Being, Nature, and Responsibility: A Philosophical Appraisal of Christian Ecology in Robert Barry Leal

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Abstract
This study reflects on Robert Barry Leal's *Through Ecological Eyes*, exploring how Christian ecology can respond to today's growing environmental crisis. As the planet faces increasing destruction driven by human-centered thinking, Leal offers a different view. It explores how his theology challenges harmful views of nature and calls for a change in how humans live within creation. He moves away from the idea that humans are above nature and instead presents a theocentric and relational understanding of creation where all life is connected and valued. Drawing on a careful reading of the Bible and Leal's writings, this work combines theology and environmental philosophy to challenge the longstanding belief that only humans possess real worth, instead demonstrating that all parts of creation deserve care and respect. Leal's image of a "web of life" reflects both Christian teaching and ecological thought. It highlights how everything in nature is linked, much like Paul's metaphor of the Church as one body with many parts. Rather than simply explaining Leal's ideas, this study examines the deeper meanings behind them. The findings reveal that Leal's ecological theology not only critiques anthropocentrism but promotes an ethic of interdependence, stewardship, and reverence for all life. His vision affirms a moral and theological shift, from domination to kinship, from control to care. By rejecting exploitative models of nature, Leal invites a more inclusive, compassionate relationship with the Earth grounded in Christian teaching. The study also fills a gap by offering a more philosophical look at Christian ecological thought, which is often discussed only from a theological angle. The study concludes by calling for a reawakening of humanity's moral responsibility toward creation. It recommends embracing Leal's theology of partnership as a foundation for Christian ecological ethics, where healing the Earth begins with transforming how we see, value, and live within creation.

Keywords: Christian Ecology, Theocentrism, Biodiversity, Environmental Philosophy, Robert Barry Leal.

Introduction

In an age defined by climate crisis, mass extinction, and ecological instability, questions about humanity's relationship with the natural world have become both urgent and unavoidable. Among the many voices seeking to respond to this global challenge, Christian theology holds a unique position, bearing both historical responsibility and ethical potential. Yet, the credibility of Christianity's environmental voice has often been undermined by perceptions that it upholds an anthropocentric worldview; one that places humans above and apart from the rest of creation (Leal, 2006, pp. 3–5). This perception has led scholars like Robert Barry Leal to reexamine the theological roots of ecological ethics. In his seminal work *Through Ecological Eyes: Reflections on Christianity's Environmental Credentials* (2006), Leal calls for a profound theological reorientation; one that shifts from anthropocentrism to theocentrism and recovers a vision of creation as sacred, interconnected, and morally significant (Leal, 2006, pp. 9–12).

This study undertakes a philosophical examination of Leal's ecological theology, situating his arguments within broader discourses in ontology, environmental philosophy, and Christian ethics. Rather

than treating ecological degradation merely as a scientific or policy issue, Leal identifies its deeper roots in a crisis of worldview—specifically, a metaphysical and moral failure to recognize the intrinsic worth of non-human beings (Leal, 2006, p. 43). At the heart of this failure lies the ontological privileging of the human as the only subject of moral concern, often reinforced by distorted interpretations of Scripture (Leal, 2006, pp. 47–48). Leal's theocentric alternative rejects this hierarchy by placing God, not humanity at the centre, and affirming the equal participation of all creatures in the divine order of being (Leal, 2006, pp. 49–50).

In this light, the ecological crisis becomes not just a technological challenge, but a call for ontological repentance, a need to rethink the fundamental categories of existence and moral responsibility (Leal, 2006, p. 52). The study critically engages Leal's re-reading of Christian texts, particularly his emphasis on creation as a relational and spiritual reality (Leal, 2006, pp. 50–52). Drawing from philosophical traditions that interrogate being and inter-being, it explores how Christian ecological thought might develop a more inclusive moral ontology—one that sees forests, rivers, animals, and ecosystems not as resources to be managed, but as co-participants in a divinely imbued cosmos (Leal, 2006, pp. 55–58).

By bringing together theology and philosophy, this study contributes to ongoing efforts to reimagine Christian responsibility in a time of planetary crisis. It asks: what kind of ontology best undergirds a theology of ecological justice? How might Christian ethics be transformed when read through ecological eyes? In addressing these questions, this work advances a model of Christian ecology that affirms the dignity of all being and calls for a renewed, humble, and relational posture toward creation (Leal, 2006, pp. 85–88).

Clarification of Concepts

Biodiversity: A Gift of Creation

Biological diversity, commonly known as biodiversity, refers to the variety and variability of life forms; genes, species, and ecosystems across the planet. It represents the richness of living organisms and their intricate relationships within habitats. Biodiversity is the foundation upon which ecosystems are built and sustained (Kumar & Asija, 2012, p. 1). Diana Richards (2010, p. 26) defines biodiversity as both the range of biotic components in a given area and the broader variance among all living organisms. Michael Allaby (2010, p. 46) stresses that biodiversity includes species richness, genetic variation, and ecosystem complexity. This diversity makes life on Earth possible and adaptable, showcasing nature's resilience and divine design (Fatubarin, 2009, p. 14).

The functional significance of biodiversity is rooted in its contribution to ecological stability. The Earth hosts over 100 million species, yet less than 20% have been identified, and only a fraction explored for potential human use medicinal, agricultural, or industrial (Kumar & Asija, 2012, pp. 2–3). Genetic diversity ensures adaptability and resistance to disease, species diversity promotes balanced ecosystems, and ecological diversity fosters resilience against climate impacts (Kumar & Asija, 2012, pp. 9–10). As Colin Townsend (2008, p. 4) notes, species richness, the number of species in a given region is a critical metric in measuring ecological health. Without biodiversity, the entire structure of nature would collapse, weakening the biosphere's ability to sustain life.

However, biodiversity loss—driven by human activities like deforestation, pollution, and over-exploitation—is one of the gravest but often underestimated threats to life on Earth. Kureenthadam (2014, p. 158) notes that this issue is frequently overshadowed by concerns over climate change, despite its equally devastating implications. The United Nations (2015) underscores the far-reaching impacts of biodiversity loss on human security and sustainable development in Africa. From nutrient cycling and carbon sequestration to soil fertility and water purification, biodiversity underpins vital ecosystem services (Kureenthadam, 2014, pp. 160–161). Its erosion risks disrupting these life-support systems and unleashing cascading ecological failures with direct consequences for humanity.

Pope Francis, in Laudato Si', emphasizes the spiritual and moral responsibility of humanity to care for creation, warning that "each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know" (Francis, 2015, no. 33). He critiques human arrogance and consumerism, urging a theocentric view that values all creatures as part of God's plan (Francis, 2015, nos. 34–35). This aligns with Leal's assertion that the ecological crisis stems not merely from external mismanagement but from

internal moral and metaphysical disorientation (Leal, 2006, pp. 3–5). Thus, understanding biodiversity is not just scientific—it is deeply theological and philosophical.

Anthropocentrism and the Ecological Crisis

Anthropocentrism, from the Greek anthropos (human) and kentron (center), refers to a human-centered worldview that accords intrinsic value solely to humans, while all other beings and elements of nature are valued only for their utility to human needs. According to Rae (1960, p. 352), anthropocentric perspectives judge the goodness or usefulness of things based on how well they serve human interests. In this light, animals, forests, and ecosystems are seen as valuable only insofar as they offer emotional comfort, food, shelter, entertainment, or medical benefits. MacKinnon (2007, p. 331) explains that anthropocentric ethics may prohibit needless cruelty to animals, but still justify their exploitation if human benefit outweighs animal suffering.

The anthropocentric view has profound implications for biodiversity loss, especially as it often justifies environmentally harmful actions under the guise of economic necessity or progress. Fatubarin (2009, p. 15) identifies pollution, mining, gas flaring, and the use of toxic chemicals in agriculture and fishing as destructive anthropogenic activities. These activities are rooted in human-centric goals that prioritize short-term economic gains over long-term ecological stability. Colin Townsend (2008, p. 11) emphasizes that climate change and pollution largely human-induced are increasingly major drivers of biodiversity loss across ecosystems. Indeed, he warns that habitat degradation through pollutants shows "an alarming increase" (Townsend, 2008, p. 17), reflecting a deeply entrenched anthropocentric disregard for non-human life.

The continued deforestation of tropical forests illustrates the dangerous logic of anthropocentrism. Research cited by Asija (2015, p. 43) suggests that if current deforestation trends persist, between 5 to 10 percent of tropical species may face extinction within three decades. These outcomes underscore how anthropocentric ideologies, often embedded in development policies, legitimize practices that severely disrupt ecological systems. In many cases, these actions are not just driven by ignorance, but by systemic structures of economic exploitation or deprivation. Leal (2009, p. 23) insightfully observes that "environmental irresponsibility and social injustice are intimately linked," indicating that anthropogenic harm is both a symptom and a cause of deeper moral and social crises. Thus, addressing anthropocentrism is not merely an ecological task but also a moral one, requiring a shift in worldview that affirms the value of all life

Ontology and the Question of Being in Christian Ecological Thought

The question of Being is fundamental not only to philosophy but also to Christian ecological thought. Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, reignited this forgotten inquiry, asserting that the true meaning of Being has been eclipsed by an obsession with beings entities rather than existence itself (Heidegger, 1962, p. 1; Popkin & Stroll, 1993, p. 310). His notion of *Dasein*; the being who questions Being underscores that human existence carries the burden of interpreting reality (Stumpf, 1994, p. 504). In the context of ecology, this question of Being becomes urgent: if only humans are considered true bearers of Being, then non-human life is reduced to utility.

This is where the importance of ontology emerges. Ontology, from the Greek *ontos* (being) and *logos* (discourse or study), is the branch of metaphysics that deals with the nature of Being. It asks: What does it mean to exist? What is the fundamental structure of reality? In ecological and theological terms, ontology challenges us to consider whether nature is merely a collection of objects, or a communion of beings sharing in existence.

Robert Barry Leal's ecological theology resists this anthropocentric bias by affirming that all of creation participates in the web of Being, thereby deserving moral recognition (Leal, 2006, pp. 3–5). Iroegbu's insight that Being "delivers a thing from nothingness to existence" (Iroegbu, 1995, p. 60) challenges us to see the natural world not as inert matter, but as meaningful, existing reality. Thus, reawakening the question of Being is also a moral act, a shift from domination to relationship, from objectification to reverence echoing Leal's call for a theocentric and participatory view of nature. In this light, Being is not abstract; it is the very heartbeat of existence, inviting humanity to rediscover its responsibility within the divine ecology.

Theocentrism in Ecological Theology

Theocentrism is a worldview that places God at the centre of all reality, value, and purpose. Derived from theos (God) and kentron (centre), it affirms that creation finds its origin, sustenance, and destiny in God, not in human utility or dominance. In Through Ecological Eyes, Robert Barry Leal advances a theocentric model of Christian ecology that sharply contrasts with anthropocentric tendencies, which place humans above and apart from nature. Leal stresses that the earth belongs to God (Ps. 24) and is not merely a resource to be exploited. According to him, the crisis of environmental degradation stems from humanity's dissociation of God from the earth, thereby legitimizing an unjust sense of ownership and entitlement (Leal, 2006, p. 12). He insists that "God remains active, revealing through nature amazing wonders and loving care" (Leal, 2006, p. 12). Religion, in this theocentric sense, shapes our ecological conscience. As William James suggests, it is "founded on the subjective experience of an invisible presence" (Wallace, 1902, p. 52). Joseph Omoregbe defines religion as a relationship between the human and the divine person believed to exist (Omoregbe, 1993, p. 3), while Esthin Carpenter sees it as a cultic response to the sacred ordained by tradition (Carpenter, 1913, p. 4). A.C. Bouquet identifies religion as a "fixed relationship between the human self and the self-existent" (Bouquet, 1941, p. 16). In line with Aquinas, Leal argues that biodiversity is good in itself and delights God, thus it should also delight and be cared for by humans (Summa Theologiae, I, q. 65, a.2, ad 2; Leal, 2006, p. 13). This idea is deepened by Freidich Schleiermacher's view of religion as "a feeling of absolute dependence on God" (Schleiermacher, 1963, p. 12).

In this same spirit, the Nigerian philosopher Pantaleon Iroegbu affirms that God is not an abstraction but the very ground of being and meaning. In his conception of being as belonging, Iroegbu underscores the idea that all creation finds its value in its relationship with God; what he calls the "belongingness" of beings. For Iroegbu, to be is to be in communion with others, with nature, and ultimately with God. His emphasis on community and transcendence aligns closely with the theocentric call to move from autonomy to relationality, from dominion to stewardship. Theocentrism, therefore, calls for a shift from power to partnership, from mastery to stewardship, in honouring God through creation.

Environmental Philosophy and Creation

To clarify environmental philosophy, we must begin with the key terms: environment, nature, and philosophy. The environment refers to the totality of natural conditions in which organisms live and interact; air, water, soil, ecosystems, biodiversity, and even the atmosphere. It encompasses both living and non-living entities and their interdependence. Nature, in this context, is not just a passive backdrop or a resource bank; it is a dynamic, living whole, marked by complexity, self-regulation, and intrinsic value (Naess, 1989, p. 29).

Philosophy, as Oroka affirms, is the reflective quest for understanding life, its purpose, and our place within it—it concerns itself with "what is," and why it is so (Oroka, 2010, pp. 1–5). Akinpelu adds that philosophy functions as a "midwife," aiding the birth of insight and meaningful action (Akinpelu, p. 167). Merging both terms, environmental philosophy is a discipline that critically interrogates human relationships with the natural world, examining moral obligations, metaphysical assumptions, and the values that undergird our treatment of the Earth (DesJardins, 2001, p. 12).

Robert Barry Leal's ecological theology moves environmental philosophy further. He rejects the anthropocentric worldview that sees humanity as sovereign over nature, instead proposing a theocentric, relational, and moral understanding of the cosmos (Leal, 2006, p. 14). For Leal, nature is not just matter—it is meaningfully connected to divine purpose and human responsibility. He draws from biblical imagery, like Paul's metaphor of the Church as a body, to show that all creation is interlinked (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12–27).

Environmental philosophy, therefore, involves being, nature, and responsibility. As Pope Francis notes, what is needed is "ecological conversion" a deep transformation in our worldview that reorients us from dominion to stewardship (Laudato Si', no. 217). In this sense, environmental philosophy is both reflective and restorative: it seeks wisdom for how we ought to live within creation, not over it.

Elements of Creation in Robert Barry Leal's Theocentric Theology

Robert Barry Leal is a leading voice in Christian ecological theology who calls for a rethinking of the human relationship with nature through the lens of faith. In Through Ecological Eyes, he critiques

anthropocentrism, the belief that humans are at the centre of creation and proposes instead a theocentric worldview, one that sees God as the true centre and all creatures as valued members of a sacred ecological community. Leal (2006, pp. 3–5) argues that Christian theology, when rightly interpreted, upholds the interconnectedness and sacred worth of all life, not just humanity.

He maintains that ecological degradation is rooted not only in material exploitation but also in spiritual blindness; a failure to recognize the theological and moral significance of the natural world. Through a rereading of Scripture, Leal (2006, pp. 9–12) urges Christians to adopt an ecological imagination that sees every element of nature as part of a divinely ordained web of life. This theological vision seeks to inspire not just admiration, but also responsible and reverent action.

In this section, we aim to explore the theological importance of specific elements of creation in the thought of Robert Barry Leal. These include water, air, earth, animals and birds, and vegetation. Each element, as Leal sees it, carries symbolic and theological meaning, rooted in Scripture and divine purpose. The goal is to show how a renewed Christian ecological consciousness, shaped by Leal's reflections, can help deepen our understanding of creation and foster more responsible environmental action.

Water: The Symbol of Life and Cleansing: According to Leal, water is God's gift to be respected and not just a commodity to be wasted. Water is an integral part of the world, as without it, life cannot be sustained. Yet, we often take it for granted, and as a result, water pollution is on the increase. Leal observes that ninety-seven percent of earth's water is salt water, and yet we pollute the remaining few percent of freshwater without minding the consequences.

Looking at water theologically, Leal posits that the symbol of water is that of life and cleansing. For instance, our new birth in baptism through which we become children of God is through water. It is through the water of baptism that we are cleansed from original sin. In view of this, the idea of fresh and clean water is theologically important. As a symbol of life and cleansing, if water is polluted, it can no longer symbolize life and purity. So, for Leal, given the significance of water to life and its theological and religious importance, we cannot but take water more seriously and desist from those activities that bring about water pollution. Secondly, given the limitedness of freshwater, he posits that we ought to change our attitude from that of careless exploitation to that of care and respect.

Air: The Breath of God: According to Leal, the air that we breathe to stay alive is the most important and invaluable gift of God. However, he bemoans human beings' lack of attention to this beautiful element without which we cannot live. Because we take it for granted, we treat it with indifference. Leal observes that there are basically only two moments when we are conscious of the air we breathe. According to him, our consciousness of air is only when we receive a very fresh air or unbearable polluted air.

So, he calls for a change of attitude, a rediscovering of sense of wonder and appreciation of the gift of air that sustains us. This sense of appreciation will enable us to work for clean air. According to Leal, in the Scripture, air is often understood as the breath of God, and as such, we must treat it with utmost respect and avoid polluting it, as is the case when we generate and continue to burn wastes indiscriminately.

Earth: Sacred Ground with Creative and Restorative Power: According to Leal, among all the four elements of the natural world: air, water, fire, and earth, the earth is viewed with suspicion. This explains why we view the dark recesses of the earth as the abode of evil spirits, and as such, the earth is generally looked down upon. Going back to Scripture, Leal observes that the earth has creative power as well as restorative power.

According to him, the creative power of the earth is evident in its ability to bring forth plants and vegetation at God's spoken word (Genesis 1:24). Similarly, its restorative power is made manifest in Jesus' use of mud in the healing of the blind man (John 9:5). In view of this theological importance of the earth, he posits that well-deserved respect and care should be accorded to the earth. But unfortunately, he observes that, given our perception of the earth, we do not hesitate to plunder it. According to him, it is true that God has given us the earth, but as we pointed out earlier, he gave us the earth not only to enjoy but also to care for it. The issue here, according to him, is that "God's good earth is becoming degraded as we take and fail to give back" (Leal, 2006, p. 61).

Animals and Birds in Creation: Co-Creatures in God's Covenant: Just like other scholars have observed, Leal observes that animals and birds in creation are constantly being threatened with extinction based on human beings' exploitative, environmentally destructive activities. He posits that our attitude towards animals and birds in creation indicates that we understand them merely as our possession but not as God's creation.

We harm them directly by killing them and indirectly by destroying their natural habitats, which is the chief cause of their extinction. Launching his argument from the significance of naming of the animals by Adam and Noah's preservation of all the species of animals in the ark, he shows the importance of animals in what God has created. If God never allowed any of the species of the animals to go into extinction, why should we?

Reflecting on the beauty of birds in creation, he observes that regardless of their beauty of form and colour, their extraordinary instincts which enable them to navigate their ways and their ease of flight far above us, we still take them for granted as part of an undifferentiated environment. According to him, "human attitudes to birds oscillate between respect and admiration on the one hand and scorn and indifference on the other" (Leal, 2006, p. 80). He locates this idea of scorn in the way we speak about birds. He observes that we often refer to people as having a "bird brain" when we want to insult their intelligence. Similarly, when we want to talk about the worthlessness of something, we say, "throw it to the birds."

It is based on this scorn, according to him, that we do not often care about the habitats of birds such that at will, we cut down trees that harbour these beautiful creatures. Pointing to the Scriptures, he shows how Christ used the example of sparrows to show God's care for the world. The thrust of his argument here points to the fact that the understanding of the Scripture is largely dependent on reading it through ecological eyes. Take for instance, in the Scriptures, two birds feature prominently, namely, dove and eagle. Talking about gentleness, Christ uses the dove, which is equally the symbol of the Holy Spirit. How then, can a contemporary reader of the Scripture understand this image if doves were to go into extinction?

He goes on again to cite the example of the dove as the symbol of the Holy Spirit hovering over the waters at creation, the dove sent out by Noah after the flood, the dove descending on Jesus after his baptism, etc., and with these, he concludes that preservation of every creature is necessary not only for the praise of God but also for authentic understanding of the spiritual message of the Sacred Scripture.

Vegetation: God's First Gift to Humanity: Reflecting again on the Genesis account of creation, Leal observes that vegetation was God's first gift to Adam, for shade and food. In identifying trees as God's first gift to Adam, and Eve being the second gift, he opines that it is an interesting sense of priorities (Leal, 2006, p. 88). Interesting as this may sound, it is important to note here that men chauvinists may hold onto this in their disregard for the female folk—but this should not be.

We understand Leal to be highlighting the importance of trees to the earth, of which the first beneficiary is human beings rather than positing an order of importance between females and trees. Surprisingly, not minding the importance of trees to life and the beauty they add to the environment, human beings are not considerate in their felling of trees. This again points to the basic problem of ecological degradation: an anthropologically hierarchical view of the earth.

Anthropocentrism as the Root Cause of Ecological Degradation: A Reflection on the Thought of Robert Barry Leal

Ecological degradation has become one of the greatest existential threats confronting humanity and the planet. This degradation is driven by several interrelated factors, including over-exploitation, natural enemies, natural disasters, and most significantly, *anthropogenic influences*. Among these, over-exploitation is a major contributor to the loss of biodiversity, especially as a result of deforestation, which endangers many plant and wildlife species. As environmental experts have warned, "if forest clearing and desertification go too far, then at some point, the planet may simply become incapable of nurturing life, regardless of our attempts to remedy things" (Oyeshola, 2008, p. 27).

Additionally, natural enemies; organisms such as pathogens, pests, parasites, predators, and weeds pose threats to other living things. However, their destructive capacity pales in comparison to the damage caused by human activities. Fatubarin (2009) notes that while these natural enemies may lead to

population decline, agricultural damage, and health risks, the most devastating effects on biodiversity arise from anthropogenic sources. Natural disasters like floods, erosion, volcanic eruptions, drought, and landslides can also result in the loss of biodiversity, but these are often intensified by poor human planning and environmental mismanagement.

Nonetheless, the most persistent and dangerous driver of ecological degradation, according to Robert Barry Leal, is anthropogenic influence. At the core of this influence is a worldview; an *anthropocentric perception* of the earth. Drawing from classical Greek thought, Leal points out that humans have historically viewed themselves as "the measure of all things." This anthropocentric perspective has been reinforced by certain interpretations of the Genesis creation narrative, wherein human beings are seen as the crown of creation, with all other elements of the earth created for their benefit. This reading of Scripture, Leal argues, has led many to consider human beings as superior and central, and the rest of creation as secondary and utilitarian.

Based on this perceived superiority, humans have plundered the earth, exploiting natural resources for economic gain and disregarding the intrinsic worth of non-human beings. This anthropocentric hierarchy sees the value of other creatures only in terms of their usefulness to human needs. Worse still, such usefulness is typically measured by economic profitability. As a result, the anthropocentric worldview has legitimized environmental abuse, treating the earth not as a sacred trust but as a resource depot for human consumption. Leal maintains that this worldview is foundational to the ecological crisis we now face.

Leal is not necessarily rejecting the uniqueness or dignity of the human being. Rather, he challenges the moral and theological assumptions that elevate humanity at the expense of other creatures. He posits that even if humans hold a unique place in creation, this should not lead to the neglect or exploitation of other beings that form the very foundation and support system of life on earth. What is needed, according to Leal, is a radical shift in perspective—a movement away from anthropocentrism toward what he calls the "web of life" view of the earth.

In contrast to hierarchical anthropocentrism, Leal's *"web of life"* model envisions all of creation as interrelated and mutually dependent. He asserts that how we view the earth shapes how we treat it, and when we see the earth through anthropocentric lenses, degradation becomes inevitable. The web-of-life model encourages a more responsible and reverent attitude toward nature by promoting a theological and ecological framework in which each part of creation is respected and valued for its role in sustaining the whole. Leal draws on St. Paul's analogy of the human body in 1 Corinthians 12 to illustrate this mutual interdependence. Just as each body part is essential to the functioning of the whole, so too each part of nature plays a vital role in the balance and harmony of the earth.

This interdependence is also affirmed in Scripture. After the flood, God's covenant was not limited to Noah and his descendants, but extended to "every living creature," affirming the divine concern for all creation. As Colossians 1:20 makes clear, God reconciles "all things" in Christ, not just human beings. Leal uses this biblical insight to argue that the degradation of the environment is not merely an ecological problem, it is a theological and moral failure, a refusal to recognize the sacredness and interrelatedness of all life.

Leal further emphasizes that in contrast to anthropocentric theology, which often views God as separate from or above the world, the web-of-life perspective understands God as both Creator and Sustainer, intimately involved with the entire created order. Accordingly, the relational model of creation should not resemble a pyramid, with humans at the top and other creatures beneath, but rather a triangle, with God at the apex and humanity and the rest of creation sharing equal footing at the base. This model calls for a reorientation in our thinking and acting, encouraging a theology that includes not only the relationship between God and humans but also between God and nature, and between humans and the rest of creation. As Leal rightly concludes, "This new way of thinking may well be the most effective way for us to tackle the current ecological crisis" (Leal, 2006, p. 21).

In support of this shift, many scholars define anthropocentrism as a perspective that grants intrinsic worth only to humans, judging all other life forms by their ability to serve human needs. Rae (1960) explains that anthropocentrism holds that the environment has value only insofar as it benefits humans. MacKinnon (2007) adds that while anthropocentric ethics may object to causing unnecessary pain to animals, such objections are typically overridden when human interests are deemed more

important. For example, animals are valued for emotional support, food, clothing, and entertainment—not for their own sake.

These attitudes manifest in tangible environmental harms. Anthropogenic influences include activities such as pollution, deforestation, gas flaring, mining, and the use of toxic chemicals in both agriculture and illegal fishing (Fatubarin, 2009, p. 15). Colin Townsend underscores the gravity of this, noting that "climate change and pollution are predicted to become progressively more important causes of biodiversity loss across all ecosystem types" (Townsend, 2008, p. 11). He further warns that "degradation of habitat by human pollutants continues to show an alarming increase" (p. 17). A 2015 study by Kumar and Asija indicate that if deforestation continues at its current pace, "roughly 5 to 10 percent of tropical forest species may face extinction within the next 30 years" (Kumar and Asija, 2015, p. 43).

These destructive actions, Leal notes, are often rooted in economic deprivation or exploitation. In some cases, people exploit the environment as a means of survival; in others, profit-driven motives override ecological concerns. Either way, Leal asserts that "environmental irresponsibility and social injustice are intimately linked" (Leal, 2009, p. 23), reinforcing the need for a holistic approach that integrates ecological care with justice and stewardship.

Leal's critique of anthropocentrism offers a compelling theological response to the ecological crisis. His call for a web-of-life perspective re-centres creation within a framework of relationality, interdependence, and divine purpose. By challenging the human-centered worldview and advocating a theocentric and inclusive vision of the earth, Leal invites us to embrace a more humble, responsible, and reverent posture toward the natural world, a posture essential for the healing of the planet and the flourishing of all life.

Being, Nature, and Responsibility: Toward an Ontological Ecology

The ecological crisis we face today is deeply rooted in a misunderstanding of being, a distorted view of nature, and a neglect of moral responsibility. At its core, Christian ecological thought affirms that all creatures, not only human beings, possess a meaningful share in existence. Robert Barry Leal (2006, pp. 3 to 5) challenges the idea that nature exists merely for human use. He proposes a theocentric vision in which God is the centre of all creation, and every part of the natural world shares in divine value and purpose.

The concept of being must therefore include more than human existence. The Nigerian philosopher Pantaleon Iroegbu explains that being is a movement from nothingness into meaningful existence and that every being "belongs" in a network of relationships (Iroegbu, 1995, p. 60). This idea of belongingness calls us to acknowledge that to exist is to exist with others—humans, animals, plants, waters, and the land. In this sense, being and nature are inseparable. Nature is not an abstract backdrop to human life but a living reality with which we are in communion.

Responsibility flows naturally from this recognition. If all of creation participates in the divine act of being, then every creature commands moral attention. Leal (2006, pp. 49 to 50) argues that Christian ethics must move away from domination and embrace stewardship grounded in relationality and reverence. This moral vision resonates with the teachings of Pope Francis, who calls for an "ecological conversion" in which humanity renews its relationship with nature through respect, restraint, and care (Laudato Si', no. 217).

The denial of being to non-human creatures, often supported by anthropocentric theology and development policies, leads to exploitation and ecological destruction. When we fail to recognize the tree, the river, or the animal as having its own meaning and role within creation, we reduce it to a mere object. This is a failure not only of ethics but of metaphysics. Martin Heidegger (1962, p. 1) warns that when we forget the question of being, we become estranged from the world and from ourselves. Christian ecological responsibility, therefore, must begin with a rediscovery of being as shared, nature as sacred, and responsibility as a moral demand rooted in our participation in the communion of creation.

Critical Analysis of Robert Barry Leal's Ecological Theology

Robert Barry Leal's Through Ecological Eyes presents a powerful theological and philosophical response to the environmental crisis by challenging anthropocentrism and proposing a theocentric vision of creation. One of the strengths of Leal's work is its integration of biblical theology with ecological ethics,

presenting a coherent argument that all creation is interconnected and morally significant. His concept of a "web of life" (Leal, 2006, pp. 49–50) resonates deeply with ecological thought and reinterprets Christian teaching in a way that affirms the intrinsic value of all beings. By using Saint Paul's metaphor of the Church as one body with many parts, he effectively shows that each part of nature contributes meaningfully to the whole (Leal, 2006, pp. 85–88).

Leal's re-reading of Scripture is also commendable. He highlights how certain interpretations have wrongly placed humanity above creation, legitimizing environmental exploitation (Leal, 2006, pp. 47–48). His call for what he terms "ontological repentance" invites a deeper moral and metaphysical shift in how humans understand their place within the cosmos (Leal, 2006, p. 52). Furthermore, his reflections on natural elements such as water, air, and earth bring out the theological and sacramental dimensions of the environment, urging believers to approach creation with reverence and responsibility. This echoes Pope Francis's call for "ecological conversion" that transforms not only our actions but our vision of the world (Francis, 2015, no. 217).

Nonetheless, the work has its limitations. While Leal touches on profound metaphysical themes, his engagement with philosophical traditions remains minimal. He introduces important ontological questions but does not consistently develop them through dialogue with established thinkers in environmental philosophy. Greater interaction with perspectives such as eco-feminism, African ecological thought, or process theology would have added depth and broadened his theological appeal. For instance, Arne Naess's deep ecology, which advocates intrinsic value in all forms of life, would have been a useful philosophical dialogue partner (Naess, 1989, p. 29).

Moreover, Leal's use of metaphor and biblical imagery, though spiritually enriching, may lack clarity for readers seeking actionable ethical principles. His theology calls for transformation, but it is less clear how this vision translates into concrete practices within church communities or policy frameworks. The work would benefit from a clearer articulation of how ecological theology can shape real-world responses, particularly in contexts marked by poverty and environmental injustice. In all, Leal offers a thoughtful and visionary contribution to Christian ecological thought. His strength lies in re-centering creation around God rather than humanity and affirming the dignity of all life. However, the work could be strengthened by deeper philosophical engagement and more practical application.

Conclusion

The earth, in all its fullness and biodiversity, belongs to the Lord who delights in the harmony and beauty of His creation (Ps 24). Yet, this divine beauty has been marred by ecological degradation largely driven by an anthropocentric and hierarchical view of the world. By placing humanity above and apart from the rest of creation, this worldview justifies exploitation and neglect of the earth and its non-human inhabitants. As Robert Barry Leal argues, overcoming the ecological crisis requires a theological and moral shift, a movement from domination to relationship, from power to partnership. The web-of-life model he proposes calls us to see all creatures as interdependent and participants in God's ongoing creation. To restore the integrity of creation, humanity must learn to revere, not just use, the natural world. This renewed attitude affirms that the earth is not meant for humans alone, but for the flourishing of all God's creatures.

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