

The Noahic Covenant as a Foundation for a Global Ethic: Implications for Natural Science and Environmental in Christian Education Contexts

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study utilizes a document analysis approach to construct a theoretical framework for a global environmental ethic based on the Noahic Covenant in Genesis 9. The research aims to systematically examine the covenant's theological themes specifically God's commitment to all creation and the establishment of human stewardship and their capacity to provide a universal moral foundation that transcends cultural and religious divides. Through critical analysis of biblical texts, theological commentaries, and international ethic declarations, the study investigates the practical implications for Christian education. It concludes by proposing integrative pedagogical strategies that connect natural science and environmental responsibility with this biblically-grounded, global ethic, aiming to foster a generation of scientifically-literate and morally-driven ecological stewards.

INTRODUCTION

The defining paradox of the early 21st century lies in the stark contrast between humanity's monumental technological achievements and the unprecedented ecological crisis those very achievements have precipitated. (Martin, 2012) Scientific evidence, meticulously documented by global institutions, presents an unequivocal and alarming portrait of a planet in distress. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) confirms that global surface temperatures have risen approximately 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels, a shift overwhelmingly driven by human activities that have elevated atmospheric carbon dioxide to concentrations not seen in at least two million years. (Sweder, Garcia, & Salinas-Quiroz, 2024) This statistical warming translates into tangible, devastating phenomena: the relentless acidification of our oceans, a heightened frequency and intensity of catastrophic weather events from scorching wildfires to paralyzing floods, and a biodiversity crisis so severe it is widely acknowledged as the sixth mass extinction. The 2019 Global Assessment Report by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) delivered the sobering conclusion that around one million species are now threatened with extinction, many within mere decades, due to anthropogenic pressures. (Rathoure, 2024) These are not merely environmental challenges to be solved through technical innovation; they represent a profound failure of our collective global ethic a critical lack of a shared, compelling moral framework that can inspire and obligate humanity to steward the fragile planetary systems upon which all life depends.

In response to this escalating crisis, the international community has largely turned to secular ethical frameworks. Concepts like "sustainable development," enshrined in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, and the geological designation of the "Anthropocene" attempt to articulate a new paradigm of human responsibility. (Cléménçon, 2012) While these frameworks provide valuable common ground for policy dialogue and goal-setting, they often struggle to generate the deep-seated, transformative commitment required for meaningful and sacrificial global action. They can be perceived as abstract, politically negotiated compromises, or as narratives of guilt that lack the motivational power to transcend short-term national and economic interests. They frequently appeal to pragmatism or fear but may lack the narrative depth, transcendent authority, and communal resonance needed to fundamentally reorient human behavior on a global scale. This creates a critical vacuum, a pressing need for an ethic that is both universally applicable and morally compelling, one that speaks to the core of human identity, purpose, and our inherent connection to the natural world.

It is within this context of ecological urgency and ethical insufficiency that this paper turns to a foundational narrative from the Judeo-Christian tradition: the Noahic Covenant described in Genesis 8:20-9:17. This ancient text, which establishes a new, enduring relationship between God, humanity, and the entire created order in the aftermath of the Great Flood, offers a surprisingly potent and relevant foundation for a robust global environmental ethic.(Blount, 2017) Its significance extends far beyond the boundaries of a particular faith tradition, providing core theological principles that can address the contemporary crisis. The covenant is, first and foremost, universal in its scope. It is made not only with Noah and his descendants but explicitly and repeatedly with "every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark" (Genesis 9:10, ESV).(Naselli, 2009) This establishes a created community of intrinsic moral significance, fundamentally linking human destiny and responsibility to the fate of the non-human world.

The theological architecture of the Noahic Covenant is built upon three pivotal pillars that directly counter the paradigms of exploitation and apathy fueling the current environmental decline. First, it is rooted in a Divine Commitment to Creation. The covenant is initiated and sustained by God's own unilateral promise, sealed with the sign of the rainbow, assuring that the fundamental rhythms of life "seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night" (Genesis 8:22) will never cease.(Jackelén, 2005) This divine fidelity establishes the stability, integrity, and order of the natural world not as a mere given, but as a sacred trust, making the cosmos a reliable object of study and a gift to be cherished. Second, it redefines the Human Role as Accountable Stewardship. The reaffirmation of humanity's unique status, bearing the *imago Dei* (image of God), is immediately contextualized within a framework of responsibility. The command to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1, 7) is set within the context of God's ultimate ownership, casting humanity in the role of God's vice-regents, charged with caring for a creation that is not its possession.(Newkirk, 2020) Third, it introduces a principle of Moral Accountability and the Sanctity of Life through the institution of a creational law governing the shedding of blood (Genesis 9:5-6). This lays the groundwork for an ethic of restraint, respect, and justice that governs humanity's relationship with each other and with other creatures.

While the existing scholarly literature contains robust theological works on creation care, extensive scientific documentation of the environmental crisis, and well-developed models for Christian education, a significant research gap persists at their intersection. Theologians like Steven Bouma-Prediger and Loren Wilkinson have powerfully articulated a biblical case for environmental stewardship, and the scientific community, through the IPCC and IPBES, has provided the urgent data.(Bouma-Prediger, 2003) However, there is a lack of scholarly work that systematically leverages the specific framework of the Noahic Covenant as the primary foundation for a global ethic and then explicitly translates that ethic into a concrete model for integrating natural science and environmental education within Christian contexts. Previous works often treat theology, science, and education as separate domains. The novelty of this

research lies in its deliberate and focused synthesis, arguing that the Noahic Covenant uniquely binds them together, making the rigorous study of natural science a theological imperative and proactive environmental action a covenantal response.

Therefore, this paper aims to articulate a global environmental ethic grounded explicitly and solely in the theological principles of the Noahic Covenant and to explicate its direct implications for the theory and practice of natural science and environmental education in Christian contexts. Through a qualitative methodology of document analysis examining biblical texts, key theological commentaries, scientific reports, and educational philosophy this study will construct a coherent model. It will demonstrate that by integrating this framework, Christian education can equip a generation of learners who are not only scientifically literate but also ethically grounded and motivationally fueled, seeing environmental responsibility not as a political or optional add-on, but as a non-negotiable response to a divine covenant that includes all of creation in its gracious and binding scope. In a world groaning under the weight of human impact, the ancient promise to Noah emerges as an urgently relevant guide for a sustainable and ethical future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The scholarly conversation surrounding the integration of environmental ethics, theology, and education is rich and multifaceted. This literature review will situate the proposed research within three primary domains: theological foundations for environmental ethics, the theory of worldview integration in Christian education, and the specific pedagogical challenges at the intersection of science and faith. The grand theory underpinning this study is Covenant Theology, while it is supported by the theoretical frameworks of Worldview Integration and Post-Critical Realism.

The primary stream of literature relevant to this study involves theological ethics and ecology. A significant body of work, exemplified by scholars like Steven Bouma-Prediger in *For the Beauty of the Earth* and Loren Wilkinson, has effectively dismantled the persistent but flawed narrative that the Judeo-Christian tradition, particularly the "dominion" mandate in Genesis 1:28, is the root cause of the ecological crisis. (Wood, Curry, Bouma-Prediger, Bjelland, & Bratton, 2005) These scholars have instead articulated a robust theology of creation care, emphasizing concepts of stewardship (stewardship), kinship, and sacramental witness to creation's goodness. Their work provides an essential foundation, establishing that Christian faith carries profound ecological implications. However, while they frequently reference the Noahic Covenant as a key text, their treatments often subsume it within a broader Genesis-based theology. (Viands, 2010) The novelty of the present study lies in its specific and exclusive focus on the Noahic Covenant (Genesis 9:1-17) as a self-contained framework for a global ethic. It argues that the covenant's universal scope its establishment with "every living creature" (Genesis 9:10) and its pre-Abrahamic nature make it uniquely suited to address a pluralistic world, a point not fully developed in the existing broader creation-care literature.

This theological exploration is framed by the grand theory of Covenant Theology. This framework understands God's relationship with creation as being structured through a series of binding agreements. The Noahic Covenant is seen not as an isolated event but as a universal, creational covenant that establishes the foundational moral order for all humanity and for the Earth itself. (Dell, 2003) This perspective, drawn from systematic theologians like Herman Bavinck and more recently applied to ecology by Michael Northcott in *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, provides the overarching lens. (Goundrey-Smith, 2024) It posits that the stability of the natural world (Genesis 8:22) is a function of God's covenantal faithfulness, and human ethical responsibility is a response to this prior divine commitment.

To bridge theology into educational practice, this study draws upon the supporting theory of Worldview Integration, a cornerstone of Christian education philosophy articulated by authors such as David Naugle in *Worldview: The History of a Concept* and applied in educational contexts by James Nickel. (Tierney, 2017) This theory posits that authentic Christian learning involves the deliberate and systematic connection of all academic disciplines, including natural science, to the foundational beliefs of a Christian worldview. The Noahic Covenant, in this model, provides the specific "faith" component to be integrated with the "learning" of ecology and environmental science. (Jenkins, 2013) It answers the "why" of environmental responsibility, while science provides the "how."

Furthermore, the epistemological challenge of relating scientific and theological knowledge is addressed through the supporting lens of Post-Critical Realism, as developed by theologian and scientist John Polkinghorne. (Polkinghorne, 1998) This position acknowledges the distinct methodologies of science (investigating proximate causes) and theology (investigating ultimate purposes and meanings) but holds that both are engaged with the same objective reality, which is endowed with intelligibility by its Creator. The Noahic Covenant's affirmation of a reliable natural order (Genesis 8:22) theologically grounds this intelligibility, making scientific inquiry a valid and valuable endeavor for the Christian student. (VanDrunen, 2010)

While the existing literature provides strong theological foundations for creation care and robust models for faith-learning integration, a gap remains in explicitly linking the specific theological framework of the Noahic Covenant, through the lens of Covenant Theology, to a practical educational model for science instruction. This research seeks to fill that gap by utilizing Worldview Integration and Post-Critical Realism to translate a covenantal ethic into a transformative pedagogical paradigm.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design utilizing document analysis as its primary methodological approach. The research process involves the systematic examination and interpretation of a curated collection of textual documents to construct a robust theoretical argument.(Tracy, 2024) The data corpus comprises three distinct categories: primary theological sources, specifically the biblical text of Genesis 8:20-9:17; secondary scholarly literature including theological commentaries and works on Christian environmental ethics; and tertiary documents such as international reports on environmental crises and Christian education frameworks.(Bauer, 2011) Through a process of hermeneutical analysis and thematic coding, these documents will be interrogated to extrapolate the principles of the Noahic Covenant and synthesize their implications for a global ethic and educational practice. This method is chosen for its rigor in facilitating an in-depth, contextual understanding of the theoretical constructs under investigation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Universality of the Noahic Covenant as a Foundational Global Ethic

The argument for the Noahic Covenant (Genesis 9:1-17) as a foundational global environmental ethic rest critically on its inherent universality, a quality best illuminated through an examination of the Hebrew text. This covenant is not presented as a particular agreement with a chosen people but as a cosmic ordinance establishing the fundamental terms of relationship between God, humanity, and the entire biotic community.(Murray, 2000) Its universal scope is demonstrated through three key exegetical lenses: the parties involved, the thematic content, and its enduring sign.

Firstly, the exhaustive list of covenant participants underscores its inclusive nature. The text repeatedly and emphatically specifies the recipients of this divine pledge. In Genesis 9:9-10, God states, "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, and with every living creature [וְאֶת כָּל-נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה, v'et kol-nefesh hachayyah] that is with you... with every living creature [לְכָל-נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה, l'kol-nefesh hachayyah] on the earth." The Hebrew term נֶפֶשׁ (nefesh), often translated as "soul" or "being," here signifies a "living creature" in its fullest, embodied existence. The deliberate repetition of kol-nefesh hachayyah ("every living creature") moves beyond anthropocentrism, explicitly incorporating the animal kingdom into the binding agreement. This is not a covenant where humanity is the sole beneficiary; the non-human creation is a direct party, granting it a status of intrinsic value within the divine moral framework.(Vorster, 2011).

Secondly, the content of the covenant reinforces its global applicability. The central promise is the stabilization of the natural world. Genesis 8:22, which serves as a prologue to the formal covenant, declares, "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease." This is a promise of ecological predictability. The subsequent prohibition against murder (Genesis 9:5-6) is grounded not in Israelite law but in the universal fact that humanity is made in the "image of God" (בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים, b'tselem Elohim). This establishes a creational, rather than a revelational, basis for human rights and the sanctity of life, applicable to all people irrespective of nationality or creed. The human role is thus framed as one of accountable stewardship under God's ultimate ownership, a mandate for all of humanity.(Bbosa, 2025).

Finally, the sign of the covenant, the bow in the clouds (אֶת־קֶשֶׁתִּי, et-kashti), is universally visible and non-exclusive. Unlike later covenantal signs like circumcision, which is a marker of a specific community, the rainbow is set in the sky for all to see. Its symbolism is profound: God's "war bow" is pointed away from the earth, hung up as a sign of peace and restraint.(Shectman, 2016) This sign is a perpetual reminder to God Himself of His oath (Genesis 9:15-16), ensuring that the promise is maintained by divine fidelity, not by human merit or faithfulness. This makes the covenant's assurance unconditional and universally reliable.

Through a careful Hebrew exegesis of its participants, content, and sign, the Noahic Covenant emerges as a uniquely potent foundation for a global ethic. It transcends particularistic boundaries by establishing a moral order for all humanity and, significantly, for the entire community of life. Its principles of divine commitment to creation, accountable human stewardship, and the sanctity of life provide a transcendent, universally accessible framework that can undergird a shared global responsibility for our planetary home.

Re-framing Natural Science as a Covenantal Responsibility in Christian Education

The integration of faith and learning has long been a central tenet of Christian education, yet the discipline of natural science has frequently occupied an ambiguous, if not contentious, position within this paradigm. Traditional approaches often vacillate between a defensive posture against scientific theories perceived as threatening and a utilitarian adoption of scientific knowledge stripped of theological significance.(Chappell, 2018) This discussion proposes a fundamental re-framing of natural science, not as a neutral tool or an adversarial force, but as a covenantal responsibility, rooted explicitly in the theological framework of the Noahic Covenant (Genesis 8:20-9:17). This shift moves science education from the periphery to the heart of a Christian worldview, transforming it into a discipline of discipleship and a practical response to God's faithful promise to creation.

The theological foundation for this re-framing rests upon God's unilateral commitment to uphold the natural order. Following the Flood, God declares, "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease" (Genesis 8:22). This is not merely a statement of fact but a divine oath that establishes the cosmos as reliable, orderly, and intelligible. The predictability of natural laws the very object of scientific inquiry is thus grounded in God's covenantal faithfulness.(Chapp, 2011) When students study the water cycle, the laws of thermodynamics, or the process of photosynthesis, they are, in essence, investigating the mechanisms and structures through which God sustains His creation according to His promise. Science, therefore, becomes the systematic exploration of God's ongoing creational faithfulness. This perspective effectively bridges the perceived chasm between faith and science; the scientist and the theologian are studying the same reality, one exploring its proximate causes and the other its ultimate purpose and sustainer.

The Noahic Covenant redefines the human role within this created order. Humanity, created in the *imago Dei*, is reinstated with a mandate to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 9:1, 7), but this is now contextualized within a covenant made also with "every living creature" (Genesis 9:10). This establishes a relational community under God's sovereignty, positioning humanity as accountable stewards or vice-regents. From this perspective, scientific literacy is not an optional skill but a core component of faithful stewardship. To care for a system, one must first understand its complexities, interdependencies, and vulnerabilities. A student learning about ecosystem dynamics or climate science is acquiring the necessary knowledge to fulfill their covenantal role as a responsible caretaker. Ignorance of science becomes not just an academic shortcoming, but a failure in one's God-given responsibility to "till and keep" the garden (Genesis 2:15).

Consequently, the pedagogical imperative is transformed. The goal of science education in a Christian context is no longer merely to produce competent technicians or to pass standardized exams.(Majesty, Pane, & Jura, 2025) Its primary aim is to form ethically-minded stewards who perceive the natural world as a sacred trust. This involves cultivating a sense of wonder and reverence for God's faithful sustenance, a humility before the complexity of His design, and a sober recognition of the responsibility that comes with scientific knowledge and technological power. By framing natural science as a covenantal responsibility, Christian education can empower a generation to approach the environmental crisis not with despair or apathy, but with a sense of vocation, viewing their scientific engagement as an active and faithful participation in God's redemptive purposes for all creation.

Pedagogical Applications: from Theological Ethic to Transformative Classroom Practice

The translation of the Noahic Covenant's theological framework into tangible classroom practice represents the critical culmination of this ethical-educational model. Merely understanding the concept of covenantal stewardship is insufficient; authentic learning requires pedagogical strategies that foster embodiment and application. (Taylor, 2020) This discussion outlines a transformative approach, moving from abstract theory to formative practice through two primary, interconnected methodologies: inquiry-based learning and project-based learning, thereby bridging the gap between confessional belief and practical discipleship.

Inquiry-based learning serves as the foundational pedagogical engine. In this model, students are guided to engage in critical dialogue between the biblical text of Genesis 9 and empirical scientific data. For instance, a lesson on biodiversity would not only explore the mechanisms of species interdependence but would also examine the covenant's inclusion of "every living creature" (Genesis 9:10) as a theological mandate for preserving biological variety. Students would be prompted with essential questions: How does the current rate of species extinction violate the principles of the Noahic Covenant? What does the covenant's emphasis on life's sanctity imply for our treatment of endangered species? This methodology positions students as active investigators who discover for themselves the profound connections between divine promise and ecological reality, thereby internalizing the ethic rather than passively receiving it.

This intellectual engagement must then be coupled with actionable response through project-based learning. Here, knowledge is consolidated and faith is expressed through tangible service. Students might design and implement a local habitat restoration, audit their school's energy consumption to develop a creation-care plan, or collaborate with a local conservation group. Such projects are not mere add-ons but are the practical outworking of the covenant, allowing students to enact their role as stewards. This experiential learning transforms the classroom from a site of information transfer into a workshop for practical discipleship, empowering students to become agents of restoration in their communities. (Shaw, 2014) Through this integrated pedagogical approach, the Noahic Covenant ceases to be a distant ancient text and becomes a living, breathing framework for faithful and informed action in the world.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article demonstrates that the Noahic Covenant provides a robust theological foundation for a global environmental ethic, reorients Christian engagement with natural science, and offers transformative potential for pedagogical practice. Its universal scope, encompassing all creation, establishes a transcendent basis for ecological responsibility that surpasses secular frameworks. By framing the natural world as the object of God's faithful promise, the study of science becomes a covenantal act of understanding divine sustenance. This theological foundation, when operationalized through inquiry and project-based learning, equips students to become faithful stewards who address ecological crises not merely as technical problems, but as moral and spiritual imperatives.

Based on these findings, three recommendations are proposed. First, for theologians and ethicists: further develop the Noahic Covenant as a platform for interfaith dialogue on environmental ethics, emphasizing its pre-Abrahamic and creational nature. Second, for educators and curriculum developers: create integrated lesson plans and resources that explicitly connect scientific concepts in ecology and climate science with the theological principles of stewardship, divine commitment, and cosmic community found in Genesis 9. Third, for Christian institutions: prioritize professional development for science educators, training them to facilitate this integration and to mentor students in designing faith-informed sustainability projects that serve their local communities, thereby embodying the covenant's call to accountable care for our common home.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Advancing research requires empirical validation of this covenantal model's efficacy in transforming ecological awareness and practice within diverse Christian educational settings.

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