness of humanity's responsibility to care for nature. Education within the church should focus not only on personal salvation but also on shaping the congregation's character, so that they are aware of their responsibility toward God's creation. Moltmann (1993) states that worship and service to God must include service to His creation. Halawa and Situmorang (2024) wrote that the church can play an active role in shaping the congregation's ecological awareness.

However, in reality, humans, including Christians, neglect their responsibility toward nature. There is excessive exploitation of natural resources, with humans as the primary perpetrators of environmental destruction, engaging in massive exploitation and acting unwisely in utilizing nature (Budiman & Objantoro, 2022).

Data from Indonesia's National Disaster Management Agency (BPNN) indicates that throughout 2023 there were 5,400 disasters in Indonesia. Of this total, the most prevalent disasters were forest and land fires (2,051 incidents), extreme weather (1,261 incidents), and floods (1,255 incidents) (BPNN, 2024). These dominant disaster events result from human exploitation of nature. As stated by Saputro and Gunadi (2021) one of the main factors influencing various ecological issues is humanity's unethical attitude toward using natural resources. Furthermore, this unethical attitude stems from humans positioning themselves as the rightful owners of nature, thereby deeming all their exploitative actions as justified.

This exploitation of nature, which humans consider normal, stems from a human understanding and attitude that views humanity as the center of everything, termed humanist ideology. Humanity's fall into sin led to a deviation from God's original purpose in creating humanity. God created humans as His representatives to manage His created world. Humanity's fall into sin has corrupted God's good creation, which no longer fulfills the Creator's purpose (Grams, 2001; Myers, 2011). History shows the development of civilization that entered modern civilization, influenced by humanist ideas- ideas that make humans the center of everything. White (1967) states that Christianity is at the root of the environmental crisis caused by its deep anthropocentric values. Warsito and Muttaqin (2012) wrote that the attitude of humans who see themselves as the center of everything is called anthropocentric humanism. Anthropocentrism is an understanding that considers humans as the center of the world. Anthropocentric humans feel like they are rulers of themselves. However, humans do not stop there; they want to master things outside themselves. Nature also becomes the target of his lust for power, which grows increasingly uncontrollable over time (Warsito & Muttaqin, 2012). All interest orientations serve human needs by eliminating divine values, leading to the

destruction of nature itself (Aditama et al., 2023). This thinking has manifested as a callous disregard for ecological health, treating nature as an exhaustible resource to be consumed rather than a sanctuary to be preserved.

As a result of this excessive exploitation, humans themselves feel the impact. The impact of their own actions is fires, landslides, ozone layer damage, global warming, air pollution, soil and air pollution, and many other things (Warsito & Muttaqin, 2012). In response, humans try several things to overcome or repair the damage. For example, in Indonesia, efforts to preserve the environment are carried out through the creation of Law Number 32 of 2009 concerning Environmental Protection and Management (Media, 2021).

On the religious aspect, Swara et al. (2022) conducted research on the Nyepi Segara tradition. This tradition has become social capital to build sustainability in coastal areas. Then, in the context of Islamic theology, the application of environmental theology is carried out in Islamic boarding schools as an effort to preserve the environment (Anwar & Rosyad, 2021). In Christian education, real action is also needed to overcome environmental challenges such as land degradation (Samosir & Boiliu, 2022). In a religious context, biblical texts such as biblical texts need to be considered in an effort to increase public awareness of environmental issues (Saputro & Gunadi, 2021). The study of theology that responds to the environmental crisis is called ecotheology (Maggang, 2019). In the context of Christianity, as White stated, Christianity is the root of the environmental crisis; the church, as the builder of the Christian faith, has a responsibility to overcome it. Research conducted by Panggarra and Budiman (2025) shows that misinterpreting the phrase "conquer the earth" in Genesis legitimizes human-driven natural exploitation. White (1967) states that since the root of our problems concerns religion, the family's path must also be through religion.

Some research suggests that the church has strategic potential as an agent for transformation in its response to the environmental crisis. However, the approach taken remains partial and has not been systematically integrated into ecological character education. Research conducted by E. Conradie (2020) affirms that the church serves as a moral guide in environmental preservation through cultural mandates. Meanwhile, Crespany and Imelda (2025) highlight the importance of ecological education based on church documents such as *Laudato Si'*, as a form of spiritual and social advocacy. On the other hand, Rusliadi and Tampubolon (2025) emphasize the Church's urgency to reject forest encroachment through contextual preaching and relevant environmental education.

Education is an important factor in shaping a person's character, which ultimately impacts the environment and nature. Good character positively impacts you, your surroundings, and nature. Therefore, the church, as an educational institution, plays an important role in shaping character for nature conservation. Elementary and higher education need to implement character education (Fauziah et al., 2019). The church's participation in character education is essential. Research by Glanville et al. (2008) shows that church-based education has significant potential in character building. Similarly, research shows that church education plays a central role in shaping congregational behavior (Objantoro et al., 2022). Ruiz et al. (2018) found that

church-based education has encouraged social mobility and community character. As a religious institution that provides education, the church plays an important role in shaping the character of congregants who care about the environment.

In Genesis 1, God created the universe and everything in it. Humans are given the responsibility to maintain and manage it. Therefore, as an educational institution, the church must introduce the concept of nature preservation to its congregation. The education provided must form a strong character of nature preservation in each individual. Pangihutan and Jura (2023) explain that there is a biblical purpose for humans to inhabit, rule, and maintain the universe in a sustainable manner. Therefore, the church needs to instill the concept of nature preservation in its members. The church's nature-care character education must be based on biblical teachings. The Church must teach that nature is a gift from God that must be protected and preserved. In addition, the church must teach humans' responsibility to preserve nature.

Although the Church has strategic potential as an agent of character formation and ecological awareness, its approach so far remains partial and has not been systematically integrated into ecological character education grounded in ecological values. Previous studies have focused more on the church's role in environmental advocacy, thematic liturgy, and contextual preaching, but have not developed a learning model that combines biblical theological narratives with pedagogical strategies to shape the congregation's ecological habitus in a sustainable way. Based on this, the problem this study addresses is how church education can be systematically designed to integrate ecotheological values into the formation of the church's character of care for nature, and to what extent this approach can answer contemporary ecological challenges theologically and pedagogically.

METHODS

This research used qualitative methods. This method was chosen because the researcher collected data that emphasized extracting meaning, deep understanding, and interpretation of the phenomenon of nature preservation character education in the context of the church. As stated by Creswell and Creswell (2018) qualitative research is an approach to explore and understand meaning that comes from the social experiences of individuals or groups. Therefore, qualitative research is needed to collect in-depth data. This research combines two approaches, namely the literature study approach and the field study approach. The researcher examines theoretical sources and research on strengthening the character of nature conservation through implementing ecotheology in church education. In addition, the researcher conducted a field study approach with churches or NGOs that have carried out nature conservation activities

The data sources in this study include articles, books, and electronic sources. In addition, the researcher used data sources from interviews and observations made on environmental conservation practices carried out by churches and NGOs, such as St. Peter and St. Paulus Ngablak Catholic Church; Yayasan Kemah Peduli (Kemah Peduli Foundation), Gereja Kemah Injil Indonesia (GKII) Churches in Malinau Region, North Kalimantan, and

GKII Sulselbara Region, Sulawesi, and GKII Alfa Omega, Salatiga, Gereja Masehi Injili di Timor (GMIT) and Yayasan Sion (Sion Foundation), Central Java.

The data analysis process in this study was carried out gradually and reflectively by following the framework developed by Creswell and Creswell (2018). The process begins by organizing data from interviews, observations, and document analysis. Then, the entire dataset is read carefully to capture initial impressions and understand the context. Next, the researcher identifies and codes key parts of the data for relevant information. The codes are then grouped into main themes that reflect the central patterns of meaning or issues that emerge. The next stage interprets the findings through a descriptive narrative that relates the data to the theory and context of the research. To ensure the validity of the results, the study used triangulation techniques, confirmation with participants, and reflection on the researcher's position and role in the analysis process. This approach allows researchers to understand the dynamics of ecological character education in the church in depth and to compile a contextual and meaningful synthesis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Christian Paradigm's Teaching on Nature Conservation

A foundational axiom of Christian theology and pastoral ministry is that internal theological frameworks invariably dictate external ethical outputs. True transformation within the ecclesiastical community cannot target outward behavior alone; leadership development must prioritize cultivating a robust Christian mind. What an individual believes about God, humanity, and the cosmos fundamentally shapes how they operate in the world.

To effectively combat the erroneous paradigms that have led to ecological neglect, the strategy cannot be reduced to superficial moralizing or reactionary activism. Instead, leadership development must rigorously critique systematic theological presuppositions. To foster a generation that handles the material world with diligence, educators must reconstruct the Church's understanding of its ancient vocation. By challenging deeply entrenched, unbiblical assumptions and providing a robust education on the covenantal responsibilities assigned to humanity, the church can realign its orthopraxy (right practice) with a truer, more holistic orthodoxy (right belief).

Definition of Paradigm or Worldview

A paradigm is a frame of mind or belief system that shapes the way a person understands reality, interprets experiences, and makes decisions (Kuhn, 2012). Tung (2013) states that a paradigm is a set of ideas, assumptions, or beliefs about life and everything contained in it. A paradigm, or worldview, is a collection of presuppositions and beliefs about reality that represents a person's total view of life (Hoffecker & Smith, 1986). The paradigm or worldview a person holds greatly influences their thoughts and actions. In the Christian context, a

Christian worldview is a Bible-based belief system that influences both a believer's perception of the world and his or her interaction with the world (Gangel & Benson, 1983).

Human attitudes and behaviors are greatly influenced by the paradigm, or worldview, they hold. As Hoffecker and Smith (1986) write, a person may not be aware of his or her worldview, but it can still affect his attitude and actions. The exploitation of nature that results in environmental destruction, whether people realize it or not, is influenced by their paradigm or worldview.

Human actions that exploit nature and cause environmental crises are shaped by the paradigm or worldview they hold, especially the anthropocentric paradigm. In the anthropocentric paradigm, nature is seen as an object to meet human needs and interests. Nature and the resources that exist in it are valued only to the extent that they are economically or practically useful. Sara stated that anthropocentrism is criticized as a paradigm that objectifies nature as a private resource, causing the relationship between humans and nature to be a relationship of power and consumption (Sara, 2025). The current modern environmental crisis is rooted in an anthropocentric worldview that eliminates the spiritual and moral dimensions in the relationship between humans and creation (E. Conradie, 2020; Jati, 2013).

Natural damage or environmental crises are not solely due to technological developments or development policies, but are manifestations of an anthropocentric paradigm that has taken root in human culture and social systems. Therefore, the first step in overcoming the environmental crisis must begin with a paradigm shift in worldview. In relation to Christianity, which White (1967) as the root of the environmental crisis, this resolution must also be achieved by realigning religious values.

The church is where Christians receive faith formation. The Church has the responsibility to educate and nurture the faith of the church in the truth of God's word, with the aim that the members of the church will grow in Christ (Selan, 2006). Regarding the environmental crisis, the church needs to teach and educate members of the congregation to adopt a paradigm or worldview that aligns with the truth of God's Word. A correct understanding of the Christian worldview that every Christian must possess will help overcome the challenge of preserving nature in accordance with biblical truth. This can be done by teaching the Christian paradigm of nature stewardship, where the church learns about man's true responsibility to nature. According to biblical truth, humans are managers, not owners, of the entire created universe (Budiman & Objantoro, 2022; Panggarra & Budiman, 2025). Cobb Jr. (2021) affirms the importance of radical theology that not only formulates moral responsibility, but urges a paradigm shift in life, and invites the church and Christians to see the earth as a moral communion, not just an object of exploitation

Christian Paradigm or Worldview (CFRC Concept)

The Bible is the basis of Christian insight. Christian insight forms from a series of biblical narratives. Tung gives an overview of the biblical narratives in terms of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation (CFRC). The Bible's main themes focus on Creation, Fall,

Redemption, and Consummation. The Bible's main framework is the CFRC series, presented as salvation news. Understanding the concept of CFRC will be very helpful in seeing the reality of the world created by God with the right perspective (Tung, 2013) Help in understanding the duties and responsibilities of man as God's created creatures in relation to the preservation of nature. The congregation needs to be taught about the CFRC's principles regarding nature conservation.

Creation

God is the creator of the universe. God created all things. As it is stated in Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created heaven and earth." God created and owns the entire universe. And Allah has created all things well. Humans are tasked with managing God's created realm. Thus, man's calling in this case is to administer the universe for the glory of the Creator and for the benefit of man himself. This is the foundation for instilling true human responsibility to continue to work for the glory of God (Simanjuntak, 2018). Humans are obliged to preserve the nature God created.

This is the first concept the congregation should learn. The understanding that God is the owner of all things, not man. Thus, humans must not engage in natural exploitation that causes environmental damage. This aligns with research by Aditama et al. (2023) which states that both Christianity and Islam strongly emphasize humans' role as guardians of the environment, the concept of environmental justice, Allah's role as the giver of responsibility, and the importance of collectivity and spiritual values in humans' ecological role. Research by Budiman and Objantoro (2022) found that the Bible clearly commands humans to maintain the environment. Genesis 2:15 establishes the ancient blueprint for human existence, stating that the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to "work and keep it," demonstrating that humanity's initial covenantal assignment was intrinsically ecological. This creation mandate was never rescinded; it is an enduring ontological responsibility. This calling is grounded in the absolute ownership of the cosmos, as declared in Psalm 24:1: "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." Because the earth remains divine property, environmental degradation is not merely a political or social issue; it violates cosmic property rights. To mismanage the earth is to deface a sanctuary belonging to the Creator. True biblical fidelity requires a comprehensive obedience that honors the Creator by protecting, preserving, and cultivating the good earth.

Educational or faith-building programs in the church do not emphasize man's responsibility as stewards of nature. A youth member at a local church, after receiving the CFRC material, said that during his time as a Christian, he learned only that humans are responsible for nature. The anthropocentric paradigm makes man focus only on himself, and on the idea that the redemption carried out by the Lord Jesus Christ is only concerned with the salvation of mankind and not the restoration of the entire created realm (Grams, 2001). An NGO activist who carries out tree-planting activities in several places admitted that he

understood his tree-planting activities as an effort to prevent the destruction of nature, not as a form of responsibility given by God to manage the nature created by God.

The teaching of the concept of Creation, in which God is the Creator and Owner of the universe, emphasizes that humans are not owners but managers of creation, who are spiritually and morally responsible for maintaining the environment. This understanding is an important basis in the education of the Christian faith in the church to form the character of the congregation, as affirmed by Simanjuntak (2018). Aditama et al. (2023), and Budiman and Objantoro (2022) which show that the initial commands God gave to humans come from a divine call rather than a mere technical need. However, the dominance of the anthropocentric paradigm that places man at the center of creation and the understanding that Christ's redemption is only for human salvation obscures the ecological responsibility in the life of Christians (E. Conradie, 2020; Grams, 2001; White, 1967). An example of an educational activity in a church is teaching in Sunday school or a small group on the theme of "good creation" to foster gratitude and ecological responsibility from an early age.

Fall

The next concept to understand is man's fall into sin. Man's fall into sin damages our relationship with God and His creation, and the land is cursed. The role of humans as stewards became more difficult and was eventually neglected altogether. Humans disobeyed God's commands and suffered some consequences. Man is completely destroyed and has a broken relationship with God, himself, his neighbor, and nature.

The fall of man in sin makes man destroy nature and commit excessive exploitation. Boehlke (1997) writes that sometimes the need for food drives poor people and governments to take actions that threaten the survival of the environment. The attitude of man who wants to be ruler over himself and over everything is the result of sin. As Palmer (2010) writes, the total destruction of man due to sin explains the source of the problems that arise in this world. Human rebellion and hatred of God and others are the root of acts of violence and all forms of exploitation against fellow humans and nature.

E. Conradie (2020) states that the fall of man not only has an impact on man's relationship with God, but also on other creations of God as a whole. Man's fall into sin causes a separation between spirituality and ecology, the breakdown of human relationships with other creatures, so that the act of destroying the environment becomes an expression of spiritual alienation (E. Conradie, 2020; Onotere & Emusi, 2024). Cloete (2023) states that ecological crisis is a manifestation of the collective sin of humans who have ignored the sacred value of creation, where sin creates a dominant paradigm, in which nature is seen as an object that can be controlled and utilized without limits. Thus, man's fall into sin is not only a matter of individual morality, but also of systemic ecological impact.

The Church needs to be taught about the impact of man's fall into sin. The impact of man's fall into sin is not only a spiritual problem, but also a problem of man's relationship with nature. The Church must educate the congregation not only about spiritual matters, about the

salvation of souls, but also about human responsibility for the preservation of nature (Cloete, 2023). The church has a strategic role in educating the congregation through a contextual and transformative ecotheological approach. Specifically regarding the concept of man's fall into sin, the church can create trainings and workshops that show the impact of the destruction of nature. The church can provide lessons on issues related to the fall such as consumerism, social injustice and environmental degradation.

Redemption

Man's fall into sin damages man's relationship with God. Whatever efforts are made by humans can never repair the damaged relationship. God, who so loved this world, provided a way out through the sacrifice of his only begotten Son so that the damage caused by sin could be restored. This is the concept of redemption that Christians understand well. The concept of salvation that can only be obtained in Christ. Man's fall into sin renders man powerless to save himself, and only Christ can save man.

Through redemption, God is eager to restore everything: God wants to redeem all things so that the relationship with Him is restored. Man is saved and creation is restored. Colossians 1:20: "And by Him he reconciled all things to himself, both on earth and in heaven, having made his atonement through the cross of Christ." Christ's death reconciled all things, not only redeemed man, but the earth and its contents as well.

Redemption by Jesus Christ to restore all of His creation. Christ's redemption includes the restorative aspect, which is the restoration of the original essence (goodness) of creation before it was corrupted by sin. Christ's redemption affects all of creation. Christ's redemption implies that God's people (redeemed people in Christ) promote renewal to every creation. It is the restoration of the image and likeness of God that has been corrupted by the fall of man. The aspect of redemption by Jesus Christ includes two things, namely the restoration to goodness as the original creation and its nature which encompasses the whole of His creation (Grams, 2001).

This concept of redemption is not only concerned with the restoration of man's relationship with God, but also includes the restoration of all of God's creation, which is directly related to the formation of a character of caring for the environment. As the biblical narrative written in Romans 8:22 shows the impact of man's fall into sin that is not only experienced by man but also by all of God's creation who also experience suffering and alienation. The redemption wrought by the Lord Jesus Christ through His cross and resurrection was intended to restore the entire order of creation. Therefore, the character of caring for the environment is born from the realization that believers are called to participate in God's work of restoration to a world damaged by sin (E. M. Conradie, 2011; Grams, 2001).

The thing that needs to be emphasized in this concept of redemption is that the redemption wrought by Jesus Christ is to restore all creation, not just humans. This is what still needs to be emphasized in education in the church. Most education in the church focuses only on spiritual matters. The church needs to be equipped to be able to carry out its duties in

preserving nature (Sion, 2023). An interview with a member of the congregation revealed that he only understood that humans have a responsibility in terms of preserving nature after participating in a *Bible Camp* activity that discussed the Christian paradigm (E.E., 2024).

The formation of a character of caring for the environment is reflected in an attitude of respect for creation, ecological responsibility, and making it a sustainable lifestyle. Redemption makes Christians no longer live in an anthropocentric paradigm, but rather in a theocentric and ecocentric paradigm, in which nature is seen as part of God's beloved community of creation. Thus, the act of preserving nature is not just an activity, but an expression of faith and participation of God's people in God's mission to restore the world. The Church has an important role to play in shaping this character through liturgy, teaching and living practices that reflect the spirituality of creation. The Church can strive in liturgy, sermons, or ministry to form an active congregation in bringing peace and justice.

Consummation – The Embodiment of God's Will

The concept of embodiment of God's will needs to be emphasized in church education. Emphasis on how the church lives a life in accordance with God's will. After man is redeemed, man gains a new status before God. Humans who have been restored. Tung (2013) wrote that *consummation* is the awareness of human interdependence with the world created by God. This has to do with the new status that humans have after redemption. Christ's redemption has renewed the heart and mind so that it is able to see correctly the reality of God's creation in accordance with the purpose and purpose of God's creation in the beginning. In addition, this consumption is a call for God's redeemed people to live glorified God by being a blessing to others. Consumption is a call to put all creation in its place according to God's purpose from the beginning.

The first thing that must be done in an effort to form the character of caring for the environment in the congregation is to teach a paradigm of thinking that is in accordance with the truth of God's Word. The establishment of a paradigm through the teaching of the CFRC concept through systematic teaching in the educational program carried out by the church will result in a true understanding of God as the Creator, man as the steward of creation, the impact of sin on nature, and the redemption of Christ that encompasses all of God's creation. This complete theological understanding will shape the attitude and character of the church that is ecologically responsible, lives in harmony with creation, and plays an active role as an agent of environmental restoration. This is emphasized by Setianto (2024) a congregation activist who organizes waste processing activities by young Catholics in Ngablak, where church character education needs to be carried out to overcome the environmental crisis.

Teachings About Love for God and Care for His Creation

The Bible teaches that love is essential in relationships between humans and with nature. Love for God guides every believer in love for His creation. This includes treating nature with love, avoiding excessive exploitation, and ensuring that the use of natural resources is done

fairly for all creatures. Love for God builds a simple attitude to living and a simple attitude encourages man to take from nature in a responsible manner.

One of the strategic approaches that the church can take in instilling the values of environmental preservation is through the preaching of the word in Sunday worship. This is reflected in the practice carried out at GKII Alfa Omega, Salatiga, where Rev. Enggar Objantoro in his sermon on May 7, 2023 emphasized that the true spiritual life of God's people is reflected in concern for the created environment. The sermon was an important moment for some members of the congregation, who claimed to be understanding for the first time that the preservation of nature is an integral part of the faithfulness responsibility of believers. This experience shows that preaching is not only a means of spiritual formation but also a transformative medium for shaping the ecological consciousness of the congregation. Theoretically, this is in line with the view that spirituality-based character education must integrate ecological ethical values, where the proclamation of faith functions as an agent of shaping the paradigm and ecological behavior of the people in the context of daily life.

In addition to being taught in sermons from the pulpit in churches, coaching on environmental awareness can also be done through appeals on social media. As done by the synod of GMIT, which issued appeals for nature conservation through social media and YouTube, in commemoration of the environmental month of GMIT in November 2021. This can be seen on the YouTube channel of the Synod of the Evangelical Church in Timor (GMIT's Pastoral Message Environment Month) (Timor, 2021). In a KOMPAS report entitled "From the Church Pulpit to Real Action", Pastor Winda Dewanna on Damer Island emphasized the importance of protecting the environment as a form of worship to God (Aranditio, 2025). This call has been consistently delivered from the church pulpit and has successfully mobilized the congregation to take real action, such as cleaning the beach of plastic waste and managing livestock waste. This demonstrates that church education that emphasizes love for God as the foundation of care for creation can transform the congregation's mindset and behavior.

Build a Simple Life Attitude

E. Conradie (2020) in his various writings on ecotheology, emphasizes that simple living is not just an ethical choice, but a form of ecological repentance. Where he criticizes the consumptive lifestyle born from the anthropocentric and capitalistic paradigm, where humans always feel that they are never enough and continue to exploit nature for personal gain. This is in line with the findings of field observations in Sintang, West Kalimantan, after the major floods in Sintang Regency in 2022 and 2023 caused by the rampant illegal gold mining. The source of destruction of nature in Klansam as a result of gold mining on a large scale, cannot be separated from humanity's attitude of never feel satisfied. To preserve nature, a simple lifestyle attitude is needed.

To cultivate a simple attitude of living in the context of environmental conservation in accordance with Bible teachings, every Christian needs to understand the principles of stewardship of the earth according to Bible teachings (Manurung, 2021). This principle teaches

that man is responsible for the universe God created. This means that every believer has a responsibility to care for and maintain God's creation, not only for their own benefit, but also for future generations.

The church can deliver coaching on developing this simple lifestyle through the pulpit in every worship service. Teaching can also be done through Bible study activities and special activities such as retreats and field worship. As proposed by Budiman and Laukapitang (2024), the church can foster awareness of simple living through liturgy and faith education, as well as make a simple lifestyle an expression of love for God and His creation.

Teaching about the preservation of nature in the church can be done through the preparation of curriculum on the preservation of God's creation. The preparation of sermon themes in the congregation, material in Bible study activities or in categorical group teaching materials, can be done as a form of teaching or church coaching to cultivate character in terms of nature preservation for members of the congregation. One example that has been done is the book "Maintaining God's Created Nature" published by Kalam Hidup. This book can be used as a guide to teach the theme of preserving God's created nature.

Education in Real Action

The paradigm or worldview of the CFRC is not just a theological framework that is taught, but a living lens that shapes the way of thinking, behaving and acting in a real context. Therefore, this concept must be embodied in concrete actions such as in the design of the educational curriculum in the church, learning interactions, ethical decision-making and social engagement. Education in real action is not only about teaching the truth, but also about living the truth in the context of the church. This is in accordance with the transformational education theory developed by Mezirow (1981) which emphasizes that true learning occurs when individuals experience a paradigm shift or a way of looking at the world. In the context of environmental education, the church can create reflective experiences that challenge the anthropocentric assumptions of the congregation and encourage them to adopt an ecocentric or theocentric paradigm. Research conducted by Creapany and Imelda (2025) shows that the church can serve as an agent of ecological transformation.

The nature preservation character education provided by the church must also involve the congregation in real action. The congregation must be able to implement practical forms of nature preservation. Activities to preserve nature, such as sorting garbage and planting trees, can be categorized as real actions that reflect what has been understood and taught. The Church can take the initiative to develop character education based on real actions to build environmental awareness. When character education and religious activities are integrated, they can encourage the development of a strong sense of responsibility to nature (Sari et al., 2021). According to Saputra and Budimansyah (2022) when character education is developed, it can foster deeper relationships between individuals and their roles in society. According to Gule (2022) harmony between actions and teachings is needed in order to motivate the active role of individuals. To motivate and inspire the congregation to care for the environment, church

leaders play a central role. Catlett and Campbell (2021) state that leaders' involvement in educational initiatives, especially in caring for nature, can inspire congregations to take active action.

One example of church members' character education in addressing the waste problem is the Catholic Church of Saint Peter and Paul Ngablak, Magelang. Tatag Setianto, the pioneer of the church's waste recycling program, said the church must conduct character education for the congregation on waste management. Setianto (2024) stated that the church Parish Council issued a Decree (SK) for every Catholic household to sort their waste. Furthermore, Setianto said the church buries organic waste and collects plastic waste to process into items of economic value. Setianto (2024) mobilized young people in the church to carry out waste recycling projects within the scope of the Catholic Church of Saint Peter and Paul Ngablak, Magelang.

Another example of character education in the congregation is carried out by the GMIT. GMIT designates one month each year, namely November, as Environment Month. This is linked to the theme of the preceding month, October, which is designated as Family Month. As Rev. Victoria Henderina Bathun, chairman of the assembly at GMIT Carmel Fatululi Congregation in Kupang, said, after the families in the congregation were strengthened, they are now expected to work together to preserve the environment and care for God's creation. Each local congregation will celebrate Environmental Month with various nature-care activities. Coastal congregations will carry out beach-cleaning activities, care for coral reefs, and plant mangroves. Congregations in the mountains will conduct spring-cleaning activities. Another practice that distinguishes the atmosphere in November from other months is using only flowers or live plants for church decoration. Another practical application of nature conservation is avoiding plastic bottles or drinking cups at every meeting in local churches or at synods.

The Church can host activities to preserve nature, such as tree planting and waste management. The North Central Java Christian Church (Gereja Kristen Jawa Tengah Utara-GKJTU) has done this through the Sion Foundation, which implements the Church Community Mobilization (CCM) program. One of the programs carried out is the nature conservation program. The researcher personally participated in the "*Laying Foundation*" training activity. In this training, participants learned Bible-based principles of community development and empowerment. Programs to empower church members and the community are necessary to transform the church and society using the resources God has provided in a sustainable and comprehensive manner (Sion, 2023). This training includes pastors and church activists. This training aims to develop trainers within local churches to educate their congregations.

One impact of CCM training conducted by the Sion Foundation occurred in Ngelo village. Research by Iswanto indicates that community lifestyles changed after GKJTU Ngelo Congregation received training and implemented the CCM program conducted by the Sion Foundation in collaboration with Tearfund Netherlands. The residents of Ngelo village, who were previously accustomed to disposing of trash into the river, began to abandon this habit and engage in waste recycling process (Iswanto, 2022).

In order to strengthen the character education of the congregation oriented towards environmental conservation, the Sion Foundation has initiated a training program for church leaders on honey bee cultivation as a concrete form of the church's ecological responsibility (Sasongko, 2023). Honey bee cultivation not only contributes to environmental conservation through the role of bees in maintaining biodiversity and ecosystem balance, but is also an educational strategy that forms ecological awareness and responsibility towards creation (Fajar, 2020). This activity reflects a holistic approach to character education, integrating the values of faith, social care, and environmental sustainability into congregational life. Furthermore, the aspect of economic empowerment through honey bee cultivation also strengthens the welfare dimension in character education, as shown in the training held at a local church in Pappanga, West Sulawesi, which encourages the economic independence of the ecotheological-based congregation (Udau & Mary, 2023). Thus, this honey bee cultivation training becomes a model for contextual and transformative Christian character education.

The implementation of the ecotheology-based character education model does not only take place in the form of church programs, but is also realized through community service activities by academics. One example is the honey bee cultivation training carried out by STT Simpson Ungaran lecturers as a real contribution to fostering the congregation's ecological awareness. These include training activities for pastors and the governing body of the Malinau Regional GKII congregation in March 2023 and the South Sulawesi Regional GKII congregation in December 2023. The training aimed to build understanding of honey bee cultivation and provide examples of its development.

When congregation members actively participate in nature conservation activities, their awareness of the importance of environmental conservation tends to increase as they gain hands-on experience. Bennett et al. (2018) emphasized that "local environmental stewardship initiatives that actively engage communities tend to foster stronger ecological awareness and a sense of responsibility toward nature, especially when participants experience tangible benefits". In the church context, congregational involvement in environmental conservation not only fosters ecological awareness but also strengthens the ethos of responsibility toward creation. When congregations see the benefits of preserving nature—both ecologically and socially—they will be increasingly motivated to protect and care for the environment as part of their call to faith.

CONCLUSION

As God's creation, made in His image and likeness, humanity holds a spiritual and moral mandate to care for the created world. However, the anthropocentric paradigm that places humans at the center and as owner of nature has led to excessive exploitation of natural resources and a major environmental crisis. Therefore, a paradigm transformation is crucial, wherein humans must view themselves as responsible stewards of God's creation.

The church plays a strategic role in educating and nurturing the congregation through character education grounded in ecotheology, integrating biblical values into the CFRC

framework. This education aims to replace the anthropocentric paradigm with a theocentric and ecocentric paradigm that places God at the center of creation and calls the church to act as an agent of environmental restoration. Through teaching, liturgy, sermons, and various practical activities, the church can instill holistic ecological awareness and genuine care for nature. Through these activities, it is hoped the church can build a character of nature preservation in the congregation.

The concept of love for God and His creation serves as a vital foundation for fostering a simple lifestyle and sustainable ecological actions. The church's concrete actions in waste management, tree planting, and community empowerment activities are manifestations of living faith and ecological responsibility. Character education within the church, integrated with the mission of creation restoration, will motivate the congregation to become agents of change in preserving the environment and fulfilling God's mandate for this world.

Thus, the church is not only a religious institution that fosters spiritual faith but also an agent of socio-ecological transformation that positively impacts creation's survival in the present and the future.

Competing interests

The authors state that there are no conflicts of interest regarding this publication.

Author contributions

E.M. conceptualized and designed the study, acquired data, performed the data analysis, and drafted the manuscript. D.S. participated in the data analysis and article writing.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects. Ethical approval to conduct the study was obtained from STT Simpson Ungaran, with Certificate Reference Number: STTS/ETC/001/2025

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This research uses primary data collected directly by the researchers through interviews, observations, and documentation. The researchers did not use external datasets from other parties.

Disclaimer

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