



**Reimagining Dominion: Eco-Theological Critiques to Care for Our Common Home**

**By**

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## Declaration

As required by University regulations, I hereby state unambiguously that this work has not been presented at any other University or any other institution of higher learning other than the University of KwaZulu Natal (Pietermaritzburg Campus) and that unless specifically indicated to the contrary within the text it is my original work.

Signature:



Date: 28 August 2025

Supervisor



Signature

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## **Abbreviations**

CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
DT	Dominion Theology
ET	Eco-theology
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GHGs	Green House Gases
TA	Thematic Analysis

## Abstract

This study examines the biblical-theological concepts of Dominion Theology as an alternative form of criticism based on Critical Theory and Eco-Theology, and the ecological problems that the world is facing are also addressed. For a creation narrative, which is sometimes human-centered, Dominion Theology has served as a ground for exploitive control over creation by defining human beings as having power over creation and not as caregivers- which is, i.e., the anthropocentric view /misinterpretation of Genesis 2. Given the extent of this inadequate lens in the understanding of ecological sustainability, the dissertation seeks to transform dominion and its theological implications in light of a contemporary eco-theological perspective.

Conducting a qualitative research inside a critical research paradigm that integrates the theoretical frameworks to deconstruct hegemonic ideologies embedded in traditional theological narratives using a qualitative methodology. At the same time, Eco-Theology serves as a constructive framework, advocating for an ethic of care, interconnectedness, and responsibility toward the environment. Table 1 identified the historical and theological foundations of dominion theology, and the study in green found evidence of ecological degradation contributed by visions of this type of theology and discussion that implies alternatives and sustainability.

The findings show that a new vision of dominion theology, which is influenced by eco-theological principles, can be an appropriate concept for dealing with environmental difficulties. These are contained in changing the theological discussion from human exceptionalism to a comprehensive comprehension of creation as a community of life. On top of that, the research reveals the role of faith communities in cultivating ecological consciousness and action, so the potential to play a central role in environmental advocacy and care is highlighted.

This study is a significant part of the constantly developing interdisciplinary dialogue between theology, critical theory, and environmental ethics. It presents the latest theological notions that the global movement of “care for our common home” is urged to follow. Therefore, in addition to the explanations of the theoretical framework, the book opens the vistas of a green theology oriented to practical implications already implied by academic criticism and lays the groundwork for the future eco-theological research and practical implications to actions and

biodiversity, vegetable experimentation, and energy sources efficiency, which allows ecofeminism, which is an intersection of ecological and feminist theories, to be explored.

**Keywords:** Dominion Theology; Eco-Theology; Critical Theory; Ecological Stewardship

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## **1. Chapter 1 - Reimagining Dominion Theology: An Introduction**

### **1.1. Introduction**

Dominion theology has been contributing to the continuous exploitation of nature in recent years. This is due to the fact that religious doctrine and scriptural interpretations have influenced and even changed how people interact with the natural world. Anthropocentrism, which is often associated with Dominion Theology, has also played a role in the way in which humans continue to exercise authority over the whole of creation. The relationship between theology and ecology continues to be a topical issue to date that influences certain practices that might contribute to the harm done to creation. The contribution is also attributed to the interpretation of scripture on exercising dominion over all of creation. Eco-Theology has been used as a response to deal with issues that Dominion Theology has perpetuated. It does this by emphasizing stewardship, interconnectedness of nature, and acknowledging the intrinsic value of all creation. The chapter will, therefore, first give the background of the research. Secondly, it will describe the research problem, aim, key research and sub-questions, and research objectives. Thirdly, it will discuss the theoretical framework. Fourthly, the methodology used in the research will also be addressed. Fifthly, the significance of the study will be discussed. Sixthly, it will give the limitations of the study. Seventhly, it will provide the chapter outlines. Lastly, the chapter will be concluded.

### **1.2. Background of Research**

Anecdotally, there is an innate and unconscious belief in most, if not every human being, that we are to do whatever we want with nature without even thinking about the consequences. One of the most important issues of our day is the increasing environmental crisis. Traditional dominion theology, which historically elevates humans above nature, is cited by many academics and activists as a major factor in developing attitudes that result in ecological catastrophe. This theological perspective, rooted in an interpretation of biblical texts emphasizing human control over the Earth, often justifies exploitative practices and undermines efforts to promote environmental Stewardship (White 1967, Bauckham 2010).

According to Muazu (2023), Dominion Theology is one of the reasons behind what is known as religious fundamentalists' way of exploiting nature to benefit human beings. Though some thinkers agree with Muazu's argument, such as Nir (2020), who argues that Dominion

Theology has religious and cultural tenets that influence people's behaviour, others, like Gilley (1996) and Ice (2009), argue the contrary. For Gilley (1996) and Ice (2009), human beings possess dominion over every area of life. Their argument is based on the claim that Jesus Christ came on Earth as a human to establish human dominion over nature and all in it. Their argument presupposes that humanity's dominion is a divine mandate rooted in the belief that Jesus Christ's incarnation affirmed and reinforced this authority. This perspective implies that exploiting nature to benefit humanity is not only permissible but also aligns with God's will. However, this view raises critical ethical questions about the limits of such dominion and humans' responsibility in stewarding the Earth.

Dominion theology has generally supported growth at all costs, aligning with economic paradigms prioritizing human prosperity and development over ecological sustainability (Ice 2009). This perspective often conflicts with the degrowth principles, a movement that challenges the dominant economic paradigm of perpetual growth (Hickel 2020). Nir (2020) also believes that religion and culture are responsible for instilling dominion over nature by human beings. Even though times have changed, these beliefs linger in the society. That is why there is a need to have different teachings that religion can encourage and instill to effect behavior change in society.

This teaching can be in the form of eco-theology. According to Conradie (2006:3), “eco-theology is an attempt to retrieve the ecological wisdom in Christianity as a response to environmental threats and injustices.” This theology seeks to tap into the very religious teachings to challenge exploitative attitudes displayed by those who subscribe to Judaism and Christianity (Conradie, 2023; Nir, 2020; Ice, 2009). These teachings must introduce practical eco-theological responses that will foster change and require a deviation from the norm. This deviation will be seen in societies embracing degrowth.

Degrowth, according to Latouche (2004; 1), “is economic contraction or downscaling”. This means that the principle of degrowth, above all else, is to look at growth trends and challenge them (Demaria et al., 2013). Degrowth advocates for sustainable development that prioritizes ecological health and social equity, directly opposing the exploitative tendencies supported by dominion theology (Kallis et al., 2020; Hickel, 2020). In contrast, eco-theology offers a different vision that sees humans as part of a larger ecological community, responsible for caring for creation rather than dominating it (Conradie, 2006; Bauckham, 2002). Eco-theology

aligns with degrowth principles by advocating for a re-evaluation of human relationships with the environment, emphasizing sustainability, stewardship, and the intrinsic value of all creation (Conradie, 2006).

This perspective promotes a shift from growth at all costs towards a more balanced and ethical approach to living within Earth's ecological limits (Bauckham, 2002). Despite these new developments, a big disconnect exists between the degrowth discourse's practical applications and eco-theological criticisms of dominion theology. Identifying and addressing this gap is essential to creating a comprehensive framework that challenges damaging notions and beliefs and provides workable and practical solutions for promoting sustainability and environmental awareness.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate how degrowth principles can support a more ethical and sustainable relationship with our world and how eco-theology can strongly critique dominion theology. By doing this, it hopes to add fresh perspectives and useful methods for preserving our shared home to the larger theological and environmental conversation (Pope Francis, 2015).

### **1.3. Research Aim**

The research aims to critique Dominion Theology using Eco-Theology and the degrowth discourse to promote integral care of our common home.

### **1.4. Key Research Question**

In what ways can eco-theology serve as a critique of dominion theology to promote caring for our common home?

### **1.5. Research Sub-Questions**

1. What challenges does Dominion Theology create that inhibit caring for the environment?
2. What are the alternative practices of Eco-theology that can serve as a critique of Dominion Theology?
3. How can the strategies of degrowth help to challenge Dominion Theology beliefs and practices that undermine the care of our common home?

## **1.6. Research Objectives**

The objectives of this study are:

1. To investigate the challenges of Dominion Theology that inhibit caring for the environment.
2. To identify alternative eco-theological practices that promote caring for our common home.
3. To propose eco-theological strategies to encourage behavioural change on the environment.

## **1.7. Theoretical Framework**

According to Adom, Hussein, and Adu-Agyem (2018, p. 438), a theoretical framework is “a framework based on an existing theory in a field of inquiry that is related and/or reflects the hypothesis of a study. It is a blueprint often “borrowed” by the researcher to build their own house or research inquiry”. Theoretical frameworks also assist with cementing one research (Adom et al. 2018). This study is based on two interconnected theoretical frameworks: Critical Theory and Eco-Theology. These frameworks collectively offer a comprehensive perspective for critiquing and challenging conventional interpretations of dominion theology, proposing alternative viewpoints that promote ecological justice.

The theoretical framework for this particular study was carefully chosen because of its contribution and significance to the study as a whole. This theoretical framework not only reflects the researcher's worldview but also helps conceptualize the problem the study aims to tackle (Grant and Osanloo, no date.). In the case of the study at hand, with the researcher seeing the importance and significance of the interconnectedness that exists between human beings and nature and the role that human beings can play in taking care of nature, the use of critical Theory and eco-theology are appropriate as they both capture the essence of the study.

Critical Theory, originating from the Frankfurt School (Celikates and Flynn 2024), aims to uncover and question power dynamics, ideologies, and societal inequalities that are found within the society at large. In this context, Critical Theory examines how dominion theology, with its understanding and exercise of human dominion over nature, continues to reinforce anthropocentric beliefs that prioritize human control over all while neglecting ecological interconnectedness and stewardship. By dismantling these power-centered biblical interpretations, Critical Theory reveals underlying assumptions and prompts a reinterpretation

and new understanding of theological viewpoints influencing environmental harm and exploitation. This critical approach aligns with the study's goal of critiquing and scrutinizing prevailing religious doctrines that rationalize exploitation. It is a vital instrument for re-examining humanity's connection and relation with the natural world.

On the other hand, Eco-Theology presents a constructive reinterpretation of religious doctrines and texts that highlights stewardship, interconnectedness, and the intrinsic value of all forms of life. It challenges anthropocentrism and Capitalocene by advocating for a theocentric or biocentric viewpoint that ethically considers the inherent value of living things, portraying humans not as rulers but guardians and stewards of the Earth. Drawing inspiration from scriptural reinterpretations and theological paradigms, such as the teachings of Saint Francis of Assisi, Eco-Theology advocates for an ethos of responsibility and reverence towards the environment and all that is within it. This standpoint suggests that embracing eco-theological principles is crucial for cultivating sustainable and respectful interactions between humans and their environment.

The use of the two theories was based on the fact that critical Theory helps consider the context and challenge power structures and language (Celikate and Flynn 2024), which is what perpetuates dominion over nature by human beings as bible quotes are used to support this notion. Celikate and Flynn (2024, no page.) mention that the aim of critical Theory, which is somehow the reason why the Theory was chosen for the study, is "not merely to describe social reality, but to generate insights into the forces of domination operating within society in a way that can inform practical action and stimulate change." Eco-theology was chosen for this study because of its ability to bring about a constructive response to the challenges posed by dominion theology. These responses come in the form of the promotion of stewardship, which is what is needed in order to take care of nature and not dominate it (Orr 2013).

Eco-theology also aids in understanding what stewardship entails and how human beings can better take up the role of taking care of nature (Orr 2013). The Theory also endeavours to look at what Conradie (2006, p. 3) calls ecological wisdom in Christianity. This is where power structures and language, like in critical Theory, are used to bring transformation the way critical Theory does. The two theories not only challenge but also have a transformative aspect to them, making them suitable for this study. By integrating Critical Theory and Eco-Theology, this study not only critiques harmful theological ideas but also offers alternatives that help to take

care of our common. Eco-theology also offers constructive alternatives that promote environmental stewardship. This combination underpins the study's objective of critiquing dominion theology and supporting a theology aligned with ecological sustainability and justice.

Through the use of CDA, which will be explained in the next session, the two theories then aid in examining the language, including phrases that may strongly suggest the promotion of dominion, like human superiority and exploitation. The two theories also help in understanding and challenging religious interpretations of texts and whether this way brings about destruction or transformation. This is the unique contribution that the two theories bring to the study. They help not only deconstruct Dominion Theology by challenging power structures and the use and promotion of harmful ideologies but also reconstruct these ideologies and use them in a way that will aid in better taking care of our common home.

### **1.8. Research Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to critically analyze Dominion Theology and Eco-Theological perspectives using existing literature that was found from academic sites and theological texts, including Pope's Encyclical. Through a focus on desktop research, the study relies on secondary sources like religious documents and scholarly articles to gather relevant information on Dominion Theology and Eco-Theological critiques. This approach allows for a thorough exploration of established theological concepts, interpretations, and critiques without the use of primary data collection.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) helps to critically analyze tools that eventually deconstruct language, ideologies, and power dynamics that are present in theological texts, which in this case is the biblical interpretation of Gen 1:28 and Lynn White Jr's paper on *the Historical Roots of the Ecological Crisis*. By utilizing CDA, the study will eventually identify how language in religious discourse either reinforces or challenges dominionist views, revealing the ideological foundations that impact theological interpretations of humanity's role in relation to and taking care of nature. CDA proves valuable in helping us understand the complexities of dominion, power, and stewardship language, providing insights into shaping attitudes toward ecological responsibility.

To support the analysis, NVivo software is utilized for thematic analysis to organize, code, and identify themes within the data used, which, at this point, are the two documents mentioned earlier. Utilizing NVivo enhances the rigor and consistency of the coding process, aiding in the systematic categorization of concepts like anthropocentrism, the interconnectedness of human beings and nature, stewardship, and ecological justice. The software helps visualize patterns and relationships within the discourse, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of themes across multiple texts.

This methodology enables the study to conduct a detailed and systematic analysis of religious language through biblical texts and ideologies to reveal how theological perspectives on dominion and stewardship influence the response to taking care of nature. By combining CDA with NVivo-supported thematic analysis, the study achieves a nuanced critique and a well-structured presentation of findings on theological approaches to ecological care.

### **1.9. Significance of the Study**

The dominion theology, which has traditionally supported a human-centered worldview that holds that humans are superior to nature, is the subject of this study. The study then exposes the ideologies that could be used to defend environmental catastrophe by using Critical Theory to challenge these theological presumptions. This work contributes to the crucial theological conversation on how to understand the Bible to make it consistent with our dedication to protecting, assuming responsibility for, and honoring all of creation. A recent development in the study of religion is eco-theology, which links spiritual teachings with moral behavior related to the environment.

This study promotes a formative theology of covering, grounded in eco-theological frameworks that provide alternatives to dominion theology. This is crucial because it gives religious communities a theological foundation to support environmental conservation and engage with contemporary ecological movements. Additionally, by analyzing how interpretations based on dominion theology may encourage ecological harm, this study explores the moral domain of human relationship to nature. Subsequently, the study presents ethical perspectives that propose the ecologically relevant development of an ethical and inclusive framework based on eco-theology as a conception of the worth of all life.

This is crucial for theologians and environmental ethicists who want to promote sustainable and creation-respecting ways of living on Earth. This study has applications for religious groups looking to include eco-theology in their worship, instruction, and communal life. The study offers a theological foundation for initiatives to preserve and repair nature, emphasizing stewardship and accountability. This can encourage religious communities to participate in ecological justice teaching, advocacy, and sustainability. The combination of ecological stewardship and theology can influence broader discourses about environmental policy and sustainable development. This study offers a viewpoint that is consistent with the objectives of environmental justice and sustainable development by investigating the effects of dominion theology on human-nature relations and advocating eco-theology as a substitute paradigm. This promotes religious viewpoints in discussions regarding environmental sustainability policy.

#### **1.10. Limitations of the Study**

The study seeks to critique Dominion Theology using Eco-Theology and the degrowth discourse to promote more integrally caring for our common home. Due to time constraints, one of the main limitations of this study would be solely making the study a desktop qualitative study instead of including other qualitative research methods like interviews and focused groups. This limited the accurate and more realistic data the researcher could get since desktop research only focused on specific documents. Another limitation of desktop research was network coverage due to load reduction in my area. This disrupted my time management in the writing of the thesis.

#### **1.11. Chapter outline**

##### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The research issue is introduced in the first chapter, which explores the environmental implications of dominion theology and the opposing viewpoints offered by eco-theology. It highlights the significance of looking into theological perspectives on ecological responsibility while outlining the research challenge, aims, and questions. This chapter also provides a brief synopsis of the theoretical frameworks (Critical Theory and Eco-Theology) and provides a detailed summary of the study's structure.

##### **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The literature review in this section examines foundational works and criticisms of dominion theology, with an emphasis on interpretations that have encouraged anthropocentrism and environmental degradation. It also explores eco-theological perspectives that promote respect for nature, stewardship, and interconnectivity. In order to prepare the ground for a critical comparison of dominion and eco-theological perspectives, the chapter also examines the use of Critical Discourse Analysis in theological research. It evaluates previous studies that relate religious convictions to environmental ethics.

### **Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework**

This chapter elaborates on the theoretical underpinnings of the study, concentrating on Critical Theory and Eco-Theology. Here, Critical Theory is presented as a mechanism for deconstructing power dynamics and ideologies inherent within dominion theology, while Eco-Theology presents a constructive perspective highlighting stewardship and ecological accountability. The amalgamation of these frameworks bolsters the study's critical evaluation of dominion theology and its quest for sustainable, justice-oriented theological alternatives.

### **Chapter 4: Research Methodology**

The methodology chapter delineates the qualitative, desk-based research methodology, employing secondary sources to analyze dominion and eco-theological texts. It elucidates the data collection process utilizing theological documents and scholarly literature and expounds on the utilization of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) for interpreting language and ideology. The integration of NVivo software facilitates thematic analysis through systematic coding and theme identification. This chapter also addresses aspects of the study's validity, reliability, and constraints.

### **Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion**

This chapter presents the outcomes of the analysis, spotlighting the disparities between dominion theology and eco-theology in terms of language, ideology, and perceptions regarding humanity's role in the natural world. Discoveries pertaining to dominion theology unveil a discourse of control and anthropocentrism, while eco-theological narratives emphasize stewardship and ecological justice. The chapter deliberates on emerging themes from the thematic analysis, such as spiritual responsibility and interconnectedness, offering insights into how each perspective frames environmental ethics. The chapter also discusses the ramifications of the findings within theological and ecological spheres. The study's critique of dominion theology proposes novel pathways for theological dialogue that resonate with environmental sustainability. Furthermore, this chapter examines the potential influence of eco-theology on

faith communities and developmental practices, presenting practical avenues for incorporating ecological ethics into religious teachings and advancing environmental stewardship.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations**

The concluding chapter encapsulates the study's key findings, accentuating its contributions to theology, Critical Theory, and Eco-Theology. Suggestions for future research encompass exploring eco-theological practices across diverse cultural milieus and investigating practical implementations within faith-based communities. The chapter culminates with reflections on the capacity of theology to cultivate a more sustainable and equitable relationship between humanity and the environment.

### **1.12. Conclusion**

This opening chapter has given the groundwork for the study. It has made known the problem statement, the objectives, and the aims of the study. It highlighted the study's theoretical framework, research methodology, significance, and limitations. It also discussed the chapter outlines, giving an idea of what the chapters would entail. The following chapter will be the literature review chapter, which will delve deeper into the reason behind this particular study.

## **2. Chapter 2: Eco-Theological Critiques of Dominion Theology: A Literature Review**

### **2.1. Introduction**

Christianity, in one way or another, has played a role in the complacency witnessed in society, where individuals and communities resorted to dominating nature and using it exploitatively instead of sparingly. The chapter, therefore, seeks first to investigate the challenges that threaten the sustenance and the role of individuals in taking care of our common home, which is the environment. Second, the chapter seeks to do that by looking at literature that speaks to eco-theological critiques of Dominion Theology, including anthropocentrism, human superiority, human responsibility, and issues around behaviour change. Thirdly, the chapter will also consider the positionality of the study with regard to Theology and Development and the role the research might play in advancing Theology and Development not only in academia but also in real-life situations. Fourthly, the chapter aims to solicit a form of understanding of where Dominion Theology stems from and the patterns that have enabled human beings to disregard the intrinsic value of nature and exploit it as long as it serves their needs. It will do

this by looking at the relationship between Anthropocentrism and Capitalocene. Lastly, the chapter will conclude.

## **2.2. Theological Foundations of Dominion**

### **2.2.1. Dominion Theology and Anthropocentrism**

It has been known since time immemorial that there is and has always been an interaction between nature and human beings (Carson, 1962), which somehow points to the reliance of one on the other. As early as the 1960s, Schlesinger (2010, p. 13) notes that Rachel Carson saw the era of human beings seeing themselves as more significant than all other species on Earth and considering themselves to be the ones to "exert a dominant control on the characteristics of our planet." This goes to show the genesis of the Anthropocene in our time. Van Houtan and Northcott (2010) point to an essential fact examining how environmentalists lament Christianity's complacency concerning the ongoing ecological crisis. They refer to a writer, Lynn White, who challenged Christians or Christianity on ecological issues.

White (1967, p.1205) states that already in the 2nd century, there was an idea instilled in man (sic) that it is God's will "that man exploit nature for his proper needs." This has led to some form of indifference towards nature on the part of Christianity (White, 1967). Byrne (2011, no page) also points out that "religious grounds posit humans as custodians of the natural world; they are typically founded on humans' moral responsibility to other species, which stem from supernatural entities." To a certain extent, this shows the complacency that has always been there and how human beings tend not to take issues concerning ecology or climate change to heart (Van Houtan and Northcott 2010; Schlesinger 2010). A belief that stems from dominion theology is that humans are powerful and exercise power over nature without taking any form of accountability (Blaber 2022). This is also attested to by Blaber (2022), who conducted an opinion poll in the United States that showed that American adults did not believe that humans have somehow contributed to climate change. It would be interesting to know if the attitude is the same among Africans, mainly South Africans.

### **2.2.2. Anthropocentrism and Human Superiority**

North (1987) posits that for a man (sic) to claim dominance, he has to conform to God's ordinances and requirements. This means it is crucial to understand the context of the text itself

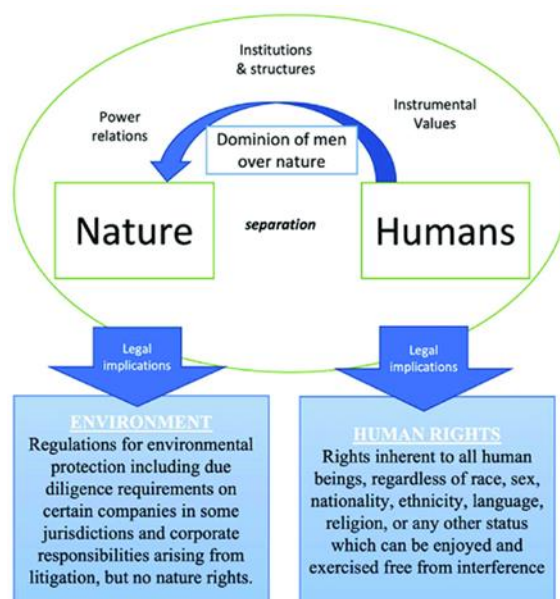
and then act accordingly as ethical beings who are God's image-bearers on Earth (North 1987). Acting as ethical beings who are God's image-bearers requires that human beings let go of "being happier putting jobs and personal well-being above the life support system that sustains us on planet Earth" (Van Houtan and Northcott 2010, p.14). Such behavior change will ultimately lead to a more environmentally conscious society. This means seeing the importance of understanding dominion theologies' commitment and how this commitment hampers or fosters good or bad responses when it comes to taking care of our common home (Shehu, 2023). According to Pope Francis (2015), taking care of our common home means reversing the cries of our Sister, Mother Earth, for repeatedly abusing and irresponsibly using the goods God gave us to sustain us.

Dominion Theology tends to make us as humans believe that we are "lords and masters entitled to plunder her at will" (Pope Francis, 2015: 3). This is where the aspect of anthropocentrism comes in. According to Goralnik and Nelson (2012, p. 145), anthropocentrism is "the ethical belief that humans alone possess intrinsic value." This is where the aspect of humans believing they are better than other created things comes from. That is why it is important to recognize nature's gift to us. Being cognizant of the very gifts that come from nature will help us, in one way or another, desire to take good care of nature as human beings are part and not owners of nature (Pope Francis 2015, Van Dyk 2012). This then requires that every human being mold their lives according to the principles of God so that they are able to fulfill their duties of being stewards and not lords over the Earth (Pope Paul IV 1967).

### **2.2.3. Separation of Humans from the Natural World**

It has been said that human beings, especially in Western countries and developed countries, have, to a certain extent, created a sense of separation from nature (Vining, Merrick, and Price 2008). This separation, in one way or another, continues to perpetuate the attitude embraced by those living in urban areas who often do not think about the negative consequences of their actions on nature (Byrne 2011). Language plays a pivotal role in this, especially when going back to the story in Genesis 1:28, which is understood to give power to human beings, which might be the reason behind this separation (Meisner 1991). According to White (1962, p. 1203), this separation has also been evident in that human beings have "often been a dynamic element in their own environment," bringing some form of change and disturbance to the environment.

This dynamism perpetuates the separation as human beings may perceive themselves as more powerful than nature, continuing the dominion narrative. Pepper and Leonard (2016) mention a fundamental aspect of Christians' inability to find guidance regarding issues related to taking care of the environment. This might be the reason behind the complacency towards caring for our common home, as there is also a lack of understanding of the scripture passage about dominion (Shin and Preston 2021). Zaleha and Szasz (2015:20) also mention that conservative Christians somehow express “anti-environmental attitudes and attempt to suppress “green” efforts that have arisen in their own ranks.” These authors show the rate at which such attitudes lead to a lack of interest in taking care of our common because of misinterpretations. Below is a diagram that explains this separation as a result of institutions and structures, which in this case may be Faith-Based Organizations, also looking at the legal implications of human beings and companies as well as the regulations (Martin-Ortega et al. 2022).



Source from: [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Our-existing-context-in-which-the-separation-between-nature-and-humans-influences-power\\_fig1\\_360966915](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Our-existing-context-in-which-the-separation-between-nature-and-humans-influences-power_fig1_360966915)

#### **2.2.4. The Connection of the Anthropocentric view of Nature and Capitalocene**

Mother Earth, as St Francis would fondly refer to planet Earth, saw a history of Anthropocene, which resulted from human action and does not promise a bright future for humans and nature as a whole (Moore 2016). This action speaks to the fact that there was a *Kairos* moment that humanity and Earth as a whole had to embrace, which signified a moment of transition, a moment of moving from the unknown to the known (Moore 2016). According to Poole (no date, p. 1), the Anthropocene describes "a new geological era that sees the loss of distinction between humans and nature, with humans drastically changing the Earth's life support system and increasing the rate of climate change."

To a certain extent, the Anthropocene plays a major role in dominionism in that it gives human beings much status to dominate the planet without much consideration of what will happen next (Adelman 2020), which is not far from what Dominion Theology advocates for. As Moore (2016) puts it, the Anthropocene brought changes that cannot be explained to date. Even though there is an attribution of Anthropocene in human activity, there are questions that the Anthropocene cannot answer (Moore 2016). Because of this, Mother Earth, including human beings who rely on Earth's resources for survival, is left wanting (Rieger 2023). However, there is also an aspect that Anthropocene seems to not pay attention to: "Not all human activities have equal impact on the planet" (Rieger 2023, p. 2). This brings to light the fact that all actions, whether consciously or unconsciously done, will somehow have an impact positive or negative.

### **2.3. Alternative Practices of Eco-Theology**

#### **2.3.1. Eco-Theology and the Reinterpretation of Biblical Texts**

Eco-theology is a critical theology that forms part of what is referred to as resistance theology (Wittenberg, 2010). This means that eco-theology has to challenge traditional theological biblical texts, which are often misinterpreted, to better relate to those elements of biblical theology that are pertinent to taking care of the environment (Van Dyk 2010). With that being said, it is also essential to understand what eco-theology is. According to Brotten (2016, p. ix), eco-theology is "the study of how questions concerning our current understandings of ecology converge with theological inquiry to discuss the relationships between God, humans, and non-humans." Understanding this also leads to realizing that the preservation and conservation of

nature are in the hands of human beings (Clifford, 1995). It is, therefore, up to the human beings to start preserving nature and all it contains.

For nature to flourish, it depends on the actions of human beings with and not without God. This could be realized using what Horrell (2010) calls ecological hermeneutics. Conradie (2010: 296) defines hermeneutics as “a systematic and disciplined form of second-order reflection on the praxis of interpretation.” Looking at the interpretation and systematically finding meaning in those reflections will eventually lead to an interpretation that will help one understand the context and reality to a certain extent (Conradie 2010). Ecological hermeneutics, therefore, emerged as “a sign that biblical interpretation (in church, society and academy) has been subject to “systematically distorted forms of communication”” (Conradie 2010: 297). These help us understand where the notion of Dominion stems from and how Dominion Theology became such a huge phenomenon.

### **2.3.2. Human Responsibility and Stewardship in Eco-Theology**

There are often distortions that make it difficult for the care of creation to be taken seriously and acted upon vigorously. These distortions are subconscious, which might also be the reason behind humans dominating nature (Conradie, 2010). Through ecological hermeneutics, the biblical texts often used by dominionists to support their anthropocentrism can be interpreted in a way that considers not only human beings as important but all of creation as a whole. The aim is to promote stewardship and sustainability from biblical texts that allegedly promote dominionism (Conradie 2010). It is also essential to retrieve ecological wisdom from the biblical texts used in the Christian tradition (Conradie, 2006). God saw nature as being good, and this should also propel us to see nature as good, not necessarily as something to be exploited but as something to be taken care of by every responsible citizen to preserve this goodness (Clifford, 1995).

God's plan for creation was centered around co-existence and not on humans dominating the Earth (Chukwuemeka and Kumbo, 2023). This meant that human beings had to utilize nature to cater to their needs and sparingly, not to over-extract and exploit what God has given to them. Also, when looking at issues concerning human responsibility and stewardship, the majority of black people see that task reserved for the middle class and for white people as they feel they are not taking part in the degradation of nature (Conradie 2006). This false

understanding has somehow led to the destruction and careless attitude observed in townships and in towns where litter is everywhere, and no one is concerned about it. It is, therefore, important to consider the consequences of such an attitude, reserving certain tasks to a certain group of people and pretending that others are not affected.

### **2.3.3. African Theologies and Integral Ecology**

Because of their rich history, African theologies play a huge role in caring for nature. Being mindful of the aspect of taking care of nature will ultimately lead to what Castillo (2019) calls integral ecology. Castillo (2019, p. 38) deems integral ecology as a way of helping “clarify how sin and grace are at work in the world, shaping the politico-ecological character of historical reality.” Each human being is thus required to play their part in ensuring the advancement of integral ecology. This ecology considers both the political and ecological state of the society. To avoid this, Pope Francis (2015) asserts that as human beings, we need to be aware of the complacency and recklessness that may result in subtle dominant attitudes that may lead to false or superficial ecology. In an exhortation to the Amazon, Pope Francis (2020, p.5) mentions how he dreams of “an Amazon region that can jealously preserve its overwhelming natural beauty and the super-abundant life teeming in its rivers and forests.” This should be a dream we all have for our respective countries and regions: to preserve the natural beauty of creation and use it to better our lives and secure the lives of future generations.

When looking at African theologies and those cultures that support eco-theological tenets, they have a way of acknowledging the significance of totemism and how certain animals and plants have a significant meaning in certain cultures (Chitando, 2020). This should play a role in encouraging individuals and communities to preserve and restore nature in one way or another. When looking at the African aspect of Ubuntu, particularly as an African people, we ought to recognize the intrinsic importance of stewardship as humans rely on nature, which relies on humans for its survival (Chitando, 2020). By focusing on this ubuntu aspect, which is also a part of eco-theology, taking care of nature may help deal with issues of capitalism that lead to material poverty in many societies (Castillo 2019).

#### **2.3.4. The Moral and Theological Imperative for Creation Care**

Societies relate to nature in different ways, which can be ethical and unethical (Ngwena 2020). Africa, in particular, has often had traditional beliefs and practices that help preserve the environment and co-exist with nature (Ikechukwu 2021). Kaoma (2013, p. 53) notes that “the concept of ancestry as custodian of the earth plays an important role in unifying African cultures and belief systems which carry articulated ecological overtones.” This shows the impact that indigenous knowledge plays in the preservation of nature, which, to a certain extent, contributes to some form of integral ecology, where nature and human beings co-exist without the other being exploited.

The ecclesial environment should, therefore, strive in its spiritual and pastoral activities to incorporate activities that will encourage and advance stewardship above all else (Kuhn 2018). Shin and Preston (2019) conducted research that showed a correlation between stewardship and the moralization of climate change and a negative relation between dominionism and the moralization of climate change. The study pointed out that stewardship, which is one of the essential facets of eco-theology that challenge Dominion Theology, is crucial in dealing with issues that concern taking care of our common home. There is a great need to incorporate such teachings in ecclesial bodies to raise awareness of the importance of stewardship and integral ecology. This is simply because both scripture and creation reveal the power and presence of the divine (Chiotti 2022). Therefore, ecclesial spaces have a great responsibility in realizing this divinity and promoting taking care of what is ours without exploiting it and expecting others to take care of it instead of playing our part.

Seeing the contestation in White's paper, the morality issue comes into play. In his paper, White (1967) blames the ongoing crisis on the views held by Christianity and Judaism on their perception of superiority over the rest of creation. This is why Cha (2012) mentions the importance of knowing the “position of humanity in the created world,” which has been a debatable subject to date. Even when going back to scripture, we realize a common identity exists between humans and the rest of creation (Cha 2012). Still, this common identity has been distorted by the many interpretations that human beings have created to promote the superiority/dominion narrative.

## **2.4. Behaviour Change and Action Campaigns That Can Promote Eco-Theology in Communities to Care For Our Common Home**

### **2.4.1. Theological Foundations for Change and Ecological Conversion**

Ecological conversion is a term coined by Pope John Paul II, and it refers to a " significantly changed relationship to our natural environment" (Ormerod and Vanin 2016, p. 328). The need for ecological conversion stems from relativism, which is considered to be a disorder that makes individuals take advantage of others, and "misguided anthropocentrism that leads to a misguided lifestyle" (Lawler and Salzman 2019, p. 580). From this, one can already see the importance of understanding ecological conversion and its impacts in protecting the environment and promoting better ways of taking care of our common home.

Change is impossible until society comes together to see what will work and bring the desired change. Change needs to begin with individuals so that it can ultimately infiltrate communities, countries, and the world at large, with behaviour change being crucial. When looking at change from a theological perspective, change and conversion " is difficult to be isolated from the other, slightly different connotated concepts of change such as repentance, metanoia ... but like all of them denotes more than just an intellectual shift in opinion" (Laudato Si Research Institute, 2021: 8). When looking at the repentance aspect, it would be necessary also to consider the many misinterpretations of the dominion connotation in the Bible and look at alternative ways of understanding it, ways that would ultimately lead to some form of behavior change (Caperon, Saville & Ahern, 2022).

### **2.4.2. The Role of Beliefs and Ideologies in Environmental Change**

Beliefs and ideologies play a pivotal role in the change that needs to occur and in realizing and accepting the interconnectedness between human beings and nature (Caperon et al., 2022). It is important to note that if and when environmental messages are expressed in a way that people relate to and understand, especially in faith contexts, change can be seen internally and externally (Ives et al., 2022). Therefore, humans need to change before any ecological change can result from choosing lifestyles that will not negatively impact the environment (Pope Francis, 2020). It should be a lifestyle that will be considerate of other living and non-living beings within the environment (Pope Francis 2020).

Oftentimes, an individual's behaviour is guided by their environment, personal beliefs, and norms (Perera, Kalantari, and Johnson 2022). These beliefs can potentially create a disconnect between the environment and human beings, contributing to the separation mentioned above (Inkpen and Baily, 2020). Having an environmental identity, which is similar to resonating with one's environment, can play a major role in ensuring that individuals become environmentally conscious and cultivate that kind of behaviour that will help them see the need to take care of their environment in a more mindful way (Perera et al. 2022). By so doing, eco-theological principles are adopted, and better ways of taking care of the environment are also exercised to improve the lives of every living creature.

#### **2.4.3. Ethics and Technology in Environmental Stewardship**

There is also a need to consider ethics, especially regarding issues concerning introducing new technology (Pope Francis, 2015). This may lead to further degradation not only of the environment but also of the moral fibre of society and would add to the lack of respect shown to nature (Pope Francis, 2015). Acknowledging and understanding that human beings are creatures that are not only intellectuals and social beings but also spiritual and historical, and how this affects their interaction with the environment and society as well, will help communities to come up with ways that will enrich the lives of both living and non-living beings (Laudato Si Research Institute, 2021). Focusing on these human characteristics and their contexts will enable society to identify the different ways to implement and bring about the desired change.

Stewardship is considered an ethical theory and practice that enables human beings to be more cognizant of their role in realizing the intrinsic value of nature and preserving that value (Gubazire 2022). Even though this has been something widely spoken about, it seems not to have an effect as it should, especially in communities around South Africa (Bennett et al. 2018). According to Gubazire (2022), destroying nature also somehow destroys us. The ethics part, in this case, is very important as it demands human beings, especially those who have influence in changing the mindsets of people, to begin with principles of “co-existentialism, personalized responsibility, proportionality, and solidarity” (Gubazire 2022, p. 299). This will only happen when a dominion mentality shifts to consider the intrinsic value of nature as the value of nature continues to deteriorate by the day (Paschual et al. 2023).

#### **2.4.4. Theological Foundations for Change and Ecological Conversion**

Faith-based organizations (FBOs) like churches can consider collaborating with ecological movements such as civil society organizations that advocate for the recognition and protection of the environment as our common home (Pope Francis 2015). One such way could be assisting households in planting their fruit and vegetables in their yards, especially in townships, using recyclable materials or tires, as is often done. Doing this could reduce harmful chemicals used to grow vegetables that are later consumed by people, causing different illnesses. This will also help eradicate poverty and promote healthy lifestyles for everyone in the community (Pope Francis 2015).

If FBOs are to introduce action campaigns to help bring awareness of the interconnectedness of humans and nature, it would be of paramount importance to allow the communities themselves to come up with action campaigns or initiatives that will be sustainable even in the absence of the FBOs (Caperon et al., 2022). This will enable communities to own these initiatives and make them work for their benefit and growth as a community. This will also aid in making communities see the integral role they play in ensuring that our common home is well taken care of and that something is being done to preserve nature's beauty without over-exploiting what has been given for our sustenance.

#### **2.5. Positionality of the Study in Theology and Development**

The research in question is positioned within the interdisciplinary framework of Theology and Development. According to Klaasen (2013), the development theme in theological studies has been embraced as a way of realizing the particular role played by civil society organizations, including churches in South Africa, especially in the advancement of community development. Integral development processes should not only be personal and individualistic but also communitarian so that communities are empowered and given an opportunity to right the wrongs that are normally perpetuated by power structures (Klaasen 2013). This means the framework seeks to bridge the gap between theological insights and any social transformation aspects that might lead to the betterment of the people.

By focusing on the environmental crisis, the study highlights how eco-theological practices engage with ecological justice, a key issue in global development. By critiquing harmful theological frameworks, which in this case is the Dominion Theology framework, the research

supports the university's Department of Theology and Development's commitment to addressing both ethical and spiritual aspects of social change. The qualitative approach and critical research paradigm further fit the university's Department of Theology and Development goal of challenging oppressive structures. This study critiques and empowers faith communities to adopt theological perspectives that promote environmental stewardship and justice. By bridging theology, development, and ecological justice, the research offers a relevant and rigorous critique. It proposes alternative living methods that align with the Department of Theology's vision of integrating theological insights with sustainable development.

## **2.6. The Degrowth discourse can challenge the relationship between the Anthropocene and Capitalocene and how this leads to growth**

Rieger and Rieger (2019) mention that environmental degradation, which is often said to be human-induced, is no longer of paramount importance. It is important to look at what might have resulted in the current situation being the way it is and use that to resolve the current situation (Rieger and Rieger 2019). Moore (2016) has a different way of thinking in that he mentions that the current situation we find ourselves in is something that has been building up over time, making it difficult to find a concrete solution as the real problem seems to be difficult to interpret or even analyze.

This shows that there is a bit of contestation with regard to understanding where the climate change issue began. Ndehedehe (2023) is also of the same mind as Adelman (2020), that human activities “are now the predominant drivers of these changes, surpassing those caused by natural processes and climate change” (Ndehedehe 2023, p. 1). Again, there seems to be another contestation, and it is seen in how Rieger (2023) is of the idea that even though 71% of emissions are from 100 corporations contributing to the current human-made global warming, not all human activities lead to adverse results.

The above gives the impression that even though some scholars are contesting the role of human beings in the current ecological crisis, some are saying human beings are not entirely to blame for the current crisis. In the end, the Anthropocene intertwines both natural history and human history (Moore 2016). This means one cannot make sense without the other. There

has to be learnings observed from both these histories. We should not discard everything, but look at teachings that would work to better care for the environment.

When looking at Capitalocene, according to Rieger (2023, p. 2), “is a geological age when the interests of big money are shaping the planet in unprecedented ways”. Capitalocene not only comprises of economics and politics, but it also affects our daily lives and shapes the way we perceive certain things. This includes how we relate with each other, what we think of and some of the religious beliefs we uphold which to date have contributed to the dominionism that is widely experienced (Rieger 2023) due to some of these religious beliefs. Capitalocene, according to Adelman (2020, p. 25), “can be traced back as far as the emergence of mercantile capitalism in the sixteenth century”. This shows that Capitalocene has been on the scene for a very long time.

Capitalocene, being a Neo-Marxist narrative, means that the main driver of this phenomenon is capital more than human beings (Adelman 2020). Rieger (2023) also mentions the importance of how Capitalocene or capitalism plays a pivotal role in luring consumers to buy more than they need and can afford, thus leading to what is often referred to as materialism. This geology of the Capitalocene is one not of mankind but of accumulating capital (Adelman 2020). Capitalocene, by contrast, argues Adelman (2020, p. 49), “explains carbon colonialism and unequal ecological exchange”.

Some faith communities, according to Reiger (2023), often blame the markets and customers for creating more and consumers for purchasing more. Due to these interests, there is a frequent exhibition of dominance, which typically drives responses to climate change and other ecological challenges. In other words, the market also is to blame for the materialism witnessed and inculcated in society because markets will do all they can to ensure that goods that are in demand are delivered on time and consumers receive them timeously as well. All this later contributes to the rapid capitalism witnessed, as well as the destruction of natural resources (Rieger, 2023).

Dominion theology has generally supported growth at all costs, aligning with economic paradigms prioritizing human prosperity and development over ecological sustainability (Ice 2009). This perspective often conflicts with the degrowth principles, a movement that challenges the dominant economic paradigm of perpetual growth (Hickel 2020). Degrowth

advocates for sustainable development that prioritizes ecological health and social equity, directly opposing the exploitative tendencies supported by dominion theology (Kallis et al., 2020; Hickel, 2020). In contrast, eco-theology offers a different vision that sees humans as part of a larger ecological community, responsible for caring for creation rather than dominating it (Conradie, 2006; Bauckham, 2002). Eco-theology aligns with degrowth principles by advocating for a re-evaluation of human relationships with the environment, emphasizing sustainability, stewardship, and the intrinsic value of all creation (Conradie, 2006).

Degrowth, according to Latouche (2004; 1), “is economic contraction or downscaling.” This means that the principle of degrowth, above all else, seeks to look at growth trends and challenge them (Demaria et al., 2013). Degrowth advocates for sustainable development that prioritizes ecological health and social equity, directly opposing the exploitative tendencies supported by dominion theology (Kallis et al., 2020; Hickel, 2020). In contrast, eco-theology offers a different vision that sees humans as part of a larger ecological community, responsible for caring for creation rather than dominating it (Conradie, 2006; Bauckham, 2002). Eco-theology aligns with degrowth principles by advocating for a re-evaluation of human relationships with the environment, emphasizing sustainability, Stewardship, and the intrinsic value of all creation (Conradie, 2006).

The Degrowth discourse also challenges the Capitalocene trends that seeks to promote markets and materialism while forgetting to preserve nature and the resources that are meant to be used sparingly for the benefit of future generations as well. Degrowth is also of the notion that expanding material throughput is not compatible with whatever efforts put forward to reducing Greenhouse Gases (GHGs) (Busk 2022). It also requires a move away from Gross Domestic Product (GDP) focused growth in which “economic growth is conventionally measured as increasing gross domestic product or GDP” (Schmelzer, Vetter and Vansintjan 2022, p. 1).

This is done to see the difference between sectors that have a potential to grow and those that need to degrow because of their unsustainability or their excessive consumption of natural resources (Schmelzer et al. 2022). Through this, even the emissions of GHGs will be reduced (Busk 2022). Capitalism according to Busk (2022, p. 4), “involves not only a separation between workers and owners of the means of production ..., but also a generalized competitive market where goods are produced in order to be sold”. This then gives a better idea of what

Rieger (2023) mentioned in terms of materialism and how consumers will be blamed for the massive production.

Not everyone is for degrowth though, mainly because of the misinterpretation of the word. Schmelzer et al. (2022) mention how some newspapers like Forbes and The Spectator published opinion pieces that were not for degrowth, stating how it is a recipe for disaster, without a full understanding of what degrowth entails. Degrowth is, therefore, explained as “a term that is increasingly mobilized by scholars and activists to criticize the hegemony of growth...” (Schmelzer et al. 2022, p. 3). It calls for a re-organization of society in order to somehow succeed in reducing the amount of energy and resources deemed necessary and possible (Schmelzer et al. 2022).

Degrowth is, therefore, against growth at all costs, which is capitalist rhetoric that needs to change over time (Busk, 2022). This is also seen in how growth, when viewed from a capitalist perspective, has an increase in inequality, unhappiness, and environmental degradation (Busk 2022). When considering degrowth against Capitalocene, Busk (2022, p. 14), states that “degrowth recognizes that the possibility of decreasing material throughput is not only a matter of mindfulness on the part of individual consumers or large corporations, but requires a confrontation with the structural logic of accumulation inherent in a capitalist market economy”. This is a clear indication of a change of mindset and operation that needs to take place from markets and human beings.

Through degrowth, the growth at all cost myth is debunked and people and large corporations become aware of the importance of reducing material throughput and chasing profits at the expense of nature (Schmelzer et al. 2022). As Puggioni states, growth has always been believed to be a socio-economic term that is linked with the western economy of accumulation without being accountable of the damage that is being done to creation. This is simply because economies these days are just focused on exploiting nature, looking out for constant GDP growth and the unfair distribution of wealth which only caters for a selected few (Ngam 2024) Degrowth also helps in addressing social issues that hinder the progress of society (Puggioni 2017, Ngam 2024).

The pursuit of growth has ultimately led the world to an economic disequilibrium and made known a range of social ills that made it difficult for society to progress (Kallis, Paulson,

D'Alisa and Demaria 2020). The Anthropocene debacle seems to have much of its focus on things relating to geography and technology and not so much on what can be done with the power struggles and capitalism that comes as a result (Moore 2015). Anthropocentrism not only hurts people but also planet Earth because of the extraction of natural resources that benefit a selected few while the majority lingers in inequality and poverty (Grabner-Radkowsch and Strunk 2023).

It is important that countries move away from the capitalist narrative, which is primarily anthropocentric, and focus on moving towards degrowth for transformation to take place not only for humans but for the Earth as a whole (Puggioni 2017). Coming to a point of realizing that emissions and extractions are a work of Capitalocene will help, especially in the field of religion and theology, to deal with the issue of not taking care of the environment and considering those who are mostly affected by these emissions and extractions (Rieger 2023). The only issue that challenges this is that Christianity does not challenge the excessive extraction that occurs due to capitalism; one might even say that Christianity is for capitalism and not for degrowth (Rieger 2023).

Christian theology and even Christian communities, in all respect, ought to play a role in understanding and advocating for degrowth principles that help build nurturing societies by combating Anthropocentrism and Capitalocene while considering the planet and what we can benefit from it. According to (Kantyka 2021, p. 175) "The Reformed Churches join the work on indicating the directions in which current economic system should evolve and indicate the means to achieve the set goals". This comes to show how degrowth principles emphasize the importance of living within Earth's ecological limits, promoting sufficiency rather than excess (Hickel 2020). When centred within Christian theology, degrowth calls for a reorientation of human desires and notions of prosperity, advocating for a lifestyle marked by moderation, care for creation, and justice for marginalized communities, thus fostering a more sustainable and ethical relationship with the planet (Latouche, 2004, Pope Francis, 2015, Puggioni, 2017).

Eco-theology offers a different vision in this regard, viewing humans as part of a larger ecological community with a responsibility to care for creation rather than dominate it (Conradie 2006). The integration of degrowth values within eco-theology underscores the need to critique capitalist consumption patterns and anthropocentric attitudes that have led to environmental degradation (Bauckham 2002). It promotes a vision of integral ecology where

spiritual transformation accompanies ecological conversion, encouraging believers to embrace simplicity, solidarity, and stewardship in their daily lives (Pope Francis, 2015). This theological approach aligns with degrowth's advocacy for systemic change to economic and social structures, urging faith communities to challenge growth-driven ideologies and embrace sustainable alternatives that honour the intrinsic value of all creation (Schmelzer et al. 2022, Pope Francis 2015).

What degrowth aims to do, which will be of much benefit to the society, is to “permanently leave behind a situation in which all policies are dictated by the imperatives of expansion, growth and efficiency” (Puggioni 2017, p. 14). What needs to be considered is not what Anthropocene aims for in protecting a selected few, but degrowth which will cater to everyone, rich and poor alike (Rieger 2023). Christianity, at this point, needs to look at ways that promote greed and capitalism, especially in light of dominionism, and come up with ways that will also challenge the status quo and business as usual (Rieger 2023). Alternatives like stewardship are not only for the benefit of those in the margins but more especially to help take care of our common home and preserve the beauty and natural resources that help us each and every day.

## **2.7. Conclusion**

Dominion Theology continues to plague communities, even in the subtlest ways. The subtle innate character of human beings to subdue nature as a result of a command in the bible makes it difficult for nature to fight for itself and regenerate as it should. This is simply because the intrinsic value of nature has not been taken into consideration and nature continues to be exploited in many different ways by human beings so as to accommodate and cater to their unending needs. This section has looked at some of the different ways that have enabled human beings to dominate nature such as anthropocentrism and the separation of human beings from nature, just to mention a few, instead of caring for it, not only for the present generation but for future generations as well. The chapter also discussed the relationship between anthropocentrism and Capitalocene. It became apparent that both these phenomena continue to play a pivotal role in the destruction of nature without much consideration of what the degrowth discourse can provide to take better care of our common home. The following chapter will discuss the theoretical foundations of the research.

### **3. Chapter 3: Critical Theory and Eco-Theology: Theoretical Foundations**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter will look at the theoretical foundations of the research at hand. According to Hiebert et al. (2023, p. 51), the theoretical framework is “the custom-made theory that focuses specifically on the hypotheses you want to test and the research questions you want to answer”. Adom, Hussein, and Agyem (2018) mention that a theoretical framework is also based on a theory that is already in existence in a particular field of study, which in this case are two and are in relation to the study at hand. In the case of this study, the theoretical framework will assist in answering the research question to understand the extent of dominion theology on nature and how eco-theology can provide better alternatives that will also promote stewardship and not dominion. The main theories that will be used in this study are Critical theory and Eco-theology. Both theories are important, especially in critiquing Dominion Theology and coming up with alternatives, which, in this case, Eco-Theology will provide.

The chapter will first look at the study's philosophical underpinnings to better understand where the study falls. Secondly, it will give an overview of the Critical theory. Thirdly, it will discuss the application of critical theory in a theological study. Fourthly, it will discuss eco-theology, what it is, and its relevance to the study at hand. Fifthly, it will consider the intersection between the critical theory and eco-theology and why both are critical for the study. Sixthly, the chapter will also look at reimagining Dominion Theology through Critical and Eco-Theology lenses, and then the chapter will conclude.

#### **3.2. Philosophical Underpinnings of the Study**

Before focusing on the theoretical framework used in this study, it is vital to identify and understand the philosophical underpinnings of the study. According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, philosophical underpinnings are defined as “something that serves as a foundation”. This means that the following are the basis of this current study. These serve as the foundation of the research, and they help focus the research and give it direction. The philosophical underpinnings of this study are embedded in the critical research paradigm, which is part of this theoretical framework. A paradigm, according to Yong, Husin and Kamarudin (2021, p. 5857), is “a set of assumptions that provides a conceptual framework or a philosophical one for a world view, which enables researchers to construct organised studies around the world”.

The section will begin by looking at the ontology and epistemology of the critical paradigm. In this critical study, ontology is considered as historical realism (Guba & Lincoln 1982). This historical realism indicates that even though reality is often historically constructed, history plays a role in how it is perceived and understood (Elshafie 2013). It also shows that reality is not boxed in the mind but exists outside of the mind in day-to-day events (Elshafie 2013). This is particularly relevant for the study at hand as it indicates the importance of understanding the biblical texts that have somehow led Christians to seeing dominion as a way of life. Which also contribute to the history and foundations of Christian Dominion. This social construct is also seen in the realities that human beings live in (Scotland 2012). Since this research falls under the critical paradigm, language, which in this case is found in the biblical interpretations reveals that power dynamics that might be at play, perpetuating dominion (Scotland 2012).

Epistemology, on the other hand, particularly in this critical study, is perceived as transactional and subjective (Guba and Lincoln, 1982). According to Elshafie (2013), this looks at how knowledge is socially and historically constructed, enveloped by complex cultural contexts. These cultural contexts may be embedded in the understanding of the biblical texts and their interpretation to form social and historical constructs that are accommodative of the Christian lifestyle or culture expected from those who follow Christianity. This knowledge according to Scotland (2012) plays a pivotal role in the power relations which also surface in the ontological understanding of the critical research paradigm which will be dealt with in the methodology chapter. Knowledge as a social construct with language playing a pivotal role in this, brings different understandings of realities (Scotland 2012) which is basically what has happened with regards to understanding the biblical text on dominion as well as the ultimate criticism of Lynn White on the power dynamics of Christianity that have led to the exploitation of nature (White 1967).

### **3.3. Overview of Critical Theory**

Having discussed the ontology and epistemology of the critical research paradigm, it is crucial to understand what Critical theory is. Critical Theory is known to be a theory that emanates from the Frankfurt School which is embedded in a family of theories that aim to critique for transformation purposes (Celikates and Flynn 2023). Horkheimer (1982, p. 244) defines critical theory as seeking “human emancipation to liberate human beings from the circumstances that

enslave them”. Horkheimer’s definition helps us understand the use of this theory in this particular study. Celikates and Flynn (2023, para. 1) further define and explain critical theory as a theory that “refers to the work of several generations of philosophers and social theorists in the Western European Marxist tradition known as the Frankfurt School”. These philosophers looked at different ways of critiquing social context, inclusive of the political, economic and religious contexts that shape societies' way of thinking and doing things (Celikates & Flynn, 2023).

This theory is known for its interdisciplinary nature, which combines philosophy and social sciences with the aim of bringing change or transformation in society (Celikates and Flynn, 2023). There are a number of critical theory strands that have emerged throughout time to help with understanding the different “forms of reflective engagement with the emancipatory goals of various social and political movements, such as feminist theory, critical race theory, queer theory, and postcolonial/decolonial theory”. In the case of the study at hand, the focus will be purely on critical theory with its ability to bring change in society and its ability to serve as a tool for critical analysis. By critiquing dominion theology, through the use of critical theory, the study will be able to challenge the status quo and strive to reach a balance (Asghar 2013), especially in terms of using what is at our disposal in the environment for the benefit of all and in taking care of the environment.

On the other hand, Rehman and Alharti (2016, p. 57) state that critical theory “endeavours to bring to light the beliefs and actions that limit human freedom with the ultimate aim of transforming the situation.” In light of the above explanation, some of the beliefs the study at hand seeks to challenge is that of power dynamics and cultures that perpetuate dominion and exploitation instead of stewardship and interconnectedness. The theory seeks to look at social structures and institutions from the dominance point of view on human subjects and the environment as a whole (Haugaard and Cooke 2010). The social structures and institutions in this regard may be groups and churches as well as their teachings when it comes to protecting and taking care of the environment. Ultimately, the study in question aims to achieve this by critiquing Dominion Theology using Eco-theology and finding ways to bring transformation using these very principles.

The point of critical theory in this particular study may also be attributed to the need to emancipate human beings from their dominion stance. According to Celikates and Flynn

(2023), emancipation which is one of the elements adopted from Karl Marx, aims not only to understand, but also to contribute to a radical transformation of the social world that is already under way, and the commitment to real emancipation as requiring a radical, irreducibly social and political transformation that overcomes the fundamental contradictions of modern society instead of partial or local reforms aimed at surface-level symptoms.

This understanding of emancipation paves the way for challenging systems that favor a selected few, in this case, the rich and those who think that they are responsible for dominating nature, leaving those in the margins to suffer the consequences of actions not attributed to them (Celikates and Flynn 2023). There is also a part of Critical Theory that not only justifies its use in Christianity and Theology but strengthens its use in acknowledging and upholding matters of social justice (Hübner 2021).

Critical theory in its essence also endeavours to bring to light all the irrational beliefs that have always been thought to be rational simply because they would serve the needs of a particular group (Hübner 2021). This is also clear in how certain biblical texts, in this case, Genesis 1:28, continues to uphold irrational beliefs of dominion which have perpetuated irrational behaviours of exploitation of the very environment we are supposed to take care of. Ward (2000) mentions an important aspect of deriving meaning in texts or experiences. These meanings then form some kind of response to those texts or experiences. For some, this text (Gen 1:28) proposed something very meaningful in that human beings not only had to take care of nature, but they also had to dominate it and use what is at their disposal for survival, irrespective of how it is being used (Ward 2000).

In all this, there is a realization that Critical Theory then seeks to look at these meanings and challenge them and how people rationalize them. In so doing, one gets to not only take events or texts for what they are but is able to decipher the meaning that is behind them in order to respond properly to circumstances, in this case, taking care of nature without exploiting it. This is where the notion of stewardship<sub>2</sub> which also challenges dominion theology, comes into play. The understanding and adaptation of stewardship in this context, particularly in the South African community, would mean having an “idea of stewardship as ‘responsible use and care’ of nature, and stewardship as a ‘balancing act’ between stewards’ use of natural resources for agricultural production and their responsibility to protect and manage the wider ecosystem.” (Cockburn, Cundill, Shackleton and Rouget 2019, p. 1). Through this, Critical theory somehow

becomes a light, as Rehman and Alharti (2016) mention, that will challenge the status quo and endeavour to bring emancipation and transformation.

### **3.4. Application of Critical Theory to Theology**

The critical paradigm and theology are no strangers to each other. According to Benyamini and Hotam (2015, p. 1), “critical thought and theological discourse have been challenging each other, as they share mutual themes alongside contesting motivations”. These themes ultimately aim to lead to the emancipation of human beings and somehow lead to particular transformations that will lead to understanding not only the way society does things but also how society views and understands certain contexts that affect everyone, including nature. This development has led to the foundation of what Benyamini and Hotam (2015) refer to as critical theology. This critical theology is said to be an inquiry “which negotiates between the critical and the theological fields of inquiry” (Benyamini and Hotam 2015, p. 1).

In the case of the research at hand, the researcher will not focus much on critical theology but rather on the importance of applying critical theory to theology. Applying critical theory in the context of theology also helps examine cultures and practices that are affected by the digital age (Ward 2000). Finding ourselves in the digital age means that there are some values that will be trampled upon and in this case, it is the intrinsic value of nature which has become a commodity used to serve human needs without any form of consideration for future generations. Unfortunately, because of the digital age, even the intrinsic value of human beings is reduced to nothing, as machines have easily replaced human beings in many respects (Pope Francis 2015).

When looking at theology, Ward (2000, p. ix) describes that its nature has “always been the transgression of boundaries”. This means that theology’s main focus has not always been centered on one thing but always seeks ways of offering a more comprehensive understanding of other discourses for it to be understood as well (Ward 2000). Critical theory helps with looking at contemporary issues and struggles as well as engaging with different movements and structures that can help challenge Capitalocene and bring forth a yearning for a more emancipatory, transformative, and accommodative society that excludes no one, even nature (Celikates and Flynn 2023). The two help challenge the historical embeddedness of language and culture in upholding and promoting power dynamics (Ward 2000), which in this case is

over nature. The application of critical theory to theology helps to challenge dominant frameworks that are derived from theological teachings of institutions and in this case, the misinterpretation of biblical texts that have led to the promotion of exploitation of nature instead of preservation of nature and stewardship.

The use of African Theology, as another field of Theology, to better understand the application of Critical Theory in Theology brings into play the concept of ubuntu, as mentioned in the preceding chapter and by Chitando (2020), who maintains that focusing on African Traditional/Indigenous Religions (AT/IRs) helps focus on the role of Ubuntu. This is seen in embracing the value of ubuntu which helps individuals and societies return to their cultural norms. According to Chitando (2020, p. 7), the concept of Ubuntu “expressed in the saying I am because you are because you are, therefore I am,” has been deployed to highlight African Indigenous approaches to the environment.” These do not only promote the concern of the other but that of deliberately and consciously using nature’s gifts in a way that will not impede the development of freedoms and happiness of others (Sen 1999) while enjoying the gifts that nature has to offer (Chitando 2020, Ikechukwu 2021).

Critical Theory, in this context, will help to bring to light the importance of not only focusing on the Western way of doing things but it will also help with regard to considering elements of AT/IRs that can help change the worldview of the society (Ward 2000). It will help individuals and communities to consider how some Western practices (Ward 2000), having made Africans forgo their cultures and practices due to colonialism (Chitando 2020), can be challenged and AT/IRs employed to bring back that aspect of the relationship between human beings and the environment which are very central in the African context.

### **3.5. Introduction to Eco-Theology**

When it comes to Eco-theology, we are somehow introduced to a new way of thinking about and understanding nature (Heimbrock & Persch 2021). This is attested to by Brotton’s (2016, p. xv) definition of Eco-theology as she states that it is “the study of how questions concerning understandings of ecology converge with theological inquiry to address the relationships between God, humans and non-humans”. Through this definition, we are introduced to what Eco-theology is and a question of its relevance comes to play. Dalton and Simmons (2010) mention a very important point in that, many people may view eco-theologians as idealists but

because of their open-mindedness to the realization of things changing even if it means by small modifications, they become realists who continue to hope in a better future, a future where change takes place.

Brotton (2016) also mentions how Eco-theology came into being in that sacred texts and the language of environmental studies play a pivotal role in understanding what Eco-Theology is. Through this as well, there is an appreciation of what was mentioned earlier on with regard to language playing a significant role in understanding sacred texts. Mukaria (2021, p. 17954) mentions that “the term eco-theology originates from two words, ‘ecology’ and ‘theology’”. The word 'ecology' was coined in 1866 by the German scientist Ernst Haeckel (Mukaria 2021). Eco-Theology, particularly Christian ecotheology, according to Conradie (2023, p. 5), is “characterized by a dual critique, namely both a Christian critique of ecological destruction and an ecological critique of Christian complicity in such destruction”. This complicity in the case of the current study may be seen in the continuing subtle dominion patterns and beliefs that cause harm to the environment in one way or another.

According to Deane-Drummond (2008, p. xi) “eco-theology turns against the tide of radical postmodern relativism or confessional counter-reaction in that it accepts that environmental problems have a substantial and reasonable basis in Reality”. This understanding of eco-theology will then help, to a certain extent, critique the dominion theology perspective that promotes counter-reactions, which are reactions deeply embedded in individuals’ Christian beliefs that do not help care for our common home. Throughout the years, eco-theology has managed to surpass its believed nature as a critique notion and become a constructive one as well (Conradie 2020). Through this constructive notion of Christian ecotheology, there is also a duality that Conradie (2020, p. 3) posits as a dual nature that “includes both a contribution to Christian authenticity and, on that particular basis, also a contribution to the public, interdisciplinary discourse on sustainability.” This duality then, makes complete sense when going back to the study at hand.

The Bible is an integral part of Christianity, which has had an influence on the current ecological crisis due to certain upheld beliefs or misinterpretations of texts. Therefore, Christian ecotheology tries to not only help Christians see the value of the bible and living according to its statutes, but it also calls for some sort of conversion in terms of interpreting texts and living out what the texts say for sustainability purposes. When going back to the issue

of understanding the biblical text which is somehow understood to encourage dominion, we then realise that there is a complicity of some sort, emanating from the very Genesis 1:28 text. Going back to the 1960s, there were texts written by Christians themselves calling for other Christians to heed the call of taking care of the environment and not exploiting (Dalton and Simmons 2010). This called for a change and a better understanding of the creation narrative, as well as the role humans have to play in taking care of the environment and preserving its integrity (Dalton and Simmons 2010). For this to take place, Chitando (2020, p. 3) contends that the realisation of “living in a characterised by a radical plurality of religions has led to the broadening of the focus, beyond Christianity and the Bible”.

In considering the relevance and role of Eco-theology, the importance of the use of African Theology comes to play. This is because it brings us to the heart of our context and the importance of engaging with “African Traditional/Indigenous Religions (AT/IRs) and the Environment” (Chitando 2020, p. 5). Ikechukwu (2021) supports this notion by introducing what he calls African Eco-Theology. African Eco-Theology is a theology that promotes social responsibility that seeks to preserve nature and all within it for future generations (Ikechukwu 2021). According to Ikechukwu (2021, p. xi), when one understands that Africans and nature have a very personal relationship, it somehow makes known “the African Christian’s theological reflections on the environment,” which makes African Eco-theology different from other theologies. The AT/IRs, according to Chitando (2020), are religions that introduce an indigenous way of taking care of our common home, which is more or less what Ikechukwu (2021) mentions in the relationship between Africans and nature.

It is therefore, important that in coming up with solutions in the African context, considering the role AT/IRs play should not be taken for granted (Ikechukwu 2021). Real transformation can only come from solutions that communities can identify with, using a language that they understand to realise the importance of preserving nature and taking care of it for future generations. The integration of these teachings are an important add on to the work eco-theology seeks to achieve. It does this by ensuring that individuals are aware of the fact that concern for the environment is not far from understanding God (Deane-Drummond 2008) which is ultimately what Eco-theology seeks to teach and accomplish. This theory, therefore, is important for this study as it helps not only critique dominant Christian beliefs but also makes known the importance of taking care of the environment with God as the centre and not an outside force who has given human beings dominion.

### **3.6. The intersection of Critical Theory and Eco-Theology**

The use of critical theory in understanding the ecological crisis that the world is currently facing is a phenomenon that Frankfurt School theorists recently engaged in, beginning with Vogel in 1996 (Celikates and Flynn 2023). Capitalism, which has played an important role in the ecological crisis and the moving away from people living an ethically good life, has led to the social change that needs to take place (Celikates and Flynn, 2023). This is where the degrowth movement has also gained momentum as it has helped to facilitate the move from capitalism, which also falls under climate politics (Fraser 2021).

Considering the role that eco-theology continues to play in the fight against the current ecological crisis, Christian eco-theology has not only been a critical task but also, one that is constructive (Conradie 2020). This is also attested to by Pope Francis (2015, p. 6) when he mentions the “increasing sensitivity to the environment and the need to protect nature,” which also shows not only the critical but constructive task that faith, religion, and eco-theology play in this. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Anthropocene also plays a pivotal role in understanding the intersection of critical theory and eco-theology. Haugaard and Cooke (2010, p. 1) mention that critical theory, in its very essence, “looks critically on social structures and social institutions from the point of view of their dominating effects on individual human subjects”. This aids in understanding the role that social structures and institutions can play in advocating for a theology that does not encourage exploitation.

Through this, one gets to understand that certain structures and systems contribute to the domination of human subjects who, in turn, dominate nature and exploit it for personal and not necessarily communal or societal needs. Considering the Anthropocene and how it places human beings at the top of the web of life as somewhat superior to nature (Moore 2016) makes it important to critique human dominion over nature, emphasizing the eco-theological tenet of stewardship and interconnectedness which makes us one with nature (Pope Francis 2015). This is because everything in nature is interconnected; nothing exists outside of the other, and nothing is superior over the other as both humans and nature rely on each other for continuity and survival purposes (Pope Francis 2015).

This intersection also helps in addressing not only the social crisis but the ecological crisis as well. Through this aspect, both the Anthropocene and Capitalocene aspects have to be considered, as well as they have an influence on both the social and ecological crisis at hand. This is because both systems have to be critiqued, and constructive frameworks developed to help better approach stewardship. Looking at Capitalocene and its role in materialism and growth at all costs, degrowth, as an alternative, stands a better chance to offer constructive frameworks. Anthropocene as well, which gives human beings the impression that they are superior to non-living things, can be challenged using stewardship and interconnectedness as constructive alternatives.

### **3.7. The Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Critical Theory in Theology**

Critical Theory according to Strunk and Betties (2019), is one of the theories considered to be an important theoretical framework when it comes to issues concerning equity and social justice in research. It is one theory that will help challenge injustices in society, especially those injustices that make it difficult for individuals and communities to thrive as they should. As Bünger and Mayer (2018) state, this theory is not only meant for critiquing injustices in the society, but it also assists in helping communities and individuals self-reflect as way to also challenge certain norms and values. Thompson (2017, p. 1) also highlights an important aspect of Critical theory, that it is “a distinctive form of theory in that it posits a more comprehensive means to grasp social reality and diagnose social pathologies”. It goes to show that Critical Theory is a theory that not only identifies problems but also helps to bring solutions in one way or another.

The theory is in line with the research at hand in that while it helps critique dominion theology, it also helps in looking at different ways that can be used to deal with issues of dominion in society. Understanding the importance of what is meant by critique, is also important as it forms a pivotal part of the theory. Thompson (2017, p. 1) goes on to explain a critique as “a distinctive form of knowledge derived from the insights of German idealism and developed in Marx’s writings that is opposed to the merely empirical and positivist models of knowledge”. It goes deeper than just mere knowledge and seeks to understand the world and how it operates. It also seeks above all things, to somehow reduce human suffering as every person in this particular theoretical framework is seen as a person with dignity, irrespective of the position they hold in life (Steinberg and Kincheloe 2010).

Ward (2000) mentions an important aspect in that Theology at its core is meant to help us understand who God is and that very view should be able to determine our immediate response to how we view nature. This is in line with what critical theory is about as there is somehow an overlap between its tenets and those of Christian ethics and ideas (Walker 2019). In all this, there is a view that critical theory and Christian theology in particular are incompatible. This is attested to by Shenvi and Sawyer (2019, no page.), who seem to be of the idea that “modern critical theory views reality through the lens of power”. This modern lens views everyone as either the oppressed or the oppressor with other factors like race gender class etc. considered (Shenvi and Sawyer 2019). Another identified issue with critical theory which might be deemed as a disadvantage to use the theory is its scepticism with regard to tradition and how tradition influences society and thus the need for transformation (Bronner 2017).

Walker (2019) also mentions how critical theory disregards Christian ethics embedded in Scripture, making lived experiences more important than what Scripture teaches. This then makes critical theory somewhat of a threat to the Gospel (Shenvi and Sawyer 2019). Christianity, more often than not, has been described as a religion that has perpetuated social ills and critical theory comes as an answer to those social ills (Watkins 2021). According to Watkins (2021, no page) “at its core, critical theory perpetually challenges the notion of institutional authority and the idea that true freedom can be identified with any one system of thought—whether that be a particular religion, a stream of political thought, or an overarching view of the world”. This is why this particular theoretical framework is important, as it helps not only critique but also challenge the certain values in Christianity that do not promote freedom but rather exercise power not only over individuals but also over nature, which has no one to advocate for.

### **3.8. Advantages and Disadvantages of using Eco-Theology in Theology**

Conradie (2023), mentions a very important point that explains what ecotheology is in mentioning that, it is a theory which endeavours to give Christian responses to the current ecological crises faced by the world. When considering the role that the Catholic Church has played in eco-theology, it is clear that the church has tried to formulate ways to promote eco-theology, the latest of these being Pope Francis’ encyclical entitled *Laudato Si* (Conradie 2023). It is of paramount importance to understand that “A Christian perspective on God’s relation to

Creation necessarily informs our understanding of humanity's relationship to the world in which we live" (Cannon 2014, p.1). This should propel human beings to look at nature and creation in a different way, which is what the study seeks to ultimately achieve. On a much larger scale, eco-theological ideas ultimately seek to bring light with regard to the interrelation that exists between religion and nature and tries to come up with ways that will help deal with the current environmental concerns (Luetz and Leo 2021). This is an advantage of using this theory especially in the context of the study.

The ultimate goal of eco-theology should be one that helps individuals and communities to understand that there can never be a relationship with God if there is no relationship with creation (Cannon 2014). This is true because it would be pointless to venerate the creator and disregard the created or vice versa. There has to be an appreciation of both creator and the created/creature for complete transformation to take place (Cannon 2014). Also, in acknowledging the relationship between the creator and the creature, one is able to see the importance of opposing the anthropocentric view that promotes the exploitation of nature (Kopp 2014). This is why Eco-theology even in the midst of contestations aims to somehow be able to "diagnose the economic, cultural, intellectual, and religious roots of the problem" (Conradie 2023, no page). Eco-theology is also concerned about the over-consumerism lifestyle not only in the outside world but in the church as well (Conradie 2023).

A disadvantage of this theory, according to Spencer (2015), is a theology that is more related to the contemporary environment than the traditional Christian doctrine. This might seem like a challenge to staunch Christians who revere doctrine more than contemporary contexts. Bevans (1985, p. 70) also notes that eco-theology falls under what is called a Praxis Model which means that such a theology "take inspiration from neither classic texts nor classic behaviour, but from present realities and future possibilities." This is more or less relating to the critical theory which is more on the contextual realities than tradition and doctrine. The two are theories are therefore, important to help with achieving the aim of the study at hand. Eco-theology also considers ways in which spirituality can be questioned with regard to the role it may play in hampering or impeding sustainability making it difficult for the care of our common home to be a common goal for everyone (Luetz and Leo 2021).

### **3.9. Reimagining Dominion Theology through Critical and Eco-Theology Lenses**

The relationship between human beings and animals has been viewed using three lenses, namely, the dominion paradigm, the stewardship paradigm, and the interconnectedness paradigm (Mitchell, 2023). This particular study, although leaning towards critiquing the dominion paradigm, also acknowledges the stewardship paradigm as well as the interconnectedness paradigm simply because the latter make up an important part of Eco-theology. According to Mitchell (2023), the dominion paradigm was taught by two of the most prominent Doctors of the Church, Saints Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, who were of a great conviction human beings are superior to the rest of creation. They never recognized the intrinsic value of animals or plants because they saw them as things to be used for the needs of human beings (Mitchell, 2023).

Considering the role of the interconnectedness of human beings and nature, Van Dyk (2012, p. 411) posits that Wittenberg's suggestion on the aforementioned is of paramount importance as it can "offer such a shared point of departure for natural scientists and eco-theologians." This shows the depth of considering this interconnectedness that does not esteem the other over another but sees everyone and everything in creation as important and of the same value. Pope Francis (2015) compares this interconnectedness to the mystery of the Trinity when he mentions that as human beings mature and grow, they come to a point of getting out of themselves and being in communion not only with others but with creation as well. Through this, we are able to see that human beings do not only rely on themselves and their intellect for survival but in reality, other human beings and creations play a pivotal role in our survival as individuals. This is where Critical Theory becomes important in that it helps to look at those transforming aspects, which in this case is interconnectedness to deal with issues of dominionism, mainly those of power and superiority of human beings over nature.

Eco-theology has been deemed as one of the theories that can help critique Dominion theological tenets and texts that have not helped in caring for our common home. Van Dyk (2012, p. 406) mentions that Wittenburg suggests that Eco-Theology "should involve more than analysing a few isolated texts and thus become central to biblical theology, that biblical metaphors should be transformed when necessary and that Eco-theology should be informed by modern science". Through this, the role that Eco-theology can play is a huge and it can help bring change with regard to preserving the environment and caring for our common home. It

is also important to consider the interconnection of creation as well as human beings in the web of life. The interconnectedness of creation looks at how all life forms, regardless of characteristics, possess the same intrinsic value and are interconnected (Ngwena, 2021). This interconnectedness of creation is also essential in challenging and critiquing Dominion Theology and embracing Eco-Theology.

### **3.10. Implications for Theological and Developmental Discourse**

This section is very important, it reflects on the significance of the use of critical theory and eco-theology in the context of theology and development. Having seen the advantages of both theories, the implications for the abovementioned discourses are that the two theories will somehow help challenge doctrines and power structures that do not help in capitalizing on sustainability and transformation. The main goal of the two theories is to promote sustainable development as an important aspect of theology. This is because sustainability plays a pivotal role in ecological integrity, in protecting nature and seeing its intrinsic value despite what has been said about that in the past. This can be done through the reassessment of dominant values that have and continue to govern the world, making it difficult to promote the care of creation and stewardship (Cho 2009).

This also means that to a certain extent, if this promotion of care of creation and stewardship is achieved, then also encourage FBOs to consider environmental advocacy following the example of Pope Francis (2015) in his encyclical on the care of our common home. The call to care for our common home is not reserved for a particular group but for everyone who sees the importance of sustaining the creator and creature relationship, instead of venerating the creator and using creation exploitatively (Pope Francis 2015). The theology and development discourse is one that urges individuals and communities to take personal responsibility for everyone's development in the society. This means that there should be a shift from the giver-receiver perspective to a more communitarian one, where the needs of the other are always considered and placed at the forefront (Klassen 2019).

### **3.11. Limitations of Critical Theory and Eco-Theology in this Study**

Critical theory which is more of a philosophical theory may be difficult to use in a theological study because of its complexity. This means that using it should allow the researcher to find

ways to simplify it and show its relevance to a theological study. Also, even though critical theory is a theory that leads to transformation, it might be difficult to find those clear solutions as the main focus will be on critiquing, but Eco-theology might help salvage the problem at this point. The use eco-theology may focus, especially in the study at hand, on promoting harmony and interrelationships between nature and human beings not being cognizant of contexts and issues that might have contributed to the environmental crisis. It also makes it difficult to critique power structures using Eco-Theology as it focuses more on the spiritual side of ecological care, this is where Critical Theory becomes important to help critique these power structures.

### **3.12. Conclusion**

The chapter has explored critical theory and eco-theology as relevant theories for this particular study. This exploration helped with understanding what critical theory is and how it contributes to this study, the same as ecotheology. It also gave a background of the philosophical underpinnings of the study, helping to understand the epistemology and ontology of the study which are embedded in the critical paradigm, and which acknowledge the role history plays in understanding knowledge in this context. Critical Theory and Eco-theology are integral in the understanding and formation of a theological reflection that will lead to transformative. The chapter has also brought to light the importance of understanding cultures and traditions and the role they play in understanding certain context and perpetuating power dynamics that support domination of nature. Although some of these cultural practices are important, we have also learnt that both the abovementioned theories are more context focused and traditional or culturally focused. Thus, using both theories, even though has its limitations, is still relevant to challenging dominion attitudes that do not promote stewardship to advocate for sustainability and transformation.

## **4. Chapter 4: A Qualitative Approach to Eco-Theology: Methodology in a Critical Paradigm**

### **4.1. Introduction**

The previous chapter delved into explaining the two main theories that form part of the theoretical framework, namely, Critical Theory and Eco-Theology as a predecessor to this chapter. This current chapter outlines the research methodology for the study. According to

Bouchrika (2024: no page), a methodology is a "systematic method used to resolve a research problem through data gathering using various techniques, providing an interpretation of data gathered and drawing conclusions about research data." Firstly, the chapter will outline the research paradigm which in this case is the critical research paradigm and approach of the study. Secondly, it will discuss the research design which will outline the overall structure of the research process. Thirdly, it will discuss the data collection methods. Fourthly, it will outline the data analysis techniques used in this study. Fifthly, the reliability, validity, and rigor of qualitative research will be discussed. Sixthly, the ethical considerations of the study will be outlined. Lastly, the chapter will discuss the limitations of the methodology used in the study, then the chapter will be concluded.

#### **4.2. What is Research Methodology?**

Research Methodology according to Mishra and Alok (2017) is said to be one of the subjects taught in many disciplines in the academic world. According to Khan et al. (2023, p. 1), research methodology is a "systematic approach used to conduct research and gather relevant data to answer research questions or investigate a specific problem." It is also a way that one uses to "systematically solve the research problem" (Nguyen, n.d., 7). In the case of this specific study, the research methodology will assist in reimagining Dominion Theology and employing the use of Eco-Theology to bring some form of transformation to our common home. A research methodology has key components that are very important for the study to be successful, and these are: Research design, data collection methods, sampling techniques, data analysis, validity and reliability, ethical considerations, limitations, and scope, and lastly, conclusion and interpretation (Khan et al. (2023).

Through this, one is able to know what doing research entails and what needs to be done to get the desired results. Research methodology also helps with knowing the relevant methods and techniques used so that the research is focused and grounded (Goundar 2012). In the case of this study, the research methodology type used is the qualitative method since this is a desktop study. A research methodology also refers to the philosophical and theoretical frameworks (Hassan 2024) which were explained in the previous section.

### 4.3. Research Paradigm and Approach

In the previous chapter, there was a discussion on the philosophical underpinnings that highlighted the ontology and epistemology of this critical study, which was largely embedded in this historical outlook of knowledge and how history shapes our reality in one way or another. In this chapter, the researcher will also look at the philosophical assumptions of this methodology often referred to as methodological assumptions. The methodological assumption, according to Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 55), is “characterized as inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher’s experience in collecting and analyzing the data.” This study adopted a Critical Theory study which makes up part of the interpretive frameworks. An interpretive framework according to Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 58), is said to be “paradigms, or beliefs that the researcher brings to the process of research, or they may be theories or theoretical orientations that guide the practice of research.”

Through this process, the researcher then chose a paradigm that was relevant to their study, one that helped throughout the process of conducting research. This means that it used the critical research paradigm as a chosen paradigm for this study. The critical paradigm is embedded in Critical Theory which endeavors to bring “human emancipation to liberate human beings from whatever enslaves them” (Asghar 2013, p. 3123). The reason behind this paradigm solely lies in the paradigm's capacity to aid in critiquing Dominion Theology using Eco-Theology and the Degrowth discourse. The study critiqued Dominion Theology using the critical, also referred to as the transformative paradigm. The paradigm was ideal because in critiquing Dominion Theology, Eco-Theology was used as a form of transformative alternative, while the research also discussed Degrowth principles, which assisted in challenging the notion of growth at all costs which Dominion Theology often perpetuates.

The relevance of the transformative alternative is seen in the application of the main theories and how the main purpose of the theories employed in the study both sought to either transform or emancipate society so that there is an interrelationship observed between nature and human beings. Creswell and Poth (2018) describe this framework as one that emancipates individuals and communities from whatever binds them to unjust structures, which, in this case, are those structures that advocate for the dominion of nature instead of correlation and stewardship. This is why the study used CDA which Van Dijk (2001, p. 357) defines as “a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality

are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context”. This is, therefore, very applicable to the critique of Dominion Theology as it analyses the dominance enacted and reproduced through biblical texts that have been used to support Dominion Theology.

The approach that was used in this instance is the Critical/Transformative approach. According to Rehman and Alharthi (2016, p. 55), this theory is mostly embedded in historical realism, which was observed in the ontological, epistemological, and methodological paradigms of critical research paradigm. This helped us understand the role that history played in understanding the current realities, as that can be dismissed. It also considered how those in power passed on the knowledge they have to others which might have, in this instance, perpetuated dominant structures that do not bring transformation (Rehman and Alharthi 2016). Through this approach, the research situated itself in “social justice issues and sought to address the political, social and economic issues, which led to social oppression, conflict, struggle, and power structures at whatever levels these might occur” (Kivunja and Kuyini 2017, p. 35).

The research used this paradigm to assist in looking at power structures and how they are setup within social structures to influence decisions that might impact the environment negatively (Kivunja and Kuyini 2017). This is why the researcher chose this paradigm because of its critical nature as well as its ability to transform societies and situations for the betterment of the people as Eco-theology seeks to do as well.

#### **4.4. Research Design**

A research design may be defined as “the overall strategy that you choose to integrate the different components of the study in a coherent and logical way, thereby, ensuring you will effectively address the research problem; it constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data” (Thakur, 2021, p. 53). Asenahabi (2019) also mentions that a research design is like a map or plan that the researcher uses to help with issues around data collection so as to achieve the intended results for the research. Through these two explanations, one is able to see the importance and relevance of a good research design so as to achieve the set objectives of the research at hand. As this is a qualitative study, a historical research design will be appropriate as a means for data collection. A historical

research design according to Shinija (2023) is a qualitative research technique that seeks to find meaning from events that have happened so as to interpret and explain the influence these events might have in the present moment. This is why a historical research design was chosen for this study as it has a relation as well to CDA as it also uses language and how it has influenced events overtime.

Qualitative research according to Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 79), “begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.” Also qualitative research is said to be inductive in nature which helps in ensuring that an understanding is drawn from the meanings and how individuals interpret events and situations around them (Mohajan 2018). Through this, the interpretation and meanings generated from Gen 1:28 will be better understood when looked at from an inductive perspective. According to Lundy (2008: 396), a historical research design is "most often associated with historiography as the primary research method. Historiography goes beyond data gathering to analyze and develop theoretical and holistic conclusions about historical events and periods."

The function and purpose of a research design is to ultimately assist in ensuring that the information and results gathered for the research are relevant to research question and lack ambiguity in all its forms (Thakur 2021). This research design is relevant for this study, especially when looking at where Dominion Theology comes from and how it influences the care of our common home. It is also appropriate as it will consider the history of Eco-Theology and its assistance in advancing ways of caring for our common home while at the same time looking at the Degrowth discourse which aims to promote the less is more narrative instead of the growth at all cost narrative promoted by Dominion Theology.

This research design also aided in understanding the link between the past and the present (Lundy, 2008), which in this case is critiquing Dominion Theology and seeing how Eco-Theology can counter some of Dominion Theology's existing beliefs and attitudes. The data analysis method that will be used in this instance, which is also encompassed in the CDA methodology, is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is "a data reduction and analysis strategy by which qualitative data are segmented, categorized, summarized, and reconstructed in a way that captures the important concepts within the data set" (Ayress 2008: 868). The use of Braun

and Clarke's 6 phase method for analysing information to acquire themes will be used to help with identification of themes.

#### **4.5. Data Collection Methods**

The research employs a desktop study also known as desk research and will use secondary sources as data. Desk research as Moore (2006) states, often solely relies on the re-analysis of other peoples' work and covers a wide range of activities. Through this re-analysis, one is able to get to understand where research is now and how it has progressed and continues to progress throughout the years. The researcher chose to do desktop research, particularly for this research because of the ability to easily access relevant theological texts. Considering time constraints, the other reason the researcher chose the desktop research is because of its time efficiency and cost effectiveness. This kind of research is useful for a theological research where religious documents and historical texts make up a big part of the study and are easily accessible on online repositories. Desktop study is also helpful in terms of analyzing secondary data making it easy to employ the use of analysis techniques like thematic analysis. Ethical considerations are also minimized when doing a desktop study.

According to Bouchrika (2024, n.p.), secondary research is a "summary or synthesis of data and literature that has been organized and published by others." The research at hand was secondary research. This means the study did not use interviews or focus groups as a means for data collection due to time constraints. Instead, it used already published literature. Data was collected using Google Scholar, JStor, Academia.edu, and other relevant academic sites. This data was mainly in the form of books, eBooks, journal articles, and scholarly research articles. These aided in answering the research question at hand. Boolean operators were used to assist with precision. Using Boolean operators, there were certain keywords used to get the relevant documents for the study at hand. This was to aid in matters of precision and conciseness of the study. These keywords included Dominion Theology, Eco-Theology, and degrowth discourse.

## 4.6. Data Analysis Techniques

### 4.6.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA hereafter) is said to be a method that looks at relations between language and power, which was relevant to this study (Wodak, 2001). CDA is “a cross-discipline set forth in the early 1990s by a group of scholars such as Theo van Leeuwen, Gunther Kress, Teun van Dijk, and Norman Fairclough (Amoussou and Allagbe 2018, p. 11). CDA is known to address social problems and also looks at the link between text and society and offers some form of action (Fairclough and Wodak 1997). It also helps deal with issues of around the relationship between language and power (Amoussou and Allagbe 2018). The study at hand observed this relationship from Lynn White’s (1967) paper that made this relationship very apparent in that Christians were using certain biblical texts to use their power to dominate and exploit nature.

This method was relevant, particularly with regard to critiquing Dominion Theology, which, to a certain extent, has used language in the form of biblical texts to exercise power or dominion over nature. The documents or texts that were used in this case are *The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis* by Lynn White (1963) and *Laudato Si: On Care for our Common Home* by Pope Francis (2015). These two documents helped not only critique but also looked at transformative ways that can be employed to answer the research question at hand. Considering that the study utilized Critical Theory as one of its main theories, CDA complimented it and helped critically analyze and critique Dominion Theology. It also helped us understand the degrowth discourse and the role of Eco-theology while also analyzing the language used and its effects on caring for our common home.

The use of language not only focused on critiquing Dominion Theology but it also looked at language from a Eco-Theological perspective and how language is used in that context. It looked at whether power relations are still at play in Eco-Theology as well. Eco-Theology helps us understand and value the intrinsic value of nature and in so doing helps in the promotion of stewardship and care of our common home. Through CDA, institutional and cultural contexts will also be looked at, especially considering how religious institutions and cultures or traditions have somehow continued to perpetuate dominion over nature. This method was used due to its complementarity to Critical Theory and Eco-theology. Due to its capacity to critique power relations and language, it helped look at social problems that affect communities as a

result of the domination of nature perpetuating the growth at all cost mentality that promote Capitalocene. In assisting with looking at language and power relations, it also helped with determining the themes that were identified in texts.

According to Luo (2019, No page) there are steps that one can follow to conduct CDA and these are:

**Step 1: Define the research question and select the content of analysis** – The researcher managed to do this at the beginning of the research and was able also to select two important documents that were used for content analysis. The research question for the Study at hand is intended to somehow bring to light the effects of Dominion Theology and aims to employ Eco-Theology and Degrowth to challenge Dominion Theology. The research question for the study is as follows: In what ways can Eco-Theology serve as a critique of Dominion Theology to promote caring for our common home? The concept of our common home is taken from the one of the documents that will be used for content analysis. This document is an encyclical by Pope Francis, mentioned earlier titled *Laudato Si: on the care of our common home* (2015). This document serves as an alternative to Dominion Theology, which promotes growth at all costs, thus also including degrowth as an alternative. Another document that was used for content analysis purposes is Lynn White Jr's document titled *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis* (1967), which focuses on where the ecological crisis began, looking at the role that Christianity has played through the promotion of dominion over nature, quoting scripture for that dominion and exploitation of nature. The two documents used for content analysis are relevant in answering the research question at hand. The selected documents will help answer the research question, at hand.

**Step 2: Gather information and theory on the context** – The researcher managed to gather information that is relevant to the research question which is on Dominion Theology and ET. The two documents used are both helpful and have been used widely by many authors when referring to Dominion Theology and ET. A literature review was also conducted to assist with what other scholars have said on Dominion Theology, ET and Degrowth. A theoretical framework was also established which is based on Critical Research Paradigm using Critical Theory and Eco-Theology as the main theories of the research. The gathering of information was conducted through using online repositories as this is a desktop Study which falls under qualitative research methodology. To get this information, a few search engines were used in order to get articles that are academic worthy. These search engines were Google Scholar,

JStor, Academia.edu, ResearchGate and the University of KwaZulu Natal's library resources. These were very helpful in not only obtaining documents but eBooks as well that helped provide invaluable information on the research topic at hand. In terms of the theoretical framework that was chosen, considering as mentioned that the research is embedded in a critical research paradigm which was explained in the previous chapter, Critical Theory and Eco-Theology were considered to be relevant theories for this research.

This was solely based on the Critical Theory's ability to not only critique especially the use of language and power, but also to consider ways of bringing transformation. Eco-Theology as well is also complementary to Critical Theory in that it also tries to bring to light methods and ways that can be used to take better care of the nature and the environment without destroying and exploiting the precious gifts of nature that God has given us. Also, the two theories assist with the positioning of this paper which is largely concentrated on theology and development and both theories have managed to bring that out. Critical Theory is more on the development side while Eco-Theology is on both the theology and development side. This is why both theories are important and relevant for this research.

**Step 3: Analyze the content for themes and patterns** – The researcher managed to find an analysis method that would be able to capture the patterns and themes embedded in the two documents that will be used for this research. Thematic Analysis was the method incorporated with CDA and used to find the patterns and themes within the documents. As explained earlier on CDA is an important method of analysis which is relevant to this study. Not only is it relevant but it is one that will help in understanding the patterns and themes within the two chosen documents of reference. To help with this process, an analysis software called NVivo was used to help generate codes and themes from the two documents. This method of analysis will also be helpful in terms of replicability and reliability. The software also helps in managing large amounts of data considering that this is a document analysis. The analysis software is also helpful especially in the usage of CDA as a method of analysis as it allows to track language and phrases that used especially in the two chosen documents for the research.

**Step 4: Review your results and draw conclusions** – The researcher was able, through the use of CDA and TA to analyse the results and draw conclusions from the identified themes due to their relevance and relatability with the research question and the research as a whole. As mentioned above, the use of NVivo software was a gamechanger because it allowed the

researcher to be able to have relevant codes derived from the selected documents for the research. As a result, themes were generated through these codes. The themes that were identified were in line with the research topic and research question. For example, themes around ecological crisis, dominion theology, Eco-theology, stewardship etc., were identified from the codes that were generated using the NVivo software. From these themes, conclusions about the importance of taking care of the environment were drawn, and transformative alternatives of stewardship and the recognition of the intrinsic value of nature were also emphasized. There were also conclusions drawn on ways in which human beings can participate in taking care of our common home and ensuring that everything that is nature and the environment are revered and protected as they should be.

Considering how the steps were relevant to the study, it is important to understand how each step was used. The first step assisted the researcher in seeing if, indeed, the chosen content was appropriate for the study and if they were going to assist in any way to answer the research question. Through the second step, the researcher used different search engines to get the relevant documents for the study. The chosen documents were some of the very important documents in the history of Dominion Theology and matters around Ecology. That is why gathering information beforehand was important so as to use appropriate content. In Step 3 of analyzing the content, the researcher was able to read and reread the content in order to be able to see if the content is applicable to the study. The final step was relevant to the study as it played a pivotal role in determining the appropriate themes from the selected texts. It also helped with understanding the content from the two chosen texts in order to be able to get to the point of identifying and selecting relevant themes that also helped with answering the research question.

#### **4.6.2. Thematic Analysis**

CDA was used together with thematic analysis as well. The two were complementary in the sense that while CDA made apparent the language that showed power and the importance of stewardship, thematic analysis aided in identifying the patterns and themes. Through the analysis of texts, thematic analysis became important, especially in the identification of themes that appear in both texts/documents that were selected for this particular research. According to Naeem, Ozuem, Howell, and Ranfagni (2023, p. 2), thematic analysis is “a research method used to identify and interpret patterns or themes in a data set; it often leads to new insights and

understanding.” The identification of themes was preceded by a process of rigorous reading and coding which helped identify themes that were within the texts. Coding, according to McLeod (2024, p. 1), is defined as a “process that involves assigning labels or codes to specific data segments that capture a single idea or concept relevant to the research question”. Through this process, the researcher was able to assign codes that ultimately led to themes that will be further discussed in the next chapter. To do the Thematic Analysis, the Researcher used the NVIVO software as an aid to both generating codes and themes, using the two documents mentioned earlier. This software aided in identifying patterns in the texts so as to add a meaningful contribution to the theological discourse.

The researcher used Braun and Clarke’s (2013) process to help with undertaking the whole thematic process. This process has 6 phases that help with the process of identifying themes. These are the phases that were used for this research:

**Phase 1: Familiarization with the data** – Here, the researcher familiarized herself with the two texts selected for this research, which are Lynn White’s paper on *The Historical Roots of the Ecological Crisis* (1967) and the Pope’s encyclical on *Laudato Si: on the care of our common home* (2015). Through reading and re-reading the text, the researcher was able to understand what the texts were about, including the core message behind the two documents. Which was of great assistance when using NVivo for the familiarization and understanding of data.

**Phase 2: Coding** – Through this process, the researcher chose to use both deductive and inductive coding which may be understood to be a hybrid approach (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006). Xiao and Watson (2019) mention that deductive codes are codes that one generates before one begins reading the material one will use to generate themes. Inductive coding is coding that is done during the process of reading the data (Braun and Clarke 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2013, no page) coding “involves generating pithy labels for important features of the data of relevance to the (broad) research question guiding the analysis.” Through this process, the researcher was able to generate codes that were able to lead to meaningful themes that helped interpret the data used for this particular research.

**Phase 3: Searching for themes** – According to Braun and Clarke (2013, no page) a theme “is a coherent and meaningful pattern in the data relevant to the research question.” Having been able to identify codes that can be used to deduce themes, the researcher saw that most of the

themes were relevant to the research topic and would be of great help in answering the research question. Through coding, the researcher was able to identify similarities in those codes that were later used to generate the relevant themes to be used in the analysis (Braun and Clarke 2013). As mentioned, there was an inductive and deductive method used, which will be explained later on. The identified deductive codes were Dominion, Exploitation, Stewardship, Anthropocentrism, Social Justice and Care of creation. The inductive codes were then derived from the two texts.

**Phase 4: Reviewing themes** – Through this process, the researcher was able to see whether the codes were relating to the themes generated (Braun and Clarke 2013). This also assisted in seeing if the themes still relate to the original data set and that the codes and themes generated did not lose the real meaning of the data or readings that were chosen for this purpose. The identified themes were coherent and there was no need to collapse other themes or split other themes to get the correct themes that represent the data. The researcher was familiar with the process thus it was not much of a challenge to identify the themes. NVivo software was also very helpful in reviewing the themes that were identified.

**Phase 5: Defining and naming themes** – In this phase, the researcher went on to name the themes appropriately and a background of the themes, with relevant support from the identified texts was given. This process according to Braun and Clarke (2013, no page) helps with “identifying the ‘essence’ of each theme and constructing a concise, punchy and informative name for each theme.” The names given to the themes helped the researcher to somewhat summarise what the themes meant in just one word. The use of deductive and inductive coding also played a huge role in naming these themes.

**Phase 6: Writing up** - Through this process, since the themes identified were coherent and spoke to a data set that was used in this case being the two documents, the researcher found this phase easy because the same extracts helped generate codes that ultimately led to the identified themes. There were relevant data extracts used to further support the themes that were identified in the previous phases. The two analysis techniques mentioned above aided the researcher in identifying and getting the results that helped answer the research question.

## **4.7. Reliability, Validity, and Rigor in Qualitative Research**

### **4.7.1. Reliability**

Reliability in the social sciences has been seen to be problematic as when considered from a scientific perspective, it looks at the results obtained in particular research and if these will be the case if the same process is followed in a different context (Cypress 2017). What is important is the study being able to be repeated or replicated and still get the same results (Cypress 2017). Even though this is the case, some scholars have argued that reliability can only be tested in quantitative studies and not qualitative studies making it difficult to know whether it is there in qualitative research or not (Altheide and Johnson 1998). In the case of the research at hand, the researcher tried to use reliable and credible sources that can be revisited for verification purposes and correct references for the sources have been provided at the end of the research paper. The researcher also documented the process by mentioning the data collection and data analysis techniques used in the research.

### **4.7.2. Validity**

Validity, according to Cypress (2017, p. 256), is defined as “the state of being well grounded or justifiable, relevant, meaningful, logical, confirming to accepted principles or the quality of being sound, just, and well-founded.” Validity is also another controversial term in qualitative research like reliability and rigor (Cypress 2017). Validity is said to be about the accuracy of measures taken during research (Middleton 2024). In the case of the current research, the researcher did not use any measurements since this was a desktop study and did not include any human subjects. Even though there were no human subjects, there is still transferability and credibility, especially with the use of NVivo software. This enabled the researcher to be able to understand the importance of software.

### **4.7.3. Rigor**

According to Cypress (2017), qualitative research over the years has been under scrutiny and the term rigor has not been spared as well. Rigor as Cypress (2017, p, 254) defines it, is “the quality or state of being very exact, careful, or with strict precision or the quality of being thorough and accurate.” Like with reliability, having a sound research question and clear and appropriate research methods to use is important so as to enhance trustworthiness as well (Johnson, Adkins and Chauvin 2020). Cypress (2017) mentions that rigor is achieved in a

research through the “inclusion of different philosophical perspectives inherent in a qualitative inquiry and the strategies that are specific to each methodological approach including the verification techniques to be observed during the research process.” In the case of the research at hand, the researcher ensured to include the philosophical perspectives which were embedded in the critical/transformational paradigm, with the epistemology, ontology and methodological approach explained also from a critical paradigm perspective.

#### **4.8. Ethical Considerations**

The research went through a thorough process of approval with the University of KwaZulu Natal’s research and ethics committee. There were a number of considerations taken to ensure that the study was conducted in an ethical manner, this includes going through the process of an oral review with the oral review committee and submitting the research proposal for ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Committee before the research can commence. Careful consideration was also given to terms of sources used and correct referencing to ensure there is no credit taken for work that the researcher has not done. The research paper will then be handed to the University.

#### **4.9. Limitations of the study’s methodology**

Due to the interpretation of language and finding meaning in the very texts, the researcher ran the risk of being biased due to subjectivity that comes with the interpretations of language (Wodak and Meyer 2015). Since this is a theology and development study, the researcher’s personal beliefs may to a certain extent unintentionally affect the analysis of the discourse especially because of religious beliefs since the researcher does not subscribe to dominion beliefs. Another limitation to using CDA may stem from its complexity as it is a discourse that requires the researcher to dedicate enough time to understanding language use as well as the context in which the language is used which might be a context the researcher is not familiar with, especially because the research is a desktop study. Using CDA to analyze religious texts may be another limitation since CDA is more of a socio-political theory more than a theological theory and may to misinterpretations of the texts and theology.

When it comes to the use of Thematic Analysis as part of the study, the researcher might run the risk of oversimplifying texts in order to generate themes from the two readings that were

used as the main texts for the research. Also, through using TA, the researcher might run the risk of not fully engaging with CDA's emphasis on power dynamics as one of the main goals of CDA is to uncover power dynamics that lead to domination and exploitation of nature which is something TA does not take into account, its main theme is to find themes that are in line with the research question. TA also relies on the researcher's interpretation which is highly influenced by their understanding and perspective. This might alter the true meaning of the texts as the themes found may affect how the researcher analyses the data they have, also leading to some form of bias.

The study sought to critique Dominion Theology using Eco-Theology and the Degrowth discourse to promote integral care for our common home. Due to time constraints, one of the main limitations of this study due to time constraints was making the study a desktop qualitative study instead of including other qualitative research methods like interviews and focused groups. This limited the accuracy and more realistic data the researcher would've got since desktop research only limits the search to documents. Another limitation to doing a desktop was issues with network coverage due to load reduction in my area.

There are also limitations to using a desktop study. The first limitation is that there is limited access to primary data because it primarily uses and relies on sources that are already existing in online repositories, which does not include firsthand information from religious leaders and practicing eco-theologians (Perez-Sindin 2017). There might also be potential gaps in the information found in online repositories and some of the information might not be available in online repositories, making it difficult to find documents that might have been helpful to enhancing the results (Perez-Sindin 2017).

A desktop study has an over-reliance on secondary data which would lead to a repetition of information limiting the studies originality. Understanding cultural contexts is also difficult when doing a desktop study, considering theological interpretations. There are also potential biases especially when it comes to issues of interpretations (Owa 2024). Reliability is also an issue, so you might find that since theological discourses are evolving, what is on the online repositories might not be as up-to-date (Owa 2024). Lastly, there is a restricted scope of analysis as a desktop study relies on secondary sources and does not have any field data.

#### **4.10. Conclusion**

This chapter managed to establish a methodological framework that helped explore the implications of Dominion Theology and tried to also look at the potential ET holds to transform individuals and societies at large. Through the assistance of CDA, there was an examination of language and texts using the two documents that were mentioned which helped bring to light the power dynamics and misinterpretations in the texts used to perpetuate dominion in religious circles and in the society. The use of TA also allowed the researcher to identify themes and patterns that will ultimately help promote ecological justice and care for our common home. This methodological design is crucial as it considers and is in alignment with the research aim and brings the analytical ability of Critical Theory together with the constructive and transformative insights of ET to better understand the role theology plays in the care of our common home. The chapter also highlighted the ethical considerations as well as the reliability, validity and rigor of the research, The limitations of the methodology were also mentioned, showing that even though these methods are not entirely perfect, they can still be used to achieve the desired objectives of the research.

### **5. Chapter 5: Eco-Theological Alternatives to Dominion Theology: Findings and Discussion**

#### **5.1. Introduction**

Having dealt with the methodology in the previous section of the Study, the researcher now delves into the results or findings of the Study in line with the key research question by using the two important documents mentioned in previous sections. This chapter will, firstly, go back to the research question to bring context and a better understanding of this section of the Study. Secondly, the chapter will briefly discuss the method of analysis. Thirdly, the chapter will discuss the themes identified. Fourthly, the chapter will then delve deeper into the findings and discuss the findings. Lastly, the chapter will conclude.

#### **5.2. Key research question**

In what ways can eco-theology serve as a critique of dominion theology to promote caring for our common home?

### **5.3. Method of Analysis**

Reiterating what was mentioned in the previous chapter, the method of analysis for this Study at hand was Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which considers the importance of understanding the use of language and how it can somehow denote power in subtle ways. NVivo Software was also used to generate codes, and themes were later identified from the generated codes. The software gave the researcher a better and more replicable way of generating codes and themes without manually doing it. Still, with the same process, the deductive and inductive methods of identifying themes were used in order to get to the Thematic Analysis that the NVivo Software assists with. Below are the themes identified in the two key documents used as points of reference for the Study.

### **5.4. Themes Identified**

The following themes, as mentioned above, were identified from the two most crucial documents used in the Study. Some of the themes mentioned were found in both texts, while some were not. The underlying, if not overarching, themes that kept coming were power and destruction. The themes mentioned here were outstanding and helped answer the research question at hand better. The identified themes are:

**5.4.1. Destruction/Exploitation of Nature** – This looks at how human beings have exercised power over nature, emphasizing the Anthropocene and Capitalocene that continue to plague society.

**5.4.2. Plant and Animal Adaptation** – Here, the theme looks at how plants and animals have managed to modify themselves over time due to the fact that they needed to adapt to a new environment that they would not have otherwise survived in. This was also brought about by the unnatural treatment that was experienced by nature.

**5.4.3. Power** - This theme considers power exercised by man(sic) over time on nature without much consideration of the intrinsic value of nature.

**5.4.4. Change** – This theme considers the change that human beings have to undergo to take better care of the environment

**5.4.5. Ecological Concern** – Here, the documents consider the issues that have ultimately led to the ecological crisis the world is experiencing today.

**5.4.6. Human Influence (Dominion and Anthropocentrism)** - This theme considers the role or influence human beings have had in the ecological crisis the world faces.

**5.4.7. Science and Technology and Environmental Impact** – The theme explores the roles that have been played by both Science and Technology in the worsening or control of the ecological crisis.

## **5.5. Findings and Discussion**

### **5.5.1. Destruction of Nature**

Exploitation and destruction of nature have been ongoing phenomena that have caused a lot of problems and led to calls to take better care of the environment. According to Mihajlović and Đorđević (2022), this issue of exploitation of nature, including natural resources with its ability to negatively impact the environment, needs a sustainable development framework that will ultimately lead to sustainable use of resources. Even though this is almost always blamed on the misinterpretation of Gen 1:28, the expectation would be to take care rather than exploitation and ultimate destruction of that which God has given us. When going back to White (1967), the issue of destruction and exploitation comes out strongly. White (1967, p. 1203) describes this destruction of nature in the following way:

Once it had been composed of delightful grassy 'glades; now it was becoming overgrown with unsightly brush because the rabbits that formerly kept such growth under control had largely succumbed to a disease, myxomatosis, that was deliberately introduced by the local farmers to reduce the rabbits' destruction of crops.

From this, there is a realization that is brought to light by White (1967), especially on how things looked like in nature back in the day, but due to environmental changes, the very species meant to help preserve the environment was no longer there. This shows the importance of the ecological cycle and how every species has a special role to play in the ecosystem.

The theme, which is tightly knit to that of dominion and Anthropocene (which will be explained later), shows that this exploitation and destruction of nature is tied around dominion which the researcher is trying to criticize. Even though there might be staunch dominionists who believe in the importance of taking dominion and using what is at our disposal to cater to our needs, there is a need for sustainable use of what God has given us so that everyone and not only a selected few benefits from these resources. Pope Francis (2015, p. 5), talking about destruction, also mentions that:

The destruction of the human environment is extremely serious, not only because God has entrusted the world to us men and women, but because human life is itself a gift which must be defended from various forms of debasement. Every effort to protect and improve our world entails profound changes in lifestyles, models of production and consumption, and the established structures of power which today govern societies.

The critic should ultimately lead human beings to acknowledge their contribution to the destruction of creation without putting the blame on what is misinterpreted in scripture. The researcher sees this as the beginning of looking at alternatives to Dominion Theology to take better care of the environment and creation as a whole as it is a common home for living and non-living things. Pope Francis (2015, p. 20) also reiterates the words of White (1967) and Mihajlovic and Đorđević (2022) when he mentions that "If present trends continue, this century may well witness extraordinary climate change and an unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with serious consequences for all of us." This is why it is important to look at ways of preserving the natural resources God has blessed us with and promote stewardship in every way possible.

### **5.5.2. Plant and Animal Adaptation**

When it comes to issues of plant and animal adaptation, there is a realization also that, to a certain extent, both plants and animals did not have much of an option but to try to adapt to the new ecological conditions. According to Jain et al. (2019, p. 1), adaptation is "alterations/changes in physiological, behavioural, and structural characters of an individual in response to their environment." Most plants and animals have been going through this, trying to adapt to the new conditions caused by the current ecological crisis. Pope Francis (2015) also alludes to the fact that adaptation is not only a matter of plants and animals but looks at it from the point of view that in the process of the preservation of creation, there should, to a certain extent, be an improvement in the quality of life of the people as well as their ability to adapt to

whatever conditions they find themselves in, without having to feel they are on their own. White (1967) mentions instances where there was a modification of contexts, where plants and animals had to change from their original habitat to that which would also favour their conditions. White (1967) mentions a few examples of these:

For 6 millennia at least, the banks of the lower Nile have been a human artifact rather than the swampy African jungle which nature, apart from man, would have made it. The Aswan Dam, flooding 5000 square miles...(White 1967, p. 1203). It has been noted, for example, that the advent of the automobile eliminated huge flocks of sparrows that once fed on the horse manure littering every street (White 1967, p. 1203). All forms of life modify their contexts (White 1967).

Through the above examples, the researcher observed that plants and animals have unique ways of adapting to new conditions when their natural habitat has been disturbed. The above also shows how misinterpretations and language understanding have somehow led to these extreme environmental changes, and they continue to do so, considering climate change and how weather patterns have changed over time.

This theme, in essence, helps the researcher to see that indeed every creature under the earth matters and that for human beings to take care of their common home, being cognizant of the realities that come with these changes is important. In the dominion narrative, these modifications and adaptations are not taken into consideration, as it might seem as if they are not having much of an impact. In all honestly, especially going back to the research question, eco-theology can provide alternative ways of caring for the environment without altering species' natural habitat. This is why stewardship is important, so such things may be curbed or avoided. Therefore, it is important to understand the intrinsic value of creation to take better care of it without losing any species in the process.

This understanding, according to Pope Francis (2015, p. 30), can also bring awareness that:

Greater investment needs to be made in research aimed at understanding more fully the functioning of ecosystems and adequately analyzing the different variables associated with any significant modification of the environment. Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another.

This is ultimately the end goal of understanding the role and intrinsic value of every human being in preserving and protecting creation at all costs.

### 5.5.3. Power

The ecological crisis the world is currently facing may be attributed to power. Power is something that human beings exert over nature and oftentimes over others as well. According to Venon (2019), religious institutions somehow have a positive and negative impact in relation to people. Sometimes, these institutions use Biblical texts and theological doctrines to exercise power on the people, leading to some form of abuse of power on the side of those who are in authority. This is also noted by White (1967), especially when going back to the history of creation. Adam named all the animals, and this is where the issue of dominance over animals came about. White (1967, p. 1205) continues to explain that:

God planned all of this explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes. And, although man's body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in God's image.

The statement above shows the most important lesson that Dominion Theology has missed, that of understanding the role of man(sic) in creation and how, if truly created in the image of God, should be able to take care of creation as God takes care of His own without exercising any kind of power or dominion over creation.

Still considering the issue of power and its impact on creation, Pope Francis (2015, p. 97) states that:

The Catechism firmly states that human power has limits and that "it is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly". All such use and experimentation "requires a religious respect for the integrity of creation.

Pope Francis continues to explain the importance of understanding who and what human beings are in relation to taking care of creation when he mentions that:

It is enough to recognize that our body itself establishes us in a direct relationship with the environment and with other living beings. The acceptance of our bodies as God's gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation (2015, p. 115).

The entire understanding and respect of all creation stems from human beings seeing themselves as gifts, not only to fellow human beings but also as gifts to the environment that contribute positively to the livelihood and preservation of creation as a whole. It helps recognize the intrinsic value and integrity that living and non-living beings should be afforded.

This theme of power, as mentioned earlier, shows the subtle ways used by Christianity to dominate and exploit nature in every possible way to cater to human needs. As Pope Francis (2015) mentions, understanding who and what human beings ought to be and respecting who they are as gifts that ought to give and not only take what nature has for them. It also goes back to the question asked by White (1967) regarding how Christianity as a religion tells people about their relations with each other and to nature. This sheds some light on how teachings were or are still used as a way to exercise power over nature without being mindful of the important role creation as a gift plays in their lives. In helping to answer the research question, as Pope Francis (2015) states, recognizing that human beings are a gift to nature and that nature is a gift to human beings will somehow change how they look at creation, whether as something to be exploited or rather as a common home that benefits all living and non-living things. This may also be considered an alternative, where human beings begin to understand who they are and value nature for its important role in ensuring good livelihoods for all human beings. The teachings of interconnectedness and stewardship come out strongly in this theme.

The language issue also comes into play in this instance as we realize that language, through the use of biblical and theological texts, is used to push the dominion agenda. This shows how the misinterpretation of a single text can cause so much harm to human beings and the environment at large. Seeing the different ways a text can be interpreted is a good start to understanding it instead of just assuming that is what the text means and acting upon it. White makes an important observation regarding the language issue. He states that:

Certainly the forms of our thinking and language have largely ceased to be Christian, but to my eye the substance often remains amazingly akin to that of the past. Our daily habits of action, for example, are dominated by an implicit faith in perpetual progress which was unknown either to Greco- Roman antiquity or to the Orient. (1967, p. 1205).

This also attests to the issue raised earlier on how Christianity seeks progress using language like corporate companies that only work for profits, which is what Christianity today is also after. Considering religious language and how it is sometimes used to exercise power, Pope

Francis mentions how language can also promote ethical principles that can help take better care of the environment. He states that:

It would be quite simplistic to think that ethical principles present themselves purely in the abstract, detached from any context. Nor does the fact that they may be couched in religious language detract from their value in public debate. The ethical principles capable of being apprehended by reason can always reappear in different guise and find expression in a variety of languages, including religious language (2015, p. 146).

Understanding and interpreting language plays a pivotal role in the gradual shift towards caring for our common home and realizing that the use of language should somehow promote and advocate for ethical principles that promote care for our common home and not dominion and exploitation.

#### **5.5.4. Change**

Change often comes in different ways. Some of it may be good, while some of it might be bad. In all of this, we must acknowledge the role that history played in the change currently witnessed in society, especially regarding taking care of the environment. This change also came in the form of how things are done, especially in agriculture, although that will be discussed in the last theme. In this particular theme, we consider the role that language plays in the changes we are witnessing when it comes to taking care of the environment and somehow owning up to the damage that has been done through negligence and exploitation. As Pope Francis rightly states,

Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life (2015, p. 149).

This message makes us aware of what was mentioned above in the importance of human beings changing, especially concerning how they view creation in its entirety. By beginning this journey of change, human beings will realize the challenge that stands before them, which will demand some form of renewal for change to occur (Pope Francis 2015). Human actions have also somehow prompted the change and loss of biodiversity (Corvalan 2003). Ecological change has been taking place over a number of years. Still, there has never been a clear history of how this ecological change came about or what happened for the West to speak about ecological change (White 1967). Pope Francis also notes that

A change in lifestyle could bring healthy pressure to bear on those who wield political, economic and social power. This is what consumer movements accomplish by boycotting certain products. They prove successful in changing the way businesses operate, forcing them to consider their environmental footprint and their patterns of production (2015, p. 151).

This is the kind of change that human beings need to adopt, which will bring radical transformation and challenge the status quo. Change that does not choose or favour a few but change that promotes the livelihood of everyone and creation as a whole. Christians, in this instance, especially those who subscribe to Dominion Theology, should consider the consequences of their misinterpretation of texts and how that has led to the changes observed today. This is attested to by Pope Francis when he mentions that,

If someone has not learned to stop and admire something beautiful, we should not be surprised if he or she treats everything as an object to be used and abused without scruple. If we want to bring about deep change, we need to realize that certain mindsets really do influence our behaviour. Our efforts at education will be inadequate and ineffectual unless we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature (2015, p. 157).

The above clearly indicates the need to look back at all that creation has been and continues to be to the human race. If human beings are able to see the goodness of God in what He has created and see the need to not only preserve but also protect it, then and only then can human beings begin to look at creation from a different angle. Not seeing the beauty of creation, as Pope Francis (2015) states, will not propel any individual to protect or take care of that beauty; rather, living in the Capitalocene state and attitude which has been adopted by many Christians and not only those who subscribe to Dominion Theology, will be an ongoing exercise for many of us. This change, therefore, requires what Pope Francis (2015, p. 159) refers to as ecological conversion, where,

the effects of their (human beings) encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.

Therefore, this theme makes the importance of not holding on to old teachings apparent and thinking they will still be relevant to date. Change, whatever form it takes, is important so that transformation and care for our common home can take place.

### 5.5.5. Ecological Concern

Understanding what ecological concern entails requires us to go back to the previous theme and reflect more on what Pope Francis (2015) spoke about regarding ecological conversion. By being cognizant of the beauty embedded in nature and creation as a whole, human beings can reach that point of being concerned with what happens ecologically. Ecological concern should ultimately lead to a point where human beings realize that the continuous destruction and over-exploitation of nature will somehow have a negative impact not only on plants, animals, and the environment as a whole but also on human beings who are also perpetrators of the damage caused to a certain extent (Fransson and Gärling 1999). This shows that ecological concern not only begins by caring for the environment but rather with the consequences that come as a result of not being concerned about fellow human beings, as long as a certain minority group benefits. White states that,

As we enter the last third of the 20th century, however, concern for the problem of ecologic backlash is mounting feverishly (1967, p. 1203).

This reality is beginning to hit badly, considering how the above was said almost 60 years ago and how ecological concern is a problem that affects both human beings and nature as a whole. Dominion Theology followers tend to downplay issues related to environmental concerns and degradation. This is also attested to by Pope Francis (2015), who mentions that Christians who often see themselves as pragmatists tend not to be concerned about taking care of the environment and what is happening in the environment.

Pope Francis gives a definition of what an ecological crisis is, which was given by St. Paul VI explaining it as,

a tragic consequence" of unchecked human activity: "Due to an ill-considered exploitation of nature, humanity runs the risk of destroying it and becoming in turn a victim of this degradation". 2. He spoke in similar terms to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations about the potential for an "ecological catastrophe under the effective explosion of industrial civilization", and stressed "the urgent need for a radical change in the conduct of humanity...(2015, p. 4).

Pope St. Paul IV reiterates what was said above regarding the way human beings treat creation while, in turn, becoming victims of their own recklessness and lack of concern for the

environment. This means that human beings need to pay close attention to their actions and how they respond to the ecological challenges that continue to arise daily. Ecological concern starts when human beings forget themselves, stop seeing themselves as the highest in creation, and consider the importance of interrelatedness and interconnectedness between human beings and nature. This will help give nature and all of creation the respect it deserves because of that inherent interrelation.

As Pope Francis (2015) states, human beings ought to be united by this ecological concern; it should never be reserved for a particular group of people who claim to be concerned but enact laws that do not favour nature and all human beings. Dominion Theology tends to forget the place of human beings in creation and esteems human beings to the point of not taking into consideration the hurt caused on creation because of domination and exploitation. As a response, or rather alternative to human beings acting unconcerned about the ecological crisis, Pope Francis gives some form of appeal to human beings by stating that,

The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home (2015, p. 12).

This goes to show how important it is for human beings to unite and come to the point of being stewards more than parasites who continually suck out the beauty of nature without any means of allowing nature to regenerate without expecting nature to give constantly. In contrast, human beings do not give much to creation. Eco-Theology can come in handy in helping human beings realize the integral part they ought to play, especially in caring for our common home.

#### **5.5.6. Dominion and Anthropocene**

Issues around dominion and Anthropocene are not far from each other. They are intertwined. This theme takes us back to the reading in Genesis 1:28 and White's paper, which contends that dominion over creation was and is still a promotion of Christianity. White (1967) argues that the very text of Genesis 1:28 has allowed Christians to justify their exploitation of nature for human interest's sake, making humans think that they have power and dominion over nature and all of creation. White states that,

The Christian dogma of creation, which is found in the first clause of all the Creeds, has another meaning for our comprehension of today's ecologic crisis. By revelation, God had given man the Bible, the Book of Scripture. But since God had made nature, nature also must reveal the divine mentality (1967, p. 1206).

Nature, therefore, should propel human beings to praise God through nature. This should be done by protecting and preserving creation and not exploiting it. This also brings us to the issue of the Anthropocentric nature of human beings. This nature has made human beings think that they can do anything and everything to create without being concerned about the implications of their actions. As mentioned in preceding chapters, Anthropocene is understood as an “era of humans—in which a single species, *Homo sapiens*, would come to exert a dominant control on the characteristics of our planet—particularly its chemistry—and to usurp the natural habitat for other species that share the Earth with us” (Van Houtan and Northcott 2010, p.14). This explanation of the Anthropocene brings some form of understanding, especially regarding how human beings misinterpreted biblical texts meant to help take care of creation and not necessarily destroy or exploit it for selfish reasons, which are mostly embedded in Capitalocene attitudes. Pope Francis (2015) asserts that the bible, which has been used falsely for selfish reasons, has no place for tyrannical anthropocentrism that is not concerned with the rest of creation. Pope Francis (2015) also mentions that in the Catholic faith specifically,

The Catechism clearly and forcefully criticizes a distorted anthropocentrism: Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection... Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness. Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things

The above gives us an idea of what has been meant by creation, having an intrinsic value like human beings, and that it deserves as much respect and concern as any living creature, especially human beings, would receive. The above quote goes entirely against what White (1967) mentions about what Christians believed about God's purpose of creating Adam and giving him 'dominion' over all of creation. According to White,

Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions (except, perhaps, Zoroastrianism), not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends (1967, p. 1205).

Pope Francis gives some sort of response to White's (1967) interpretation of the biblical texts when he states that,

Not only has God given the earth to man, who must use it with respect for the original good purpose for which it was given, but, man too is God's gift to man. He must therefore respect the natural and moral structure with which he has been endowed (2015, p. 86).

This then shows, to a certain extent, what God might have meant in that Biblical text. The above takes us back to the theme of power and how language plays a pivotal role in understanding exactly what was meant by God in those particular Biblical texts. Language, as mentioned, can be distorted so that it serves a specific group's needs and forgets about the rest. Nature cannot exist outside of human beings, and human beings cannot exist outside of nature. From time immemorial, nature always had a spiritual connotation, where certain animals and plants were revered and respected, causing human beings to preserve and protect them. This may be attributed to the philosophy of Ubuntu, as mentioned in earlier chapters, and how using that philosophy can somehow influence human beings to take better care of nature. Pope Francis also mentions an important point in relation to modern anthropocentrism in that it,

has paradoxically ended up prizing technical thought over reality, since the technological mind sees nature as an insensate order, as a cold body of facts, as a mere 'given', as an object of utility, as raw material to be hammered into useful shape; it views the cosmos similarly as a mere 'space' into which objects can be thrown with complete indifference (2015, p. 86).

The above clearly indicates where human beings went wrong in exercising dominion over all of creation and how this continues to destroy nature. It disregards the value of creation, whether human beings see it or not. This theme leads us back to realizing the need and importance of transformation, letting go of beliefs that do not serve human beings and nature, and adopting those attitudes that would inspire change and respect towards nature, which is our common home.

#### **5.5.7. Science, Technology and Environmental Impact**

This theme considers the role that science and technology have played, particularly in the negative effects observed in the environment. Science and technology were meant to help advance human life. Still, to a certain extent, they have ruled over human beings and have even gone to the extent of destroying nature because of the Capitalocene nature of human beings. White posits that,

It is often hard for the historian to judge, when men explain why they are doing what they want to do, whether they are offering real reasons or merely culturally acceptable reasons. The consistency with which scientists during the long formative centuries of Western science said that the task and the reward of the scientist was "to think God's thoughts after him" leads one to believe that this was their real motivation. If so, then modern Western science was cast in a matrix of Christian theology. The dynamism of religious devotion, shaped by the Judeo-Christian dogma of creation, gave it impetus (1967, p. 1206).

This shows that from the beginning, science was meant to continue to show the mighty work of God in creation and continue to assist in making it better and not necessarily to destroy it. The whole point of the sciences and technology, as mentioned earlier, is to help make known the works of God, but unfortunately, as White states,

science and technology ... joined to give mankind powers which, to judge by many of the ecologic effects, are out of control (1967, p. 1206).

This is what led to the dominion, destruction, and exploitation of nature in the name of bringing advancements and progress. It is important to consider the consequences of using science and technology to bring about change. Even though, as mentioned, these were meant to bring advancement, Pope Francis also believes that,

If an artist cannot be stopped from using his or her creativity, neither should those who possess particular gifts for the advancement of science and technology be prevented from using their God-given talents for the service of others. We need constantly to rethink the goals, effects, overall context and ethical limits of this human activity, which is a form of power involving considerable risks (2015, p. 98).

The above shows the importance of considering ethics and the limits human beings should have when using science and technology. Pope Francis also believes that there is room for science and technology to flourish when he states that,

science and religion, with their distinctive approaches to understanding reality, can enter into an intense dialogue fruitful for both (2015, p. 45).

This is where the alternative of Eco-theology comes into play—understanding the role science and technology play, especially from a point of view that does not cause environmental degradation and exploitation. There needs to be consideration of possible collaborations that will show respect for creation and promote and preserve nature as is. Pope Francis reiterates this point by stating that,

It is right to rejoice in these advances and to be excited by the immense possibilities which they continue to open up before us, for "science and technology are wonderful products of a God-given human creativity". The modification of nature for useful purposes has distinguished the human family from the beginning; technology itself "expresses the inner tension that impels man gradually to overcome material limitations". Technology has remedied countless evils which used to harm and limit human beings. How can we not feel gratitude and appreciation for this progress, especially in the fields of medicine, engineering and communications? (2015, p. 75)

This view of gratitude towards science and technology also takes us to the alternative mentioned earlier. It does not leave science and technology behind but one that appreciates the goodness it can bring towards advancing life and promoting care for our common home.

## **5.6. Conclusion**

This chapter discusses the themes in detail and gives a picture of where dominion was and the alternatives that are to advance the protection and preservation of creation as a whole. It looked at the themes of the destruction of nature and plant and animal adaptation and, how human beings have played a pivotal role in that destruction, and plants and animals have had to modify themselves in order to adapt to the changes brought by the destruction of nature. It also looked at the themes of power and change, where the role of language was looked into, and how this language has further influenced the changes that are seen in the environment, leading to the current ecological crisis. The last two themes looked at Dominion and Anthropocene and science and technology. Through these, there was a lesson that even though science and technology have played a major role in the dominance and Anthropocene attitudes that have led to the ecological crisis the world currently experiences, the call is to appreciate the potential that science and technology have in providing alternatives to make development sustainable (Pope Francis 2015), in turn ensuring that better ways of caring for our common home are realized. Therefore, The following chapter will delve deeper into these alternatives that can help humans take better care of our common home.

## **6. Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **6.1. Introduction**

Having gone through the research process, the final chapter concludes the research paper by summarizing the main conclusions and giving recommendations for further consideration. It will do this firstly by looking back at the research problem, research questions, research

objectives. It will also give a summary of the theoretical framework used in the Study as well as the research methodology. Secondly, it will highlight the themes by looking at the role of Dominion Theology in its promotion of Anthropocentrism and Capitalocene. It will also discuss Eco-Theology's emphasis on stewardship, interconnectedness and ecological justice to better care for our common home. Thirdly, it will reflect on the Study's contribution to the theological discourse especially in advancing eco-theology. It will do this by giving practical contributions that will help advance and promote ecological justice and taking care of our common home. Fourthly it will discuss the limitations of the study. Fifthly, It will consider recommendations for future studies. Then the chapter will be concluded.

## **6.2. Summary of the Study**

### **6.2.1. Research Problem**

This study sought to explore how eco-theology can provide a robust critique of dominion theology and how incorporating degrowth principles can help promote a more sustainable and ethical relationship with our planet. By so doing, it aimed to contribute to the broader theological and environmental discourse, offering new insights and practical approaches to caring for our common home (Pope Francis, 2015).

### **6.2.2. Key Research Question**

In what ways can eco-theology serve as a critique of dominion theology to promote caring for our common home?

### **6.2.3. Research Sub-Questions**

1. What challenges does Dominion Theology create that inhibit caring for the environment?
2. What are the alternative practices of Eco-theology that can serve as a critique of Dominion Theology?
3. How can degrowth be used to encourage behaviour change while promoting necessary actions from Eco-theological aspects of caring for our common home?

#### **6.2.4. Research Objectives**

1. To investigate the challenges of Dominion Theology that inhibit caring for the environment.
2. To identify alternative eco-theological practices that promote caring for our common home.
3. To propose eco-theological strategies to encourage behavioural change on the environment.

#### **6.2.5. Theoretical Framework**

The study used Critical Theory and Eco-Theology as the main theories. Since the study was a critical Study, critiquing Dominion Theology using these two theories was paramount, especially in understanding the role that human beings can play in ensuring that there is integral care of our common home. Critical Theory, which is rooted in the Frankfurt School, helped with providing some form of lens to better understand and explore the power dynamics that outwardly show themselves in Dominion Theology. The theory also aided in critiquing the role of anthropocentrism and Capitalocene and showed how some religious ideologies actually promote both of these in one way or another, making exploiting nature a norm and not something that needs to be challenged.

Considering Eco-Theology, which was a good complementary theory to Critical Theory, There was a form of constructive approach introduced, especially with regard to offering a different interpretation of the Genesis 1:28 text. Through this re-interpretation, there was an emphasis on Stewardship, interconnectedness, and the intrinsic value of nature as a whole. These two frameworks not only provided a platform to critique Dominion Theology but also assisted in advocating for an integral care of creation and ecological responsibility.

#### **6.2.6. Methodology**

The Study employed a qualitative methodology, using desktop research as a means of analysis of theological texts, scholarly and religious literature, and documents. Critical Discourse Analysis was used in order to examine the language used in the theological discourse and its impact on the response to the ecological crisis and in challenging notions of Dominion Theology that promote exploitation. The use of a Thematic Analysis was supported by the use

of NVivo Software to help identify codes and themes such as power, ecological justice, and stewardship, just to name a few. The combination of these approaches assists in ensuring a systematic and rigorous analysis of the interaction between theology and ecological responsibility and ethics.

### **6.3. Key Findings**

#### **6.3.1. The role of Dominion Theology and its promotion of Anthropocentrism and Capitalocene.**

Through Lynn White's article on the *Historical Roots of the Ecological Crisis* (1967), there was a clear indication of the role that certain religious texts have played in the promotion of the Anthropocene but more especially in the exploitation of nature, contributing to the growing Capitalocene attitude in the society. If Dominion Theology continues to be a discourse that dominates in society, realize a society that takes care of nature and moves away from growth at all costs mentality and embraces the less is more attitude, remembering to preserve creation for future generations. Christianity's complacency, as mentioned earlier, has contributed to Dominion Theology's role in promoting exploitative behaviors instead of preserving attitudes. Understanding the role of human beings in nature through the Dominion Theology lens makes it difficult for them to see the need to protect and preserve the environment. Rather, it makes them feel like they are more powerful and should exercise this power on both living and non-living beings.

#### **6.3.2. Eco-Theology's emphasis on taking care of our common home**

The identified themes were more of a summary of the two documents that were used. Stewardship, interconnectedness, power, exploitation, intrinsic value of nature, and integral ecology were umbrella themes that further explained the essence of the documents, also helping to answer the research question emanating from the codes generated in the text. These themes were an indication of the work that needed to be done for human beings to take better care of the environment, understanding the most important role that human beings have, that of being stewards and not exploiters. The importance of understanding the interconnectedness of human beings and the environment and how they all rely on each other for survival was also an important lesson that came out of the readings. This interconnectedness tries to dispel the notion of power and exploitation in order to realize the intrinsic value of creation and

everything in it. Through this, human beings are encouraged to promote an integral ecology that helps to preserve nature and to take better care of our common home, a home that we share with all living and non-living beings on earth.

#### **6.4. Practical Contributions that will help Advance and Promote Ecological Justice**

##### **6.4.1. Behaviour Change and Action Campaigns That Can Promote Eco-Theology in Communities to Care For Our Common Home**

Change is impossible until society comes together to see what will work and bring the desired change. Change needs to begin with individuals so that it can ultimately infiltrate communities, countries, and the world at large, with behaviour change being crucial. When looking at change from a theological perspective, change and conversion "is difficult to be isolated from other, slightly different connotated concepts of change such as repentance, metanoia ... but like all of them denotes more than just an intellectual shift in opinion" (Laudato Si Research Institute, 2021: 8). When looking at the repentance aspect, it would be necessary also to consider the many misinterpretations of the dominion connotation in the bible and look at alternative ways of understanding it, ways that would ultimately lead to some form of behaviour change (Caperon, Saville & Ahern, 2022).

Beliefs and ideologies play a pivotal role in the change that needs to occur and in realizing and accepting the interconnectedness between human beings and nature (Caperon et al., 2022). It is important to note that if and when environmental messages are expressed in a way that people relate to and understand, especially in faith contexts, change can be seen internally and externally (Ives et al., 2022). Therefore, humans need to change before any ecological change can result from choosing lifestyles that will not negatively impact the environment (Pope Francis, 2020). It should be a lifestyle that will be considerate of other living and non-living beings within the environment (Pope Francis 2020).

There is also a need to consider ethics, especially regarding issues concerning introducing new technology (Pope Francis, 2015). This may lead to further degradation not only of the environment but also of the moral fibre of society and would add to the lack of respect shown to nature as well (Pope Francis, 2015). Acknowledging and understanding that human beings are creatures that are not only intellectual and social but also spiritual and historical, and this affects their interaction with the environment and society as well, will help communities to

come up with ways that will enrich the lives of both living and non-living beings (Laudato Si Research Institute, 2021). Focusing on these human characteristics and their contexts will enable society to identify the different ways to be implemented to bring the desired change.

Faith-based organizations (FBOs) like churches can consider collaborating with ecological movements such as civil society organizations that advocate for the recognition and protection of the environment as our common home (Pope Francis 2015). One such way could be assisting households in planting their fruit and vegetables in their yards, especially in townships, using recyclable materials or tires, as is often done. Doing this could reduce harmful chemicals used to grow vegetables later consumed by people, causing different illnesses. This will also help eradicate poverty and promote healthy lifestyles for everyone in the community (Pope Francis 2015).

If FBOs are to introduce action campaigns to help bring awareness of the interconnected of humans and nature, it would be of paramount importance to allow the communities themselves to come up with action campaigns or initiatives that will be sustainable even in the absence of the FBOs (Caperon et al., 2022). This will enable communities to own these initiatives and make them work for their benefit and growth as a community.

### **6.5. Limitations of the Study**

The study sought to critique Dominion Theology using Eco-Theology and the degrowth discourse to promote more integral way of caring for our common home. Due to time constraints, one of the main limitations of this Study was making the study a desktop qualitative study instead of including other qualitative research methods like interviews and focused groups. Using these would have aided in getting to understand the effect and influence of Dominion Theology in the society. Not engaging in these activities limited the accuracy and more realistic data the researcher would have received since desktop research only limits the search to documents. The Degrowth discourse is still a much-debated discourse, due to the lack of understanding, the researcher's findings may be questioned also because of lack of enough evidence from the ground.

## 6.6. Conclusion

This study has explored the ecological consequences of dominion theology and the potential of eco-theology to offer a more equitable and sustainable basis for engagement with creation. Using Critical Theory and Eco-Theology together as frameworks, it examined how theological languages and understandings have shaped human interactions with the natural world. The findings showed that though dominion theology has been an advocate for anthropocentrism and the exploitation of the environment, eco-theology offers a different kind of theology, one based on stewardship, interconnectedness, and the intrinsic value of all creation.

The research emphasizes the dire need that exists for theological reorientation—that one which moves beyond domination to responsibility and care for Earth. This shift needs to be nurtured by faith communities—through the reinterpretation of scripture and the integration of eco-theological principles into their teaching, practice, and advocacy work—which can inspire a larger ecological conversion that aligns spiritual and ethical commitments with the pressing realities of environmental degradation and climate change.

While such a study has contributed immensely to theological and ecological discourse, its limitations need to be recognized. The reliance on desktop research and secondary sources means the findings are theoretically based, allowing further empirical studies to establish how these theological frameworks are enacted in practice. Further, the focus of the study on Christian theological perspectives would imply that there is an opportunity to explore similar issues within other religious traditions and, by so doing, broaden the scope of eco-theological inquiry.

Looking ahead, this research invites further dialogue on the integration of theology, ethics, and environmental sustainability. By embracing eco-theology, theologians, faith leaders, and communities can mount a strong intervention into the ecological crisis—one that critiques ideologies along lines of harm and reimagines humanity's role as caretaker of creation. This journey is at once a moral imperative and a hopeful path toward healing the broken relationship between humanity and the natural world.

In summary, theology has enormous potential for effecting changes in attitudes and actions towards ecological justice. This work joins a growing body of literature critiquing dominion

theology and advocating for eco-theology as a means of aligning faith with the shared responsibility to care for our common home. It serves as a call to action that theologians, faith communities, and individuals alike develop and apply a theology of care, a theology of humility, and a theology of justice toward earth's current ecological predicament.

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