

1 ECOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY IN AFRICANA INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS (AIRS): 2 AN APPRAISAL

3 Abstract

4 This study examines the complex interplay between ecology and spirituality in Africana
5 Indigenous Religions (AIRs), emphasising the influence of sacred worldview on environmental
6 ethics and practices. The main aim is to investigate how AIRs perceive nature as a living, sacred
7 entity, and how this worldview influences ecological stewardship, biodiversity preservation, and
8 sustainable practices. This research explores the influence of spiritual beliefs, rituals and
9 cosmological narratives on human connections with land, water, animals and plant life in
10 indigenous African and African diasporic groups. A qualitative research methodology is utilised,
11 incorporating ethnographic fieldwork, comprehensive interviews with traditional custodians and
12 practitioners, and an examination of oral traditions and ritual practices. Selected case studies
13 from various Africana contexts offer comparative insights into the integration of spirituality into
14 environmental engagement. The research is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Deep
15 Ecology and Indigenous Epistemology. Deep Ecology offers a conceptual basis for recognising
16 nature as inherently important, whereas Indigenous epistemology validates indigenous
17 knowledge systems. And their comprehensive approaches to human-nature relationships.
18 Collectively, these frameworks enable a decolonised interpretation of ecological consciousness
19 inside AIRs. The research enhances global environmental discourse by emphasising indigenous
20 spiritual perspectives on ecology as viable alternatives to extractive development strategies. It
21 emphasises the necessity of incorporating spiritual and cultural values into modern environmental
22 policy and sustainability initiatives.

23 **Keywords:** Ecology, Africana, Spirituality, Environmental Ethics

25 Introduction

26 The recent overwhelming ecological crisis in the world has posed serious questions on the
27 attitude of humanity towards the natural environment. Many authors have raised concerns about
28 the perceived notion of the place of man in the universe and his responsibilities to the natural
29 environment. This concern emanates from the submission that the manner humanity views their
30 position in the universe determines their mode of relating with the natural environment (John and
31 Enang, 2022). Prominent among the many authors who hold this argument is the Norwegian
32 philosopher Arne Naess; the first to raise issues on deep ecology. Throughout humanity's
33 existence on earth, his actions and attitude to the natural environment are based on the
34 philosophical view that humanity occupies a higher and superior position which makes them
35 more valuable than other sentient and non-sentient beings in the universe. The misconception that
36 other beings possess instrumental values as opposed to an intrinsic value has propelled humanity
37 to misuse and overexploit the natural environment without a deep consideration of the long-run
38 effects on the universe which humanity's survival depend on.

39 Man has significantly interfered with nature since he adopted sedentary lifestyle (Odey,
40 2021:525). The consensus among authors about the factor responsible for the ecological crisis in
41 the world is the extreme anthropocentric view of human-nature. Many African authors have
42 accused and attributed this anthropocentric problem solely to the Western view, presupposing
43 that other worldviews are free of this anthropocentric approach. However, some African authors
44 have found that the African view on human-nature relation is purely anthropocentric, and this is
45 deeply rooted in the African ontology (John and Enang, 2022). Nevertheless, to distinguish
46 between Western and African anthropocentric view of human-nature relations, Ifeakor (2017)
47 explains that African anthropocentric view assigns the obligation and responsibility of
48 environmental stewardship to man which makes him a caretaker and not to lord over
49 nature. Contemporary African anthropocentric view of human-nature relations does not have
50 much to do with Western influence but the excessive quest or drive for a better life and a total
51 disregard of the adverse effect on human-nature relations (John, Ekeke and Enang,
52 2025). Generally, the advocacy for a paradigm shift, from ethical theories which promotes man as
53 the only being with an intrinsic value forms the central discussion of environmental ethics
54 whether African or non-African. Environmental ethicists hold vehemently that the panacea to the
55 world environmental degradation and climate change is the inclusion of and consideration of
56 other sentient and non-sentient beings in ethical discourse as beings with not only instrumental
57 but also intrinsic values. This wakeup call, beyond reasonable doubt birthed the celebration of
58 International World Environment Day, and has opened doors for enlightenment programmes on
59 environmental protection, preservation and conservation, and the importance of the need to
60 understand the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature. It is on this score, that the
61 Pope Francis' Encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si'* advocacy for the care and protection
62 of our common home (the environment), is instructive.

63 While much have been achieved through the discussions of environmental ethicists, the
64 need to understand the spiritual view and connection between humans and nature as the driving
65 force for the conservation of the natural environment cannot be overemphasized. The notion of
66 the natural environment being a sacred and living entity is endemic among traditional religions in
67 and beyond Africa. From antiquity through contemporary epoch indigenous religions have held
68 tenaciously the belief that all sentient and non-sentient beings are sacred entities on the premise
69 that they are from the same source of life. African and indigenous Religions perceive nature as a
70 sacred entity on the grounds that it serves as the abode of suprasensible beings and as channels by
71 which humanity can connect with the creator (the Almighty) (Nana, 2016). This belief is also
72 enshrined in the Hindu and Buddhist views of the natural environment. The perception of nature
73 as a sacred entity is central to the thrust of Eco-spirituality. Eco-spirituality is a contemporary
74 concept originating in Europe that has undergone multiple developmental stages. However,
75 historically, the view about the spiritual connection between humanity and the natural
76 environment has been in existence in some indigenous traditions around the world" (Onebunne
77 and Okechukwu, 2021). Thus, the recourse to green spirituality (Kelly,).

78 The failure of the panacea initiated by scientists to combat the environmental crisis reveals
79 the limits of science in this context. This has necessitated the review of the spiritual and moral
80 response to our environmental crisis (Etuk and Anweting, 2021).

81 **Indigenous Epistemology**

82

83 Though the question of the existence of the indigenous African epistemology has been laid
84 to rest, the emphasis has been shifted to its nature and scope. The question of the nature and
85 scope of indigenous African epistemology is not one initiated by Western authors to validate its
86 authenticity, but a concern also raised by African authors who seek a clear understanding beyond
87 ethnocentrism. In an attempt to proffer an answer to this question, some authors defined African
88 epistemology by making reference to the tenet of African philosophy. However, referring to
89 African philosophy appears to reduce African epistemology to African philosophy. The point is
90 that there is no consensus among authors concerning the meaning of indigenous African
91 epistemology. Nevertheless, this does not imply that it cannot be defined.

92 The idea of African epistemology is based on the acceptance that
93 such concepts as knowledge, truth, validity and rationality can be
94 interpreted using African categories and concepts as provided by
95 the African cultural and traditional experiences without recourse to
96 the Western conceptual framework (Sylvester et al., 2020).

97 The implication of the above definition is that African epistemology emphasises the use of the
98 indigenous African paradigm for validating knowledge claims, which is fundamentally different
99 from the paradigm laid down by the Western worldview. Since the search for knowledge is not
100 peculiar to the West, it presupposes that each people and culture has a unique method of grasping
101 reality, ascertaining the truth about an existential problem, and preserving and transmitting
102 knowledge. Therefore, African indigenous epistemology entails “the African conception of nature
103 of knowledge, the ways in which knowledge could be gained, the ways in which one can justify
104 an epistemic claim, and the role that knowledge plays in human existence” (Ajayi and Egbeolowo,
105 2024).

106 The nature of African epistemology has been subjected to critical evaluation this is
107 occasioned by the communal principle enshrined in the African worldview. It has also been
108 criticised for its excessive concern with metaphysical issues beyond human comprehension.
109 These issues have been resolved by different authors. John (2009) argued that the nature of
110 knowledge among indigenous Africans is both empirical and metaphysical. The empirical and
111 metaphysical knowledge are both experiential. Though close to the truth, his assertion leaves out
112 or rules out the fact that the Indigenous Africans are rational beings. The point is that this paper
113 holds that indigenous Africans relied on experience, critical thinking, intuition, and revelation as
114 sources of knowledge, and that it does not promote any as superior to the others. Generally,

115 authors have identified the sources of knowledge in African epistemology as: sensory perception,
116 rationalism, premonition, common-sense knowledge, oral tradition, extrasensory knowledge, and
117 ontological knowledge. It is imperative to state that knowledge among indigenous Africans is
118 communal in the sense that an individual's awareness of a particular piece of information is not
119 knowledge until it is collectively verified by the community, and then it becomes knowledge.
120 This is consistent with the Western scientific paradigm and the principles of knowledge claims.
121 This African communal knowledge claim is categorised under ethno-epistemology. "Ethno-
122 epistemology is the study of knowledge from the perspective of particular African communities
123 as revealed in their cultural heritage, proverbs, folklores, traditions, and practices" (Irikefe, 2020).

124 The rationale for including indigenous epistemology in this discussion, and as the
125 substructure, is to gain a comprehensive understanding of Africans' understanding of their place
126 in the universe and the importance of nature to them. While it has been established that for
127 indigenous Africans all sources of knowledge are important, as far as the issue of the spiritual
128 understanding of the human-nature relationship is concerned, in the worldview and ontology, the
129 claim to this knowledge is metaphysical and communal. Although the spirit and physical worlds
130 are separate in the African worldview, beings in the spirit realm and living beings in the physical
131 realm communicate, sharing extrasensory knowledge. Through this knowledge, the living came
132 to understand that some plants, animals and non-sentient beings are special. They serve as the
133 abode of divinities, and they are totems. In most cases, this type of knowledge is revealed to
134 sacred personages within the community, who then communicate it to the people.

135

136 **A Critical Evaluation of the Thrust of Eco-Spirituality**

137 Anthropogenic environmental problems in the universe have been attributed to the spiritual
138 decline of modern humanity (Etuk and Anweting, 2021). This assertion contradicts the popular
139 submission of Lynn White in her essay *The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis that it is*
140 *caused by the anthropocentric view of Judeo-Christian religion; it teaches that God has endowed*
141 *humanity with the power to dominate and rule over the natural environment*, and this is the cause
142 of humans' overexploitation of nature. This position has been challenged by numerous authors in
143 theology and religious and cultural studies, who present scriptural evidence demonstrating that
144 the Judeo-Christian tradition holds that humans are stewards responsible for caring for nature.
145 History has it that from antiquity, traditional religions across the world hold a pantheistic view of
146 nature; traditional religions have an arcane veneration and regard for nature (sentient and non-
147 sentient) and see nature as possessing spiritual powers and serving as a medium through which
148 humanity can connect with the Divine. This notion and attitude towards the natural environment
149 created a spiritual bond between adherents of traditional religions and the natural environment,
150 which helps to prevent environmental degradation and abuse. Nevertheless, some authors
151 maintain that certain religious teachings can obscure adherents' awareness of religious activities
152 that threaten the ecosystem.

153 The discussions on the feeling of spiritual connection with nature gave rise to two prominent
154 thought systems: Eco-Spirituality and Deep Ecology. However, over the years, there has been a
155 misconception regarding the differences between these thought systems. In this segment of the
156 paper, we shall critically espouse the kernel of Eco-Spirituality. The meaning of Eco-spirituality
157 is subject to many interpretations, but its thrust remains the same. "Eco-Spirituality is the essential
158 belief in the sacredness of the natural environment" (Janet *et al.*, 2008). Eco-Spirituality involves
159 acknowledging nature as a living entity and an interconnected system that must be revered and
160 preserved. It combines environmentalism with spiritual practices, encouraging individuals to be
161 actively involved in efforts to sustain nature as a spiritual obligation. Eco-spirituality is grounded
162 on religious cum ethical principles and guidelines. (Asmanto *et al.*, 2016). Eco-spirituality
163 attempts to proffer answer to these questions; Does faith play a role in shaping environmental
164 attitude? If yes, in what way does religious faith influence an individual's attitude towards the
165 natural environment? Without religious faith, can the environmental crisis be ameliorated?
166 Environmentalism a different form of religion? (Jan *et al.*, 2008).

167 Traditional and world religions have attempted to proffer possible answers to these
168 questions. Hinduism and Buddhism have demonstrated how religious faith can influence an
169 individual's attitude toward nature. These Asian religions emphasised that all living beings are
170 from one source and possess the same element called *Brahman Atman*. Traditional religions have
171 provided ethical principles and existential guidelines for understanding and responding to
172 environmental crises, such as attributing these problems to the gods' anger and calling for respect
173 for nature as the gods' abode. While world religions like Christianity and Islam hold humanity
174 accountable for practices and actions that lead to environmental degradation. These religions
175 assigned humanity the role of a steward of nature, charged with caring for and nurturing it. Eco-
176 spirituality is an intellectual exercise that emerged in recent times. The rationale is that many
177 authors assumed that incorporating religious faith into the discourse would hinder "objectivity,
178 scientific investigation, professionalism, or democratic values" (Dwivedi, 1993). Religions have
179 played significant roles in fostering attitudes of environmental preservation and protection
180 throughout world history. Although it was largely ignored for many years, proponents of eco-
181 spirituality have awakened awareness of the need to return to religious faith if a plausible and
182 permanent panacea for environmental issues is to be achieved. Many authors today who are
183 advocates or proponents of eco-spirituality maintain that religion has the power to influence or
184 reveal a distinct form of consciousness in people, which is distinct from scientific thinking and
185 reflection. Religion enables people to become conscious of the extent to which they can dominate
186 other beings deemed inferior, reminding them that actions can have negative effects on them in
187 the long run (Dwivedi, 1993). In sum, Eco-spirituality emphasises the influence of religious
188 beliefs on attitudes toward and perceptions of the natural environment as a sacred entity.

189 **Deep Ecology: A Phenomenological Examination**

190 The discussion of deep ecology has its historical origins in the work of the Norwegian
191 philosopher Arne Naess in 1972. Influenced by Rachel Carson's argument enshrined in the

192 treatise *Silent Spring* about the damaging impacts of pesticides on nature and other
193 anthropogenic problems, Naess developed a keen interest in the need to preserve the natural
194 environment. Following his love of nature, he relocated to the countryside near a mountain.
195 Naess was greatly influenced by the works of Mahatma Ghandhi and Baruch Spinoza on nature.
196 After careful study of the environmental problems and discovering what he believed to be the
197 root of the problem, he deviated from the common notion that “a change in our way of doing
198 things will solve the environmental problems”. An idea commonly referred to as Shallow
199 Ecology. The term Deep Ecology was coined by Arne Naess as a new philosophical approach to
200 human-nature relations and proposed a panacea to the world environmental crisis. Naess puts
201 forward two arguments: that solving the present environmental crisis requires a paradigm shift
202 from the anthropocentric view of nature to ecocentrism. Ecocentrism holds that all sentient
203 beings possess intrinsic value. Again, Naess argued that ontologically and morally, humans are
204 not superior to other beings in the universe; rather, they are an integral part of the complex whole
205 of nature.

206 Although deep ecology is a new approach to human-nature relations, its thought pattern is a
207 merger of environmentalism and religious beliefs, aimed at achieving some benefits from our
208 moral duty through caring for the natural environment (Ambrosius, 2005). The crux of deep
209 ecology, in simple terms, is the argument that nature has an intrinsic value independent of
210 humans’ evaluation of its instrumental values (Nelson, 2008). Phenomenologically, deep
211 ecologists advocate for a biocentric egalitarian view of human-nature relations. This implies that
212 all sentient beings, humans, animals and plants possess equal intrinsic values. The thrust of deep
213 ecology has been summarised and paraphrased into eight points, namely;

- 214 i. All sentient beings possess equal intrinsic values; these values are separate from the
215 instrumental values of plants and animals to human beings.
216
- 217 ii. These intrinsic values are actualised by the quality and manifoldness of life forms and
218 are values in themselves; and
219
- 220 iii. Only on the grounds of satisfying important needs, humans have no right to reduce
221 the quality and manifoldness of life forms; and
222
- 223 iv. A significant reduction in the human population in the world is tantamount to a
224 progressive human life and culture. This population reduction is also a prerequisite for a
225 progressive nonhuman life, and
226
- 227 v. The natural environment has been overexploited by human beings, and the scenario is
228 incessantly aggravated; and
229

- 230 vi. To ameliorate this situation, a new policy is required, distinct from the former. This will
231 affect basic economic and technological structures, and
232
233 vii. The change in terms of ideology centres on acknowledging the intrinsic value of life, and
234 not about the drive for a higher standard of living; and
235
236 viii. As many who assent to the aforementioned points are directly or indirectly duty-bound
237 to be actively involved in these changes.
238

239 Prabhat (2024) posits that to distinguish his philosophical position from the former, Naess
240 “argued that ecologically responsible policies are apprehensive only in part with pollution and
241 resource depletion. There are deeper concerns grounded in principles of diversity, complexity,
242 symbiosis, autonomy, decentralisation, egalitarianism, and classlessness. The factor that makes
243 deep ecology enthralling is essentially the same as that which makes the nature of intrinsic
244 values in non-sentient beings fascinating: it provides a sound basis for protecting all forms of life
245 and the general well-being of the natural environment, compared with the human-centred view.
246 Deep ecology entails respect for nature and morally binds humans to relate to nature in a manner
247 consistent with that respect (Sarkar, 2005). Although numerous authors have outlined the pitfalls
248 of deep ecology, we adhere to the central thesis of the school of thought and its relation to eco-
249 spirituality. In sum, deep ecology can also be referred to as biocentrism.

250

251

252 **A Discourse on Nature as a Living and Sacred Entity in Traditional Religion**

253 One factor that distinguishes the views of monotheistic religions from those of traditional
254 religions, with respect to the natural environment, is the notion of nature as a living, sacred
255 being. Though Christianity and Islam, both monotheistic world religions, assign the obligation of
256 a steward over nature to humanity and encourage humanity to protect the natural environment,
257 these religions do not view nature as a sacred and living being. A phenomenological study of
258 diverse traditional religions in and beyond Africa reveals an endemic feature of their view of the
259 natural environment. Each of the traditional religions across the globe views nature as a sacred,
260 living entity, a view amplified by their pantheistic notions of nature. This is made possible by
261 their belief in the pantheon of gods. The idea of pantheism, common in many traditional
262 religions, contradicts the religious view of an Absolute Being enshrined in monotheistic
263 religions, such as Christianity and Islam (Takamizawa, 2003). However, the Judeo-Christian
264 religion holds the belief of the presence of God (the Absolute Being) in nature, and some people
265 seem to misconstrue it for pantheism. To clear this misconception, Youvan (2024) distinguished
266 between Divine immanence and pantheism, stating that “Divine immanence indicates the belief
267 that the divine [person] is present within and permeates all aspects of the world, blurring the

268 lines between Creator and creation”. A view found in the Christian scripture. He explained the
269 meaning of pantheism by making reference to Hinduism. He avers that “through the concept of
270 Brahman, Hinduism vehemently holds a pantheistic view of nature, teaching that the divine
271 (force not being, *Brahman*) underlies all of existence and that the individual self (*Atman*) is
272 ultimately one with the universal reality of *Brahman*”(Youvan, 2024).

273 The belief in nature as a living and sacred entity among traditional religions is aptly
274 captured in concepts such as totems, animism, and pantheism. Totems can be described as
275 objects or animals that hold spiritual significance. In many cultures, totems are believed to
276 possess spiritual power and are often used to identify with a group, connect with nature, and
277 provide protection. “They act as symbols of kinship, lineage, or tribal affiliation, embodying
278 shared values, beliefs, and ancestral connections. They are venerated as spiritual guardians or
279 sources of guidance, with rituals and ceremonies dedicated to their honour” (Sahimi et al,
280 2024). Totems can take many forms, such as animals, plants, or natural elements. There is not
281 much difference between totem and animism. Animism is the belief system that nonhuman
282 entities, such as animals, plants, and natural objects, possess spiritual souls. The belief in and
283 practice of animism and totems in indigenous religions are closely linked to the nearest
284 outstanding natural entity, the natural environment in general, and the region's circumstances and
285 historical events. Nweke (2025) avers that among Africa's indigenous peoples, the veneration of
286 certain animals and natural objects centres on the fact that these entities have played historical,
287 ecological, and religious roles in the lives of the people. The people of Abeokuta in south-west
288 Nigeria revered Olumo Rock and believed it to be the abode of a deity because of a historical
289 event in which the rock served as a protective refuge during an intertribal war with a
290 neighbouring village. Indigenous people of India considered cows and bullocks to be totems and
291 venerated them because the Veda forbade them from killing, harming and eating any animal that
292 is useful to them (Renugadevi, 2011). The Urhobo indigenous religion is described as animistic.
293 The veneration of nature among the Urhobo people is anchored in the belief in the unity of all
294 life forms, in that every being shares the same source of life (Isiorhovojaet al., 2011).

295 Many traditional or indigenous religions worship and consider natural phenomena such as rivers,
296 trees and mountains as possessing the spirit of deities. The five elements of nature are referred to
297 as gods, and are revered in Hinduism, the indigenous religion of India. Long before the
298 advocacy for environmental protection, the veneration of nature has been a common practice
299 among Hindus, serving as a means of conserving the natural environment (Gairola, 2020).
300 Among the Vedic people in India, trees are considered divine; trees such as “*Ficus racemosa*,
301 *Butea frondosa*, *Aegle*, and *Marmelos*” are regarded as sacred plants and are venerated (Chandra,
302 2016). The belief in sacred groves is common in India; they are said to be the dwelling places of
303 mother goddesses. Among Buddhists, *Ficus* is highly revered because it is believed that Gautama,
304 the founder of Buddhism, had his encounter (enlightenment) under the tree while meditating. In
305 Africa, the indigenous people of Ghana, like the Ewes residing within Hohoe in the Volta
306 Region, regard Mount *Afajato* as the abode of a deity and is venerated (Benson, 2021). Taoism,

307 often described as one of China's indigenous religions, holds a pantheistic and animistic view of
308 nature. It teaches and acknowledges that nature has an intrinsic value which must be protected to
309 maintain harmony and ecological balance. Taoism, like Hinduism, holds that all sentient beings
310 possess a vital force (Qi) which flows through them, creating the picture of a biocentric
311 egalitarian.

312 **Africana Indigenous Religious Perception of the Sacred view of the Natural Environment:** 313 **in the Light of Eco-Spirituality and Deep Ecology**

314 The thrust of this paper is to examine from the phenomenological standpoint how Africana
315 indigenous religious spiritual views of nature serve as a mechanism for environmental
316 preservation and conservation. The African sacred view of the natural environment is dynamic,
317 complex but easy to comprehend. The presentation of the African sacred notion of nature as
318 purely pantheistic is an aberration that has been lingering for decades. This erroneous perception
319 is occasioned by the misconception that African traditional religions are based on the belief in
320 pantheistic gods without recognition of an Absolute Being. In African ontology, God is
321 recognised as the Sovereign Being; therefore, characterising the African sacred view of nature as
322 essentially pantheistic is tantamount to denying their belief in the Absolute Being. Metuhin
323 Nnoruga (2025) described sacrifice in Igbo traditional religion as an essential custom that
324 entails giving “material items, symbolic acts, or prayers to spiritual entities, including the
325 Supreme Being (*Chukwu*), deities (*alusi*), and ancestors (*ndichie*)”. The African sacred view of
326 nature is both pantheistic and divine immanent, in the sense that Indigenous Africans perceived
327 the spiritual presence of the Absolute Being immanent in natural objects and further held that
328 these natural phenomena were the abodes of deities believed to exist; hence, these objects are
329 referred to as deities or totems. African indigenous religions recognised the spiritual richness of
330 nature, on the grounds that it serves as the hearthstone of divinities, deities, and spirits and as a
331 means by which they communicate with the Supreme Being (Aniekan, 2016).

332 While the practice of eco-spirituality is relatively new within the Western worldview, it has
333 long been a spiritual practice and belief among adherents of Africana Indigenous Religions
334 (Onebunne and Okechukwu, 2021). The awareness of, or consciousness of, the spiritual
335 connection and relationship with the supernatural believed to exist in nature serves as the
336 foundation for African eco-spirituality and as a means of conserving the natural environment
337 (Kanu, 2021). Africana indigenous religions, both from the ontological and spiritual
338 perspectives, consider humanity as an integral part of nature; these religions view nature
339 generally as a complex whole made up of component units, and to maintain an ecological
340 balance, it is believed that there must be a peaceful, harmonious coexistence among all the
341 entities that make up the natural environment. Though the feature of the African worldview, as
342 far as the human-nature relationship is concerned, is anthropocentric (John and Enang, 2022), it
343 is not in the sense of according a superior place of authority to humanity, but a sense of superior
344 responsibility as stewards over nature. This implies that, in the Africana indigenous religious
345 view of nature, humanity is accountable for both the harm and the disruption of the harmonious

346 relationship among sentient and non-sentient beings in the region. Enekwe, as captured in Okeke
347 (2021), speaking about the Igbos and their sacred relationship with nature, stated that “the human
348 and non-human beings like animals and trees interact and communicate in a lively way. Igbo
349 metaphysical view of life is consistent with the concept of natural religion. Everything and
350 everything is connected: The secular and the sacred, the natural and the supernatural, are a
351 continuum”(Okeke, 2021). This indicates that the Igbo religious view of nature is biocentric
352 egalitarianism.

353 The Luhya people of Kenya's spiritual perception of nature as sacred has played a significant
354 role in the conservation of the Kakamega Forest (Gumoet *al.*, 2012). The concepts of animism,
355 totemism, and pantheism in African Indigenous religions, as enshrined in their sacred view of
356 nature, have naturally led people to venerate the natural environment, including forests, rocks,
357 mountains, and rivers. This spiritual relationship is further strengthened by the enactment of
358 religious taboos and sacrilegious acts. Although some animals, mountains, rivers, rocks, and
359 trees are regarded as totems in African traditional religions, this does not permit the misuse of
360 those not considered sacred. The religious belief in metempsychosis propels Africans to treat all
361 animals with care and a sense of respect. This is supported by the notion of an intrinsic value in
362 all beings. Soko in Benson (2021) avers that the African worldview holds that living things have
363 spirits in them that continue to live even after death. These spirits sometimes inhabit animal
364 bodies, giving rise to the concept of metempsychosis and to the veneration of animals and sacred
365 groves. Africans generally acknowledge the mutual dependence between humans and the natural
366 environment. This implies that every being, sentient and non-sentient, has a significant and
367 inevitable role to play in the order of the universe (Gumoet *al.*, 2012). Therefore, all beings in the
368 African sacred view of nature are important in their diverse mode of existence.

369 It has been established that religion is a powerful mechanism by which the worldviews of a
370 people is formed and their attitude towards life and reality in general is shaped (Deopa and
371 Rinaldo 2024). This is evidence in African indigenous religions, especially their sacred view of
372 nature. The belief in animism and totems has played a significant role in forest and wildlife
373 conservation, thereby increasing biodiversity in the region. It is unarguably true that most forests
374 that are conserved in Africa today are those regarded as evil and those with specimens or trees
375 considered sacred. Empirical evidence indicates that regions in Africa where a particular animal
376 or tree is considered a totem tend to have more of these animals and plants compared to other
377 regions where there is a sacred notion attached to the same animals and plants. In the Idemili
378 area of Anambra State, the number of Pythons in the region is relatively high. The justification
379 for this, as recorded by Ndubisi in Nweke (2025), is that the Python is deified and considered a
380 totem. The benefits of attributing sacredness to natural entities and places among indigenous
381 Africans are numerous. One of the numerous benefits is that it significantly increases biodiversity
382 in the region. It also helps conserve this biodiversity for future reference. It is imperative to note
383 that the natural environment has a great influence on the religious worship of indigenous African
384 people. The religious practice and belief in the marine spirit is endemic among indigenous people

385 living in the riverine areas. In most cases the animals regarded as totems in these areas are
386 mostly associated with water. Among the Calabar people of Cross River State, the Crocodile
387 (*Effiom*) is a totem and highly revered; some fishermen carve its image on their canoe to indicate
388 their religious affiliation with the crocodile. Phenomenologically, there are historical records of
389 events in which animals and trees considered totems provided protection to these indigenous
390 peoples.

391

392 **Conclusion**

393 The discourse on African indigenous religious sacred view of nature is as old as the historical
394 origin of the people. Though the indigenous people of Africa could be said to be naive of the
395 significance of their religious practices and beliefs, and were criticised for being uncivilised,
396 fetishistic, and superstitious, a phenomenological study of the results of their religious beliefs
397 about nature shows that it is a veritable mechanism for the conservation of the natural
398 environment. For centuries, the sacred view of nature in indigenous religions has stood the test of
399 time, in contrast to the scientific methods articulated by Western authors in recent times. Naess'
400 call for a paradigm shift, from the anthropocentric view of nature to a more inclusive and
401 biocentric egalitarian notion of human-nature relationship, is unarguably patterned after the
402 sacred view of nature endemic among indigenous Africans. A critical reflection on Naess's deep
403 ecology reveals nothing new in his view, but rather a modernisation of the religious practices and
404 beliefs of African traditional religions. The thrust of eco-spirituality and deep ecology is nothing
405 short of the African indigenous religious view of the natural environment. While the views of
406 these aforementioned schools may be new to the Western world, they are a recap of the spiritual
407 beliefs and practices of indigenous people of Africa and Asia.

408 African indigenous sacred notion of nature, though anthropocentric in its feature, is egalitarian
409 in its approach. The religious cum sacred view of nature places humanity in the position of a
410 steward responsible for ensuring the peaceful and harmonious coexistence of all beings (human
411 and non-human). It holds that nature, in general, has intrinsic value, and that humanity's denial of
412 this value is tantamount to a serious environmental crisis. The recognition of nature's intrinsic
413 value and the avoidance of any action that jeopardises this value will result in an ecological
414 balance with no concern for ecological crisis. It is pertinent to state categorically that the sacred
415 view of nature as held by African indigenous religions is not purely pantheistic; it has a touch of
416 divine immanence. This is because a pure pantheistic view would amount to negating the
417 existence of an Absolute Being (God). While nature is often regarded as the abode of divinities
418 and deities, it is also believed to have the immanent presence of the Absolute Being. The respect
419 for nature among traditional Africans is not due to fear of the gods' wrath, but to an internal
420 consciousness of the importance of the symbiotic relations between humanity and nature. From
421 antiquity, the sacred view of the human-nature relationship enshrined in the indigenous African

422 belief system has been an effective medium of conserving rivers, forests and mountains. Why
423 discard it on the premise that it does not conform to the principle of scientific knowledge?

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