

Configuration and Application of a Contextualized Christian Ecological Ethics: The Case of Mahereza Rural Commune, Madagascar

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the contribution of a contextualized Christian ecological ethics to local responses to climate change challenges in Madagascar. The research focuses on the rural commune of Mahereza, a community deeply rooted in Christian faith and reliant on subsistence agriculture. The methodology combines biblical exegesis, field surveys, and the integration of Malagasy national environmental policies. Findings highlight a strong spiritual sense of responsibility toward creation, yet reveal a gap between this conviction and the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices. This discrepancy is primarily driven by economic, technical, and structural constraints, which limit the implementation of Christian ecological principles. The proposed ethical framework unfolds in three stages: repentance, transformation of perspective, and concrete commitment inspired by the Servant Christ. It fosters an alliance between faith, local knowledge, and agroecological innovations to reconcile agricultural productivity with the safeguarding of creation. Churches, in collaboration with the state, NGOs, and academic institutions, can play a strategic role in this transition. Ultimately, this approach promotes dialogue between faith, science, and policy, framing ecology as both a space for spiritual conversion and collective transformation.

Keywords: Active faith, agroecology, climate change, committed Christians.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The current ecological crisis, marked by biodiversity loss and climate change, is a major ethical, scientific, and spiritual challenge. It disrupts natural balances while questioning production models, human behavior, and the relationship between humanity and creation. In Madagascar, the impacts of climate change are evident, including rising temperatures, irregular rainfall, prolonged droughts, and increasingly severe cyclones and floods.

These disruptions particularly affect rural areas, such as the commune of Mahereza, which relies on subsistence farming that is highly vulnerable to climatic variability. Yields have become uncertain, leading some farmers to adopt unsustainable practices including excessive composting, chemical fertilizers, and pesticides. The ecological crisis engages in multiple fields of knowledge: environmental sciences, social sciences, ethics, philosophy, and theology. Given Mahereza's strong Christian identity, this study focuses on the theological dimension and analyzes human responsibility and vocation within the divine plan. This raises critical questions about the relationship between Christian faith, environmental behavior, and the sustainability of agricultural practices.

Accordingly, this study explores how Christians in Mahereza can respond to climate challenges through sustainable agriculture grounded in faith. It addresses the central question: To what extent can Christian beliefs foster ecological ethics capable of contributing to the fight against climate change?



The objective is to propose a Christian ecological ethics rooted in scripture, adapted to the local context, and aligned with global sustainable development goals. This ethics emphasizes environmental justice, solidarity, and the responsible stewardship of resources, offering an original contribution to contemporary debates on the intersections of faith, ecology, and climate action.

Methodologically, the study combines biblical exegesis of creation texts, analysis of local agricultural practices, and integration of social and theological theories. It also incorporates a missiological perspective, highlighting the role of the Christian mission in safeguarding Earth.

2. FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN ECOLOGICAL ETHICS

2.1. *Biblical Readings of Creation*

Christian ecological ethics are grounded in biblical teaching and the figure of Jesus Christ, who embodies service, respect, and care for the world (Matthew 6:26–30; Mark 4:35–41). Through the cross, Christ reconciles all creations, thereby revealing God’s love for all living beings (Boff, 1995).

This ethical vision calls for believers to acknowledge that nature—God’s creation and gift to humanity—constitutes a fundamental responsibility. In Genesis 1:26–28, humanity was entrusted with the mission of the dominion. However, this mandate must be understood as responsible stewardship, rather than exploitative domination. Genesis 2:15 reinforces this perspective: humanity is commissioned to “till and keep” the earth, not to destroy it. Likewise, Psalm 8 portrays humanity as honored stewards that are always subordinate to God. According to Brueggemann (1986), this mandate is inherently ethical: faith entails a respectful and responsible relationship with land. Indeed, nature is not a mere backdrop, but a living work that God declares “good” (Genesis 1:31) (Blocher, 2018).

Addressing the current ecological crisis, therefore, begins by recognizing creation as sacred and worthy of respect. The link between creation theology and ecological responsibility remains central to sustainable Christian ethics.

2.2. *Human Responsibility and Ecological Justice*

Human responsibility toward creation arises from a divine mandate to safeguard the Earth (Genesis 2:15). Barth (1958, 1960) argued that Christian missions include the preservation of creation as a living testimony of faith. Ecology thus becomes a space of witness and mission, serving cosmic reconciliation and reflecting the believer’s fidelity to the Creator. This responsibility is expressed through concrete actions such as sustainable farming, soil conservation, and recycling.

2.3. *Theological Models of Contemporary Christian Ecological Ethics*

Contemporary Christian ecological ethics draw on renewed theological models that integrate faith, social justice, and ecological urgency. These approaches provide ethical guidance adapted to the complexity of the current crises, particularly in vulnerable African contexts.

Revol (2020) called for an integral ecological conversion, understood as both a spiritual and ethical process. This involves transforming perspectives, practices, and social structures, moving away from the logic of domination, consumerism, and indifference toward relationships of care and respect. For Revol, Christian ecology is not limited to isolated actions but requires profound reform of believers’ lives.

In (Pope Francis, 2015), Pope Francis advances an integral ecology that unites environmental concerns, social solidarity, and Christian spirituality. He emphasizes the interconnectedness of all dimensions of life: nature, economy, culture, faith, politics, and human relationships. Integral ecology is rooted in relational anthropology, which rejects modern individualism and calls for a universal fraternity. Francis encourages the spirituality of simplicity, gratitude, and contentment as alternatives to the culture of waste.

Euvé (2021) proposes a Trinitarian ecology in which God is revealed as a living relationship between the Creator, Christ, and Spirit. Trinity is not an abstract concept but a dynamic model of interdependence, gift-giving, and communion with the created world. For Euvé, all creation is embraced within the Trinitarian relationship: it is sustained, animated, and called fulfillment. This vision provides a theological basis for rethinking the unity between faith, science, and ecology. It also legitimizes the concrete actions of Christian communities in favor of life, grounded in deep theological coherence.

Together, these models converge toward a common orientation, placing ecology at the heart of Christian spirituality. They called for lifestyle reform in light of faith, fraternity, and universal responsibility.

2.4. Pillars of Christian Ecological Ethics

Christian ecological ethics are structured around the fundamental principles drawn from Scripture and tradition. These principles guide believers in their concrete engagement with current ecological challenges. They foster active faith expressed through personal and communal choices in the service of the common good. The seven main pillars that undergird this ethics are:

- **Love:** The supreme commandment—love of God and neighbor (Matthew 22:37–40). This implies caring for God’s work (creation) and its preservation for the benefit of all.
- **Responsibility:** As noted earlier, humanity is entrusted as a steward of creation (Genesis 1:26–28; Genesis 2:15). This involves caring for creation on behalf of God and others as an expression of accountability before God.
- **Justice:** Justice requires balance across generations and special attention to the most vulnerable (Romans 8:22).
- **Sobriety:** 1 Timothy 6:6–10 and Philippians 4:11–13 call Christians temperance and moderation. This promotes responsible consumption that respects planetary boundaries.
- **Interdependence:** Humans, other creatures, and the environment are deeply interconnected (Psalm 104). [Moltmann \(1988\)](#) and [Revol \(2020\)](#) defend the Trinitarian and relational vision of Christian ecology.
- **Intergenerational and Communal Solidarity:** Believers are called upon to safeguard the earth for future generations (Psalm 78:5–7). According to [Euvé \(2021\)](#), creation is a common good that requires shared management of resources. Therefore, an ethics of sharing, favoring ecological cooperation, is essential.
- **Faithful Commitment:** Christians embody their faith through concrete choices in favor of creation (Mark 10:45; 2 Corinthians 5:18–20).

2.5. The Church’s Mission as Ecological Witness

The mission of the Church is no longer limited to evangelization; it also encompasses reconciliation between humanity and nature. [Siegwalt \(2006\)](#) calls the Church to be a “sign of reconciliation” between human beings and creation. Thus, the Church is entrusted with bearing witness to God’s love for creation through faithful, concrete, and prophetic ecological commitment.

2.5.1. A Mission Extended to the Safeguarding of Creation

The Christian mission includes safeguarding the earth and the work of the Creator God (Colossians 1:15–20). Consequently, the Church is called upon to proclaim a salvation that embraces the reconciliation between humanity and creation. Ecological engagement is both an act of faith and a service (Mark 10:45; Romans 8:19–22), anticipating the Kingdom of God by reconciling the world with its creator (Colossians 1:20). This testimony represents active hope aimed at transforming lifestyles and human relationships with the earth. It embodies an active faith, echoing [Jonas’s \(1990\)](#) call to the “principle of responsibility” toward future generations. On this point, [François \(2015\)](#) underscores the urgency of a Church that actively participates in the healing of our common home.

2.5.2. A Faith Embodied in Local Action

The Church’s ecological mission expresses active faith oriented toward justice, peace, and preservation. According to Romans 8:19–23 and Colossians 1:20, the Church participates in God’s work of reconciliation, which extends not only to humanity, but to all creations. It proclaims not only individual salvation, but also the restoration of the earth wounded by human activity ([Moltmann, 1983](#)). Therefore, the Church is called a sign of reconciliation between humanity, nature, and God.

[Weber \(2024\)](#) emphasizes that beliefs shape daily ethics, including environmental ethics. [Durkheim \(2014\)](#) demonstrated that religion structures social behavior. Together, these perspectives suggest that the Church can initiate approaches that encourage local ecological actions. Thus, ecological action becomes a meaningful communal ritual, fostering cohesion and identity. This mission takes shape in local practices of sustainable management, solidarity, and respect for nature—practices that embody faith in visible, engaged ways, contributing to both the social and ecological transformation of the territory.

2.5.3. Mediation Between Faith, Science, and Policy

The Church engages in dialogue with researchers, NGOs, and policymakers through an inclusive and transversal approach. In this regard, [McGrath’s \(2002\)](#) theology of the re-enchantment of nature links Christian faith with the natural sciences, opening pathways toward ecologically sound and locally applicable solutions. Similarly, [Euvé \(2010, 2012\)](#) advocated for a theology that fully integrates ecology

and science, affirming that ecological care is a concrete way of living faith today. Thus, the Church becomes a locus of dialogue between faith, science, and environmental policy.

These theologians emphasize that faith and science can collaborate within a shared ethic of creation. Churches can help popularize climate issues while linking them to theology and translating technical concepts into values comprehensible to the faithful.

2.5.4. *Communal Ritual and Collective Transformation*

Churches organize collective events, such as creation-centered worship services, eco-spirituality days, and ritualized tree planting. These rituals strengthen community cohesion and give meaning to ecological action. Durkheim (2014) highlighted how religion shapes collective behavior.

Because religion can structure communal life and generate shared representations, the ecological practices promoted by churches can become social rituals. Thus, faith has become a catalyst for sustainable social transformation. Collective gestures, such as annual reforestation campaigns, worship services dedicated to creation, and ecological fasts translate faith into visible acts, reinforcing community unity around a common ecological commitment. They also contribute to youth education, intergenerational transmission, and the integration of ecology into the local culture.

Consequently, the Church can nurture ecological hope rooted in God's love for the world. This hope does not deny existing challenges, but inspires persistent collective mobilization. It is expressed through communal practices of solidarity such as collective composting, waste recovery, water management, and community gardens.

These simple acts embody the gospel in daily life, responding simultaneously to climate and social crises. Moreover, ecology is a theological locus of its own right, not merely an additional moral concern. The Church is, therefore, entrusted with caring for the earth as a sacred gift to be transmitted to future generations (Euvé, 2012)

Christian ethics provide a strong moral foundation for community participation in environmental policy. By viewing the earth as a sacred gift, the Christian vision fosters ethical and responsible engagement. Since faith structures collective mobilization in rural areas by strengthening social cohesion and solidarity values, churches can play a decisive role in implementing national climate action plans locally through pedagogical, agricultural, and community-based initiatives.

2.5.5. *Prophetic Witness and Ecological Hope*

Christian witnesses are not limited to denunciation; they also proclaim embodied hope. In the face of environmental and climate crises, the Church envisions a reconciled future in which humanity and creation coexist in peace (Revelation. 21:1–5). This hope sustains a persevering commitment, which is lucid and joyful. The ecological mission thus becomes an anticipation of the Kingdom, already breaking into the present.

The Church played a critical role in its prophetic vocation. It can expose corruption, illegal deforestation, projects harmful to local ecosystems, and the abusive exploitation of agricultural land. Its discourse recalls the demand for social and environmental justice, particularly for the most vulnerable (Jeremiah 22:3; Isaiah 58:6–7). This prophetic voice does not seek political power but fidelity to God, life, and human dignity. Acting as a watchman, it calls for coherence between political discourse and concrete ecological actions. Through its spiritual authority, it strengthens public demand for environmental governance.

3. LOCAL CONTEXT: RELIGION, AGROECOLOGY, AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES

3.1. *Contextualizing a Christian Ecological Ethic in Madagascar*

3.1.1. *Climate, Environmental, and Economic Crisis*

As in many parts of the world, Madagascar is facing the combined impacts of environmental degradation and climate change. Irregular rainfall patterns severely disrupt agriculture, which is the primary livelihood of most of the population. The country is increasingly exposed to violent cyclones and recurrent droughts that exacerbate food insecurity. These climatic pressures are compounded by widespread poverty, particularly in the rural areas. Lacking alternatives, farmers often resort to environmentally harmful practices, which deepens their vulnerability year after year. Therefore, an ethically grounded agricultural response is essential.

3.1.2. *Convergences Between Christian Ethics and Environmental Policy*

Madagascar's environmental and climate policies (National Climate Change Adaptation Plan of Madagascar, 2021 (Republic of Madagascar, 2021)) emphasize agroecology, sustainable resource management, reforestation, and environmental education. These priorities resonate with biblical principles,

such as responsibility (Genesis 2:15), justice (Micah 6:8), solidarity, and respect for creation. Likewise, biblical appeals to simplicity (1 Timothy 6:6–10) converge with national strategies for transitioning toward a green economy. Such parallels open avenues for the ethical and spiritual appropriation of environmental policy.

3.1.3. *Complementarity with Mitigation and Adaptation Measures*

Christian ecological ethics can strengthen mitigation measures through advocacy of modest lifestyles, reforestation, and responsible waste management. It can also support adaptation strategies such as crop diversification, agroecological practices, and the conservation of soil and water. While these measures are already promoted by national policies, their effectiveness can be enhanced when underpinned by strong religious motivations. For example, in Mahereza, several farmers practice composting, fallowing, and crop rotation explicitly as an expression of their faith. This illustrates the potential synergy between public environmental policies and local spiritual engagements.

3.2. *Christian Beliefs and Agricultural Practices in Mahereza*

3.2.1. *Sacred Vision of Land and Scriptural Influence*

To obtain grounded insights, fieldwork and household surveys were conducted in a rural commune of Mahereza. The study, which was conducted among 119 farming families, was based on a random sample that was stratified according to religion (Christians and non-Christians) and the farming methods used. This approach ensures balanced representation of religious practices and sensibilities. The farmers were given a questionnaire measuring their faith, ecological awareness and farming practices. The responses were supplemented by field observations. Pearson and Spearman correlations were used to analyse the collected data and identify links between Christian religiosity and agricultural sustainability. The results indicate that the vast majority of inhabitants, predominantly farmers, are believers: 90% identify as Christians, 95% are baptized, and 86% report regular prayer. For most, the land is perceived as a divine gift, in line with [Revol \(2020\)](#) and *Laudato Si'*.

In Mahereza, faith strongly shapes agricultural behavior, often interpreted as part of a divine mission ([Rakotomalala & Ramambason, 2025](#)). Some farmers justify intensive exploitation based on Genesis 1:28, whereas others adopt an ethical and ecological reading of Genesis 2:15. Those with heightened ecological awareness were more likely to practice soil conservation and agroecology. However, a gap remains: although 78.3% affirm their Christian responsibility toward creation, an equivalent proportion has never engaged in concrete environmental actions ([Rakotomalala, 2025](#)).

3.2.2. *Role of Local Churches in Agroecological Transition: Training, Awareness, and Community Mobilization*

Sociocultural factors strongly influence the understanding and enactment of Christian beliefs in agriculture. In Mahereza, local church leaders have initiated programs, such as workshops and seminars on soil and water conservation. Several churches have encouraged reforestation, composting, and sustainable water management. They organized tree-planting campaigns, training in sustainable farming, and awareness-raising activities. These initiatives embody a living faith integrated into the daily lives of farmers, showing that the Gospel can inspire simple, yet transformative ecological practices ([Rakotomalala, 2025](#)).

Religious teachings transmitted during Sunday services, Bible studies, and community interactions provide a reference framework for agricultural practices. Within Christian communities, group dynamics foster the diffusion of ecological farming practices inspired by biblical ethics ([Rakotomalala, 2025](#)).

3.2.3. *Ambivalence Between Declared Faith and Intensive Farming Practices*

Despite Mahereza's strong religiosity and church-led agricultural initiatives, farmers' adherence to biblical ecological principles remains theoretical. Sustainable practices are constrained by economic pressures and limited technical alternatives. While the Bible presents land as a sacred gift to be preserved, the socioeconomic realities of Madagascar frequently push farmers toward intensive methods.

Dependence on regional markets encourages productivity at the expense of ecological stewardship. Food insecurity and modest incomes limit farmers' abilities to invest in sustainable alternatives. Chemical fertilizers and pesticides remain widespread, despite growing awareness of their harmful effects on soils and ecosystems. Agroecology is sometimes perceived as costly or risky despite its long-term benefits. These pressures create inconsistencies between the proclaimed Christian ethics and actual farming practices. Bridging this gap requires community-based support to translate faith into concrete ecological action.

This tension between convictions and practices reflects Weber's (2024) analysis of the influence of belief systems on behavior and Ellul's (2008) argument regarding the limited impact of ecological awareness under economic constraints. Ultimately, it reveals a conflict between economic and ecological responsibilities.

3.2.4. *Christian Faith and Ecology: Toward a Contextualized Alliance*

Within Mahereza's religious and agricultural context, achieving coherence between the Christian faith and farming requires a paradigm shift. Agricultural practices must integrate ecological stewardship as an expression of spiritual witness. Biblical teachings on justice and responsibility inspire balanced and sustainable choices. An alliance between faith, local knowledge, and agroecological innovation would enable the reconciliation of productivity and resource preservation. In this way, Christian vocation can take form in agriculture that nourishes, restores, and honors God's creation.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A CONTEXTUALIZED CHRISTIAN ECOLOGICAL ETHIC

To operationalize Christian ecological ethics in Mahereza, and more broadly in Madagascar, it is essential to propose context-specific recommendations for churches, institutional partners, and grassroots actors. These proposals aim to harmonize spiritual convictions, ecological imperatives, and local socioeconomic constraints.

4.1. *Recommendations for Churches*

Local churches play a central role in the advancement of embodied ecospirituality. First, they can strengthen the formation of ecospirituality and environmental theology, equipping believers with a solid foundation to connect faith and ecological responsibility. The creation of local ecospiritual groups would further mobilize congregations around contextually relevant projects. Another key avenue is the integration of agroecology into church missions through practical workshops, partnerships with experts, and establishment of demonstration plots:

- Churches are also called upon to bear public witness through sustainable practices, such as reducing waste, planting trees, and promoting the responsible use of natural resources. To ensure the effectiveness of this ecological ethics, the Church must encourage a comprehensive spiritual conversion expressed in three steps:
- Repentance: acknowledging human responsibility in the degradation of divine creation.
- Conversion of perception: rediscovering creation as a meaningful gift, structured, and reflective of divine glory.
- Concrete commitment: embodying Christ's servant model grounded in scripture and aligned with Malagasy national strategies.

4.2. *Recommendations for Institutional Partners*

Collaboration with institutional actors is indispensable to sustaining these initiatives. Ecclesial leaders should assume the roles of advocacy and "green leadership" by speaking publicly about climate challenges and influencing local policies.

Christian NGOs can support this process by implementing agroecological projects, leading awareness campaigns, and fostering faith cooperation to amplify the impact. The State, for its part, can facilitate collaboration with churches, ensure targeted funding, and officially recognize their role as climate actors.

Universities and research institutes also play strategic roles by producing relevant knowledge and providing theological and technical support. Their engagement strengthens both the scientific and theological credibility of initiatives while ensuring the contextual relevance of actions in the field.

4.3. *Church-State Partnerships for Sustainable Development*

In rural areas, churches represent legitimate actors in the ecological transition. Their community anchoring, moral authority, and mobilizing capacity make them strategic partners. The State could involve religious leaders in local committees in the implementation of climate strategies. Joint training programs and pilot projects involving churches, NGOs, and government institutions would embody this partnership for the common good. Shared governance rooted in mutual respect further strengthens the legitimacy and effectiveness of climate policies.

5. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the implementation of contextualized Christian ecological ethics constitutes a relevant lever for addressing environmental challenges in Madagascar, particularly in the commune of Mahereza. By articulating biblical teachings, contemporary theology, and local socioeconomic realities, it offers a framework capable of inspiring sustainable agricultural practices while strengthening Christian witnesses in rural communities.

Field findings indicate that, despite strong religiosity and widespread awareness of responsibility toward creation, a gap remains between spiritual convictions and concrete actions. This discrepancy, often linked to economic, technical, and structural constraints, highlights the need for sustained support through training, awareness raising, and institutional backing.

Within this framework, the Christian ecological ethics developed in this study unfolded in three steps: acknowledging human responsibility for environmental degradation (repentance), rediscovering creation as a meaningful gift and reflection of divine glory (conversion of perception), and acting concretely in the service of creation, guided by Christ's example and aligned with Malagasy national strategies (practical commitment).

Local churches, in partnership with the State, NGOs, and academic institutions, can play a strategic role by combining their moral authority, community mobilization, and spiritual grounding to promote agroecological transitions. Such collaboration enhances coherence between faith and ecological engagement, while contributing to national and international climate objectives.

Finally, this approach opens up promising perspectives for dialogue between faith, science, and policy. It positions ecology not only as a technical or scientific discipline but also as a space for spiritual conversion and collective transformation. In this way, a Christian ecological ethic, rooted in scripture and attentive to local realities, can actively contribute to the preservation of creation, in service of the common good and future generations.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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