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# Ubuntu, Jesus, and Earth: Integrating African Religion and Christianity in Ecological Ethics

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Dissertation

UBUNTU, JESUS, AND EARTH:  
INTEGRATING AFRICAN RELIGION AND CHRISTIANITY  
IN ECOLOGICAL ETHICS

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Theology  
2010

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APPROVED

By

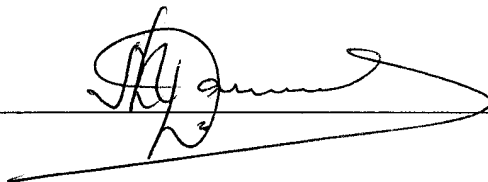
Reader



First

Dr. John Hart  
Professor of Christian Ethics

Reader



Second

Dr. Marthinus Daneel  
Professor of Missions



To My Wife Phie Kaoma  
and to our children, Dorothy, Natemwa, Namaka and Takudzwa  
My joy and Pride

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I view this study as part of the wider discourse needed to ensure the future of life on planet Earth. Our responsibility to Earth and future generations demands that we uphold the ethics of *ubuntu*. Eco-social ethics of *ubuntu* ought to compel Christians to honor Jesus, who is both the Creator and the ecological ancestor of all life.

UBUNTU, JESUS, AND EARTH: INTEGRATING AFRICAN RELIGION AND  
CHRISTIANITY IN ECOLOGICAL ETHICS

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**Doctor of Theology  
Boston University, School of Theology, 2010**

**Major Professor: John Hart, Professor of Christian Ethics**

**ABSTRACT**

Africa faces problems of ecological devastation caused by economic exploitation, rapid population growth, and poverty. Capitalism, residual colonialism, and corruption undermine Africa's efforts to forge a better future. The dissertation describes how in Africa the mounting ecological crisis has religious, political, and economic roots that enable and promote social and environmental harm. It presents the thesis that religious traditions, including their ethical expressions, can effectively address the crisis, ameliorate its impacts, and advocate for social and environmental betterment, now and in the future.

First, it examines African traditional religion and Christian teaching, which together provide the foundation for African Christianity. Critical examination of both religious worldviews uncovers their complementary emphases on human responsibility toward planet Earth and future generations. Second, an analysis of the Gwembe Tonga of Chief Simamba explores the interconnectedness of all elements of the universe in African

cosmologies. In Africa, an interdependent, participatory relationship exists between the world of animals, the world of humans, and the Creator. In discussing the annual *lwiindi* (rain calling) ceremony of Simamba, the study explores ecological overtones of African religions. Such rituals illustrate the involvement of ancestors and high gods in maintaining ecological integrity.

Third, the foundation of the African morality of abundant life is explored. Across Sub-Saharan Africa, ancestors' teachings are the foundation of morality; ancestors are guardians of the land. A complementary teaching that Christ is the ecological ancestor of all life can direct ethical responses to the ecological crisis. Fourth, the eco-social implications of *ubuntu* (what it means to be fully human) are examined. Some aspects of *ubuntu* are criticized in light of economic inequalities and corruption in Africa. However, *ubuntu* can be transformed to advocate for eco-social liberation.

Fifth, the study recognizes that in some cases conflicts exist between ecological values and religious teachings. This conflict is examined in terms of the contrast between awareness of socioeconomic problems caused by population growth, on the one hand, and advocacy of a traditional African morality of abundant children, on the other hand. A change in the latter religious view is needed since overpopulation threatens sustainable living and the future of Earth. The dissertation concludes that the identification of Jesus with African ancestors and theological recognition of Jesus as the ecological ancestor, woven together with *ubuntu*, an ethic of interconnectedness, should characterize African consciousness and promote resolution of the socio-ecological crisis.

## CHAPTER ONE

### UBUNTU, JESUS AND EARTH

#### **Introduction to the Problem**

The future of Earth will be determined, in many respects, by human attitudes toward the natural world. The negative effects of irresponsible attitudes are reflected in current crises of deforestation, air and water pollution, land degradation, uncontrolled population growth, global warming, and many other ecological predicaments that are adversely affecting our planet. Since most of these attitudes are religiously conditioned,<sup>1</sup> African theological ethics can be instrumental in changing people's perceptions of nature. African theologians have observed that in the African worldview, the spiritual, the natural, and the human worlds are interconnected. Although this worldview can inform Christian ecological responsibility and action, very few studies are dedicated to the investigation of the same.

The belief that the natural world exists solely for human use is foreign to Africans. In Africa, it can be traced back to the nineteenth century mission theory of "Civilization, Christianity and Commerce."<sup>2</sup> Whereas missionary movements promoted

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<sup>1</sup> David Korten, "The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community," *Yes! Magazine* (Summer 2006): 12-18.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Fowell Buxton and William Wilberforce argued that Africans would abandon slave trade once exposed to commerce, civilization and Christianity. See Andrew Porter, "Commerce and Christianity:

civilization as an instrument of Christianizing Africa, imperial governments promoted commerce. To them, Africa's value was in its natural resources (hereafter referred to as "natural goods"),<sup>3</sup> which were awaiting human exploitation for profit. But as Sallie McFague posits, this Western worldview (which is rooted in the Protestant Reformation, the Enlightenment, and eighteenth-century economic theory) is putting the planet in jeopardy.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Leroy Vail faults this theory for undermining the balanced relationship between humanity and the environment in Africa in the era prior to the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup>

Sadly, while the negative effects of this theory are being felt in the West, the greatest impact is felt by poor nations where most people depend on the land. There is a compelling body of scholarly literature that documents the connection between

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The Rise and Fall of a Nineteenth-Century Missionary Slogan," *The Historical Journal* 28, no. 3 (Sep. 1985): 597-621.

<sup>3</sup> "Resources" is the most common term for Earth's natural benefits that are available for human (and often for nonhuman) use, and are extracted by humans as individuals and industrial corporations. However, here and throughout this work "natural goods" will be used instead. The usage follows that of John Hart, who in *Sacramental Commons* uses "Earth goods" or "natural goods" in place of "resources," without elaboration. John Hart, *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 150. In his view, these terms more accurately describe abiotic aspects of nature that humans remove and use to benefit themselves. Calling something a "resource" implies that it is provided for, and awaiting removal by, humankind. Some of Earth's natural benefits, however, are obviously not just for humans: they already serve an ecosystemic, geologic, or other need in place; and, they are used not just by humans, but by other members of the biotic community who depend on them being in place. Discussion with this author, 14, October, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 117.

<sup>5</sup> Leroy Vail, "Ecology and History: The Example of Eastern Zambia," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 3, no. 2 (Apr., 1977): 129-155.

contemporary policies inspired by this nineteenth century theory and the negative ecological effects wrought on much of the planet.<sup>6</sup> According to Kirkpatrick Sale, dwellers in the land today destroy the environment on which they depend due to foreign capitalistic interests.<sup>7</sup> Paul Hawken adds that although the destructive impact of capitalism on poor nations is not visible to the West, business should be understood in a wider context. It ecologically matters how profit is obtained; thus the fundamental principles of commerce should be re-examined if we are to meet the ecological challenges of our time.<sup>8</sup>

One major example of exploiting nature for human use was the damming of the River Zambezi in Southern Africa. The effects on humans, animals and vegetation were severe. Elizabeth Colson, Thayer Scudder, and recently Lisa Cliggett, have highlighted the detrimental anthropological effects of the dam on the local people.<sup>9</sup> After resisting

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<sup>6</sup> Séverine Deneulin and Masooda Bano, *Religion in Development: Rewriting the Secular Script* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2009); Jeffrey Haynes, *Religion and Development: Conflict or Cooperation?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Kirkpatrick Sale, *Dwellers on the Land: the Bioregional Vision* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2000). Sale builds on the Gaia hypothesis and advocates for an economy with a bioregional focus. He argues that human and other biotic systems should be best understood at the local, and community levels. See also, Maano Ramitsindela, *Transfrontier Conservation in Africa: At the Confluence of Capital, Politics and Nature* (Oxfordshire: Cabi, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Paul Hawken, *The Ecology of Commerce: A Declaration of Sustainability* (New York: Harper Business, 1993), 6-17, 32, 72.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Colson, *The Social Consequences of Resettlement: The Impact of the Kariba Resettlement Upon the Gwembe Tonga* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971); Thayer Scudder, *The Ecology of the Gwembe Tonga* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1962); *The Future Of Large Dams : Dealing With Social, Environmental, Institutional, And Political Costs* (London: Earthscan, 2005); *A history of Development in the Twentieth Century: the Zambian Portion of the middle Zambezi Valley and*

relocation due to their belief that the river spirit Nyami-Nyami would destroy the dam, more than 57,000 Tonga people were forcefully resettled and the river was dammed in 1958, creating a 5,580 square km reservoir. Unfortunately, no care was taken to address the fate of thousands of non-humans that inhabited the area, and only a fraction of animals was rescued through “Operation Noah.” Charles Lagus, who witnessed and documented this disaster, argued that:

The damming at Kariba is a more than usually spectacular symptom of man’s (sic) attitude to animals in many parts of the world, but nowhere is the prospect more alarming than in Africa. Just as Operation Noah has undertaken an imaginative programme of rescue work at Kariba, so in the wider context there is need for a great holding operation to bridge the fifty years it may take for man to acknowledge his responsibility to the natural world, and his responsibility for it to future generations of men. – Like it or not the White Man’s disease (one might almost call it the “English Sickness,” for it began in England), has come to Africa to stay.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, Frank Clements observed that the damming of the Zambezi illustrated the struggle between Western Civilization and African traditional religion. While in reality Western civilization triumphed, Clements argues that it was the River God, Nyami-Nyami, who won as evidenced by the problems that accompanied the construction of the dam.<sup>11</sup>

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*the Lake Kariba Basin* (New York: Clark University, 1985); Cliggett Lisa, *Grains from Grass: Aging, Gender, and Famine in Rural Africa* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Charles Lagus, *Operation Noah* (London: William Kimber and Co., 1959), 37.

<sup>11</sup> Clements attributes the completion of the dam to the ritual appeasement of the spirit of Nyami-Nyami. Frank Clements, *Kariba: The Struggle with the River God* (London: Methuen, 1959).

Indeed, the advent of the English preoccupation with exploiting the ecological landscape has negatively affected the African environment. Since Christianity is one of the fastest growing religion in Africa, African Christians have a role to play in addressing the resulting crisis.<sup>12</sup> Because African Christians are influenced by an African traditional worldview and Christian doctrines, their dual heritage is vital to ecological ethics. However, scholars such as Placide Tempels, John S. Mbiti, Ferdinand C. Ezekwonna, Laurenti Magesa, and Bénézet Bujo,<sup>13</sup> have also observed that African ethics is deeply anthropocentric. Critical examination, though, of African traditional beliefs and philosophy reveals that African ethics puts emphasis on human responsibility towards planet Earth. This is because in African cosmology, humanity, nonhumans, the ancestors, and other spiritual forces are interconnected; hence, the abuse of Earth threatens this interconnectedness on which life depends.

Although Lagos raised the question of human responsibility to the natural world and future generations in 1958, it was the publication of Lynn White's article in 1967, "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis," that attracted many theological responses. White argued that the separation of God and humanity from nature led to the desacralization and exploitation of the natural world. Since Western civilization is deeply

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<sup>12</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003); Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002); Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> These Scholars works will be discussed under literature review and in other chapters.

conditioned by Christianity, White faulted Christian beliefs for the current crisis. He argued that until the Western Christian assumption that nature exists solely to serve humanity is rejected, the ecological crisis is set to worsen. Nevertheless, he concluded that because “the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not.”<sup>14</sup>

Most theologians agree that human attitudes toward nature ought to be ecologically sensitive, but are divided on White’s argument against Christianity.<sup>15</sup> Some accept White’s argument and dismiss Christianity as anti-nature. This group argues that Christianity is ecologically bankrupt and a solution to the crisis should be found elsewhere.<sup>16</sup> Others, while agreeing with some elements of White’s thesis, argue that he erred elsewhere in his argument. For example, he avoided other significant causes—such as economics—for the crisis. This group of scholars seeks to defend Christianity from some aspects of White’s attack and argues as well that, properly understood, Christianity demands justice and peace. According to positions developed by the World Council of

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<sup>14</sup> Lynn White Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science, New Series* 155, no. 3767 (Mar. 10, 1967): 1207.

<sup>15</sup> Max Oelschlaeger divides these responses into five groups; conservatives, liberals, moderates, radicals, and alternative creation stories. Max Oelschlaeger, *Caring for Creation: An Ecumenical Approach to the Environmental Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994). Paul Santmire, however, divides them into three major groups; constructionists, apologists, and revisionists. *Nature Reborn: The Ecological and Cosmic Promise of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> Matthew Fox, *Natural Grace: Dialogues on Creation, Darkness, and the Soul in Spirituality and Science* (New York: Image Books/Doubleday, 1997); *Creation Spirituality: Liberating Gifts for the Peoples of the Earth* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

Churches and Vatican documents on the environment, these themes should be extended to the poor and to the environment.

Some theologians have sought to revise, but not entirely reject, the major premises of Christianity through the study of classical Christian thought.<sup>17</sup> They argue that White and other critics have not addressed the ambiguous ecological premises represented in Christian traditions. James Nash and Paul Santmire, for example, have argued that a serious study of Christian thought suggests that Christianity is not ecologically bankrupt.<sup>18</sup> Finally, some scholars such as John Hart and Marthinus Daneel pay more attention to the role of religion in providing a solution to the crisis. As such, they dialogue with other religious traditions and integrate them in Christianity.

One vital question arising from this scholarly debate is whether White's observations can apply across the globe. Mutombo Mpanya, who argues that the establishment of mission stations and African Christian villages led to environmental devastation, agrees with White. To Mpanya, Christian evangelization could have affected the place that the environment enjoyed in African cultures. "Several institutions linked to conservation of the environment and providing an opportunity for people to relate

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<sup>17</sup> Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

<sup>18</sup> James Nash, *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991).

intimately to nature lost their prestige.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, Christianity discouraged nature-related rituals and other ancestral practices and beliefs in nature spirits.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, Mpanya does not acknowledge some missionaries such as David Livingstone, Robert Moffat, and Albert Schweitzer whose works show ecological sensitivity. In this respect, Mpanya has oversimplified the missionary activities in Africa.<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, because life is interconnected, destruction of rituals and sacred places destabilized the African community. According to Kofi A. Opuku, in Africa community includes nature. In fact, “humanity is part of nature and is expected to cooperate with it; and this sense of community with nature is often expressed in terms of identity, kinship, friendliness and respect. This reverence and respect controls the use of nature.”<sup>22</sup> Laurenti Magesa adds that community life includes all creatures and says that the maintenance of life is the paramount goal of African life while “the opposite

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<sup>19</sup> Mutombo Mpanya, “The Environmental Impacts of a Church Project,” in *Missionary Earthkeeping*, ed., Calvin DeWitt and Ghillean T. Prance, 91-109 (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1992), 104.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 104-106.

<sup>21</sup> John Kaoma, “David Livingstone’s Attitude Towards Nature: A Challenge to Earthkeeping Mission,” *Newsletter, Boston Theological Institute* 32, no.20 (Feb.2003). Although part of this article was first published in the BTI newsletter, the entire paper was presented at “The Costas Consultation in Global Mission” held at Harvard Divinity School on February 29, 2003. In this article, I argued that modern environmental and Earthkeeping mission in Southern Africa should be traced back to early missionaries. Later, in his Th.D. dissertation, Richard S. Darr further developed this analysis. See Richard S. Darr, *Protestant Missions and Earthkeeping in Southern Africa, 1817-2000* (Th.D. Thesis., Boston University, 2005).

<sup>22</sup> Kofi Asare Opuku, “African Traditional Religion,” in *Religious Plurality in Africa: Essays in Honor of John S. Mbiti*, ed., Jacob K. Olupona and Sulayman S. Nyang (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1993), 77.

constitutes the paramount destructiveness.”<sup>23</sup> The ethical presupposition of the African worldview maintains an active interaction between God, humanity and planet Earth.

Apart from illustrating this active interaction, rituals, totems, creation myths, taboos, and customs exemplify the ecological injunctions of African communities. For instance, among the Bantu, *ubuntu* (to be ethical) implies active or vital interconnectedness and to possess *ubuntu* (to be virtuous) demands living in harmony with the rest of creation.<sup>24</sup> This vital interconnectedness regulates human relationships with God, ancestors and the rest of creation. In short, African religion upholds an *eco-humano-relational* ethic or what John Hart calls a “creatiocentric consciousness”<sup>25</sup> through which humanity learns to recognize the intrinsic and spiritual instrumental value of creation. In this context, eco-humano-relational means an ethic that puts emphasis on human relatedness to other beings.

In his investigation of Bantu philosophy, Placide Tempels asserted this

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<sup>23</sup> Magesa argues that, ancestors “maintain the norms of social action and cause trouble when they are not obeyed.” Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 48, 65-71. Also Elizabeth Colson and Thayer Scudder, *For Prayer and Profit* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 60-61; John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 175.

<sup>24</sup> In his book, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1997), Michael Battle argues that *ubuntu* aims at building an interdependent human community. Although this understanding is partially right, it is a misrepresentation of what Africans mean by community since *ubuntu* networks of interdependence include the natural world.

<sup>25</sup> Hart, *Sacramental Commons*, 121.

interconnectedness of the universe through his theory of *vital force*.<sup>26</sup> Tempels observed that every creature possesses the *vital force*; thus, “It is because all being is force and exists only in that it is force, that the category ‘force’ includes of necessity all ‘beings’: God, [humanity] living and departed, animals, plants, and minerals.”<sup>27</sup> In fact, “every created thing is in rapport with every other creature according to a law of hierarchy. This world is like a spider’s web of which you cannot touch one thread without disturbing the whole.”<sup>28</sup>

Notably, Bantu philosophy does not share what Sallie McFague calls Western historical “apartheid thinking,” the falsehood that human life is more valuable than that of other species.<sup>29</sup> Neither does it share the concept of biota egalitarianism as proposed by

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<sup>26</sup> Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, Translated from *La Philosophie Bantu* by A. Rubbens (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1952), 23. Quotation marks are his. Although Tempels studied the Bantu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Bantu refers to a language family running from Nigeria to the Cape in South Africa. Although not all Bantu speakers might have the philosophical underpinnings described by Tempels, his hypothesis equally applies to the Tonga, Shona and Bemba people in Southern Africa.

<sup>27</sup> According to Tempels, *muntu* (person) signifies the vital force endowed with intelligence and will; *bintu* are what we call “things,” forces not endowed with reason. *Ibid.*, 36. See also Edwin W. Smith (ed.), *African Ideas of God, A Symposium* (London: Morrison and Gibbs, 1950), 17-20.

<sup>28</sup> Edwin W. Smith, “La Philosophie Bantoue,” *Journal of the International African Institute* 16, no.3 (July, 1946): 200-201. Magesa attributes this statement to P. Baudin, “Nothing moves in the universe of forces without influencing other forces by its movement. The world of forces is held like a spider’s web of which no single thread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network.” Magesa, *African Religion*, 46. However, Baudin’s book does not have this statement. *Fetichism and Fetish Worshipers, Missionary on the Slave Coast of Africa*, Translated by M. McMahon (New York, Cincinnati: Benziger Brothers, 1885).

<sup>29</sup> Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 117. Not all ethicists accept this position. James Nash and Pope Benedict XVI argue that humans are superior to other creatures. In his 2009 encyclical letter, *Caritas In Veritate* (Charity in Truth) Pope Benedict XVI cites approvingly these words from Vatican II’s *Gaudium et Spes*, “...believers and unbelievers agree almost unanimously that all things on earth should be ordered towards man as to their center and summit.”

Albert Schweitzer and deep ecologists. Rather, Bantu philosophy has humanity as the center, and yet the center is connected to a web of hierarchical interacting vital forces with God at the top, followed by clan founders, ancestors, humanity, animate, and, finally, inanimate forces. Thus, the annihilation of any creature depends on the Creator because “existence that comes from God cannot be taken from a creature by any created force.”<sup>30</sup> Magesa confirms this observation when he argues that in African religion, every creature has “its own force of life, its own power to sustain life. Because of the common origin of this power, however, all creatures are connected with each other in the sense that each one influences the other for good or for bad.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore, since every force (being) shares God’s vital force, nonhumans have moral claims and natural rights to existence.<sup>32</sup>

Placide Tempels’ work has been influential in African theology across the continent, although African scholars have also identified the limitations of his insights. John Mbiti argues that to call the book *Bantu Philosophy* is ambitious. In fact, “It is open to a great deal of criticism, and the theory of “vital force” cannot be applied to other

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[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_benedict\\_enc\\_200090629\\_caritas-in-veritate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_benedict_enc_200090629_caritas-in-veritate_en.html). Accessed 02/08/ 2010.

<sup>30</sup> Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, 39.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>32</sup> This understanding resembles the ideas of Saint Maximus the Confessor (ca. 5<sup>th</sup> century) cited by John Hart in *Sacramental Commons*. A revered figure in both Eastern and Western Christianity, Maximus argued that sparks of the divine being are present in every created being. According to Hart, “Maximus viewed creation as the context and revelation of God, and referred to it as a cloak worn by the creating Word....”Hart, *Sacramental Commons*, 9.

African people with whose life and ideas [Mbiti is] familiar (sic).”<sup>33</sup> Mbiti’s criticisms, however, are unwarranted since Tempels was aware of these limitations.<sup>34</sup> Stephen O. Okafor argues that Tempels’ philosophy is generally right but his conclusion about the center of Bantu cosmology is misleading. To him, African cosmology is centered on the theory of life.<sup>35</sup>

In this regard, Paul Santmire’s suggestion that humanity ought to salute other creatures as members of their “extended family”<sup>36</sup> fits well with Bantu philosophy. Furthermore, according to Mbiti, in African religion God, spirits, humanity, and nonhumans exist as a unity, and “to break up that unity is to destroy one or more of these modes of existence, and to destroy one of them is to destroy them all.”<sup>37</sup> Charles Nyamiti shares this understanding when he concludes that the universe is a sort of organic whole composed of supra-sensible or mystical correlations or participations.<sup>38</sup> In fact, these

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<sup>33</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 10-11.

<sup>34</sup> Edwin W. Smith observed that Tempels presented “a hypothesis to be verified by further inquiry over the whole Bantu field.” Smith “La Philosophie Bantoue,” 200.

<sup>35</sup> Stephen O. Okafor argues that critical examination of African cosmologies revealed that, a) the meaning and the meaningfulness of the universe is nothing else than the meaningfulness of life; b) the conviction that the goodness of life is only reflected in the philosophy of commensality; c) the conviction that every phenomenon emits an aura or essence particular to it. Stephen O. Okafor, “‘Bantu Philosophy’: Placide Tempels Revisited,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 13 (1982): 91-92.

<sup>36</sup> Paul H. Santmire, *Nature Reborn: the Ecological and Christian Promise of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 73.

<sup>37</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 51.

<sup>38</sup> Charles Nyamiti, *The Scope of African Theology* (Kampala: Gaba Publications, 1973), 21.

mystical participations do not only affirm the intrinsic spiritual value of creation but also explain the manifestations of ancestors and other spirits in sacred groves, mountains, rivers, snakes, animals, and trees. It is this reality that African Earthkeepers ritually affirm.<sup>39</sup> For his part, Magesa avows:

The [African] world is the manifestation of God, God's power, and benevolence. Accordingly, a big rock where people go to sacrifice is not just a big rock, but it incorporates, shows, and for that reason is, in fact, some supernatural quality of the Divine. The same can be said ...of practically anything that inspires awe: mountains, trees, snakes, certain animals, and so on. While African Religion understands... that these elements are by no means God but creatures...it also recognizes that they have divinity in them because they exist by the will and through the power of the divinity. In a sense they "represent" the Divinity and surely demonstrate God's will and power to humanity.<sup>40</sup>

Therefore, since the universe is interconnected, African ecological ethics should build on this reality in addressing the current crisis. Yet for it to become "Christian," it must be informed by the Christian heritage.

African Christian ecological ethics should embody the dual influence of African traditional religion and Christian theology. That there are many reasons why this dual influence is necessary is supported by the facts that African religion and Christian theology both believe that creation originates from the Creator God; both heritages suggest that the Spirit is present in creation and the abuse of nature is evil; and the

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<sup>39</sup> Marthinus Daneel, *African Earthkeepers, Wholistic Interfaith Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 114.

<sup>40</sup> Magesa, *African Religion*, 59.

Christian doctrine of natural revelation, and the understanding of the manifestation of the Spirit in nature in African religion, both affirm nature's sacramental value.

On a social level, both religions teach that Earth is a common trust and home that cannot be privatized or abused for individual gain. For this reason, Earth's natural goods should be shared equally for the benefit of all creatures. Additionally, both religions hold Earth to be a God-provided home to all creatures. On a cultic front, the role of saints in Christianity and ancestors in African religion can inform African ecological ethics. Since these sacred figures (living dead) occupy important positions in both religions, their teachings on creation are imperative to ecological ethics. Furthermore, African and Christian ethics advocate that humanity has a duty to promote life.<sup>41</sup>

Given that the ecological crisis threatens life, an argument can be made for the necessity of African Christian ecological ethics. In addition to advocating the integrity and interconnectedness of Creation, this study argues that economic development, corruption, demographic growth, and poverty have compromised Africa's moral responsibility to the natural world and future generations. It finally argues that the relationship of Jesus Christ to the natural world as both an ecological Ancestor and the first born of all Creation should inform Christian ecological responsibility and action locally and globally. Since this dissertation is not intended to provide an ethic of sustainable development, however, it uses current economic theories to a limited extent

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<sup>41</sup> Ferdinand C. Ezekwonna, *African Communitarian Ethic: The Basis for the Moral Conscience and Autonomy of the Individual: Igbo Culture as a Case Study* (Bern, New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

while nonetheless paying attention to the effects of capitalism on the environment. Finally, besides arguing that the concept of interconnectedness is inherently African, this study will attempt to integrate Western religious resources and African traditional resources in addressing the crisis.

### **Significance of the Study**

Export driven economic policies and practices have put extreme pressure on African natural goods to the detriment of the environment.<sup>42</sup> Since religion is central to African life, religious ethics are essential for addressing the crisis. Further, although African theologians and ethicists have identified some ecological themes within African religion, very few have addressed integrating them into the global ecological community.

This dissertation investigates the concept of “interconnectedness” in African ecological ethics. The multi-disciplinary application of this concept makes it useful in addressing the ecological crisis across disciplines. Since the concept is found in other religious traditions and in the sciences, it can serve as a point of contact between African Christian ecological ethics and ethical theories and practices in the rest of the world. This work is particularly indebted to the insights of John Hart and Marthinus Daneel, both of whom have illustrated the value of appreciating local people’s heritages in promoting

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<sup>42</sup> Majid Rahnema and Victoria Bawtree, (eds), *The Post-Development Reader* (London: Zed Books, 1997); Rist Gilbert, *The History of Development from Western Origins to Global Faith*, Translated by Patrick Camiller (London: Zed Books. 2008 edition); Wolfgang Sachs, *The Development Dictionary* (London: Zed Books, 1991).

environmental ethics. Hart uses American Christian and Native American heritages while Daneel employs Shona heritage and Christianity. The present study will particularly elaborate and highlight the groundbreaking work of Daneel and African Earthkeepers.<sup>43</sup> Yet, the present study will also differ from Daneel. In particular, whereas African Earthkeepers illustrate the interconnectedness of creation in their rituals, it is the concept of *Chimurenga* (war of liberation) that especially informs their mission. By contrast, this study employs the African concept of interconnectedness as the dominant theme in promoting ecological ethics. Similarly, while the presents study is also reliant upon Hart, it differs from Hart by using the African heritage.

### **Literature Review**

St. Francis of Assisi is among many Christians who lived a life of interconnectedness. Marion A. Habig's *Omnibus of St. Francis* presents St. Francis of Assisi's ideas that are similar to the ways in which Africans understood life. Francis lived an interconnected life with humanity, nonhumans, and the Divine.<sup>44</sup> His love for nature was founded on the conviction that, all creation has its source in God. In an African context, this conviction can complement my understanding that creation shares the same

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<sup>43</sup> The importance of the Earthkeepers concept is evidenced by the fact that the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Wangari Maathai, is involved in similar work.

<sup>44</sup> Marion A. Habig (ed.), *St. Francis of Assisi Writings and Early Writings: English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis*, Translated by Raphael Brown and others (London: SPCK, 1973).

“primary ancestor,” Jesus Christ. Today, theologians have realized that this understanding is also present in many cultures.

Rosemary R. Ruether’s edited book, *Women Healing the Earth* and the edited volume by Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary R. Ruether, *Christianity and Ecology*, are imperative to understanding the global perspectives on ecological ethics of interconnectedness. Similarly, John Hart’s *Sacramental Commons, What Are They Saying about Environmental Theology*, and *The Spirit of the Earth*, show that the concept of interconnectedness exists among Native Americans. John Hart observes that Native American and Christian heritages suggest that land is a trust given by God for our care. In *Sacramental Commons*, he asserts that the belief that Earth exists solely to serve humanity is a form of idolatry, for Earth is a sacrament and commons to all creatures. According to Hart,

A sacramental commons is creation as a moment and locus of human participation in interactive presence and caring compassion of the Spirit who is immanent and participates in a complex cosmic dance of energies, elements, entities, and events. It is a place in which people in historical time integrate the spiritual meaning of sacramental with the social meaning of commons, and consequently is characterized by a sacramental community consciousness that stimulates involvement in concrete efforts to restore and conserve ecosystems.<sup>45</sup>

To Hart, the notion of sacramental commons should inform both social and ecological engagements. He asserts that persons who view Earth as a “sacramental commons” possess “a sacramental consciousness” that allows them to “care about and for

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<sup>45</sup> Hart, *Sacramental Commons*, xviii

creation as a whole; care about and for members of the biotic community; care about and for members of the human community who are denied needed goods of creation.”<sup>46</sup> From this perspective, Hart calls for “a relational consciousness” through which humanity appreciates all biokind as mutually connected beings in the universe. He concludes that nonhumans have natural rights and natural value to be advocated and protected.<sup>47</sup>

The interconnectedness of creation is widely recognized in theological literature. Paul Santmire’s *The Travail of Nature*, and *Nature Reborn*, argue that traditional Christian thought possesses some positive themes which point to the interconnectedness of creation. In *Loving Nature*, James A. Nash adds that creation is connected through the web of life and that the biblical concepts of justice, covenant, and love should be extended to every part of God’s creation. Nash contends that humanity is above other creatures, yet this superiority makes humanity morally responsible to nature.

Likewise, Pope Benedict XVI argues that humanity is superior to creation as a whole. Although Nash and Pope Benedict XVI reject the concept of biota-egalitarianism, Sallie McFague argues otherwise. In *The Body of God*, she insists that Christians should view Earth metaphorically as the body of God. Since every part of the body is equally valuable, this model should inform our understanding of creation, theology, Christology, ecology, and justice. In *Creation*, Hans Schwarz notes that comparative anatomy for most

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 121.

plant species, insects, and animals confirms the unity and involvement of all living species. In fact, the various life forms show a fundamental and astounding unity that suggests both a relationship of all living beings and a common evolution. Schwarz concludes that theologically “nature is fundamentally the arena and medium of God’s action.”<sup>48</sup>

Eco-feminist theologians do not only recognize the interconnectedness of creation but add that the male dominated world is behind the exploitation of women and nature. Some feminist theologians, among them Carol P. Christ, Naomi Goldenberg, and Mary Daly, maintain that the male God should be replaced with a female goddess *Gaia*, if our crisis is to be arrested.<sup>49</sup> But in *Gaia and God*, Rosemary Ruether argues that the ecological crisis is beyond the “God” problem. She advocates for new symbols and languages that uphold the interrelatedness of all beings. To her, anything that threatens this interconnectedness is sinful. Thus, all symbols (theological and scientific) that encourage domination, exploitation, and violence at all levels should be revised and resisted.

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<sup>48</sup> Hans Schwarz, *Creation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns Publication, 2002), 108-109.

<sup>49</sup> Carol P. Christ, *Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflection on a Journey to the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987); Naomi Goldenberg, *Changing of Gods: Feminism and the End of the Traditional Religions* (Boston: Beacon, Press, 1979); Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985); Nicola Slee, *Faith and Feminism: An Introduction to Christian Feminist Theology* (London: Darton, Longmann and Todd, 2003), 25-35; Kathleen M. Sands, *Escape from Paradise: Evil and Tragedy in Feminist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 115-135.

Advocating an ethic of interdependence, Ruether argues that human ethics should be a conscious version of natural interdependence that would mandate “humans to imagine and feel the suffering of others” and act so as to enhance life.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, in *Mother/Nature*, Catherine Roach rejects the Gaia hypothesis. “While the planet is certainly life-giving, it is not a person who gave birth to us and/or reared us in a one-on-one family relationship. While Earth may well function as a self-regulating organism – as the Gaia hypothesis claims – it is not our personal mother.”<sup>51</sup> Although Roach disputes the Gaia hypothesis, she argues that humanity ought to appreciate the interconnectedness of creation.

On the African front, theology has experienced different paradigm shifts at different times. John Baur outlines these shifts by Francophone and Anglophone African theologians, who moved from adaptation, inculturation, contextualization, and finally to liberation. Although these shifts had Christology as their central theme, they were influenced by the socio-political realities of the time.<sup>52</sup> Consequently, it can be argued that the resulting crisis demands another shift in African theology and ethics. This shift accords with what Third World Theologians concluded in *African Theology en Route*

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<sup>50</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 57; *Introducing Redemption in Christian Feminism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 92.

<sup>51</sup> Catherine M. Rouch, *Mother/Nature: Popular Culture and Environmental Ethics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 35.

<sup>52</sup> In 1994, Baur argued that African theologians had positively re-evaluated traditional religions and culture but paid less attention to other areas of African life. John Baur, *2000 years of Christianity in Africa: An African History, 1962-1992* (Nairobi: Pauline Publication, 1994).

where they noted that through the mystery of incarnation, “Christ assumes the totality of humanity and the cosmos.”<sup>53</sup>

African theologians have employed a variety of resources in their developing theology. Mercy Amba Oduyoye employs the bible, Christian history and African history as some sources for theological reflection.<sup>54</sup> She observes that creation narratives and covenants show that the universe belongs to the creator God and there is an interdependence of God’s world and God’s people. Oduyoye does not pay attention to ecological issues in her early work. Later, however, in *Beads and Strands*, she observes that the concept of “neighbor” should include “all creation, seen and unseen. Loving our neighbor has come to mean recycling, reforestation and cleaning up the waters around us.”<sup>55</sup> In *Theology in Africa*, Kwesi Dickson maintains that scripture, experience, Church tradition, and culture are the major factors in theologizing. He asserts that human attitudes toward Earth are essential to understanding African religions. Dickson further argues that Africans have a fellow-feeling relationship with nature, and that creation “plays a vital role in the apprehension of reality.”<sup>56</sup> But in *Toward African Theology*,

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<sup>53</sup> Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres, (eds), *African Theology en Route: Papers from the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, December 17 – 23, 1977* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis, 1979); See John Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 32.

<sup>54</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986).

<sup>55</sup> Amba Mercy Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands, Reflections of an African Woman on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 26. This is the only page that discusses ecology in this book.

<sup>56</sup> Kwesi Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 29-49.

John Pobee asserts that Christianity should take into consideration genuine African categories and thought forms in order to address present challenges. To him, theologians should uphold the past, present, and future when doing theology.<sup>57</sup> Although he does not extend this to ecological ethics, this study contends that African theology cannot uphold the past, present, and future without addressing the escalating ecological crisis.

In fact, African theologians have observed that life is ontologically interconnected and at the most, ecologically expressed. Specifically, John Mbiti's *African Religions and Philosophy*, and *Concepts of God in Africa* illustrate the African concept of interconnectedness. Mbiti observes that in African cosmology, God and spirits can manifest in any creature or animal. Yet the relationship between God and the animal world is of a mythological nature that should not be taken beyond face value.<sup>58</sup> To him, while nonhumans are "deified" and prayers are offered to them, such prayers are offered to the deity or the spirit and not to the "object or phenomenon as such."<sup>59</sup> In sum, Mbiti undervalues these deifications, yet they are vital in our quest for ecological ethics.

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<sup>57</sup> Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*, 18.

<sup>58</sup> Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa* (London: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 91-128.

<sup>59</sup> Mbiti insists that although some African cultures regard trees, snakes, the sun, and other natural phenomena as sacred, such beliefs are likely to fade with the coming of science and education. Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa*, 233-34. This position was earlier advocated by Stephen N. Ezeanya in *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, ed., Kwesi A. Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969), 46. However, these beliefs are still present. In 2003, the appearance of Omieri (sacred python) among the Luo of Kenya became a center of religious, political and cultural debates. Agai Yeir, "Good Luck Python Brings Hope and Joy to Nyanza," *The Nation*, Nairobi, <http://www.allafrica.com/>, 3/19/2003. On the other hand, Edwin W. Smith argues that nature spirits are the personification of the natural phenomena. Many Africans honor "Mother Earth, a goddess who personifies, or symbolizes, the fertility of the soil." Edwin W. Smith, *African Ideas of God, A Symposium* (London: Morrison and Gibbs, 1950), 23-

Matthew J. Schoffeleers, Scudder, and Colson agree in arguing that African communities are essentially ecological in nature. Schoffeleers maintains that Africans uphold the ancestors as guardians of the land. In fact, territorial and ancestor cults have ecological dimensions since they function as insurers for the community's well-being. In his words, they "issue and enforce directives with regard to a community's use of its environment."<sup>60</sup> Scarcities of food or water are usually blamed on human failure to live in harmony with the environment. Social abuses, for example, lead to ecological disasters and these in turn threaten community life.<sup>61</sup> Similar to the *Iwiindi* to be discussed in chapter two, African cults and rituals influence the production, distribution, and management of natural goods. Although these ecological dimensions are present in African religion, Schoffeleers regrets that scholars have not explored them for the rich ecological illustrations they offer.<sup>62</sup>

Further, ancestors play a crucial role in upholding ecological injunctions. African theologians have not only interpreted Jesus as "an ancestor par excellence, a unique

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26; Edwin W. Smith, and Murray Andrew Dale, *The Ila-Speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia* (London: Macmillan, 1920), 124-131. Obiakoizu A. Iloanusi, *Myths of the Creation of Man and the Origin of Death in Africa* (New York: Peter Lang, 1984), 89-95.

<sup>60</sup> Matthew J. Schoffeleers (ed.), *Guardians of the Land: Essays on Central African Territorial Cults* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1978), 2.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-8.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

ancestor,” but they have also developed various ancestor Christologies.<sup>63</sup> In this regard, Bujo argues that the concept of ancestors unifies African communities and is central to morality. To him, Christ is “the Proto-Ancestor” while to Charles Nyamiti, Christ is “our Brother-Ancestor.” Similarly, Francois Kabesele observes that ancestors are the foundation of Bantu morality and worldview and the obligatory route to the Supreme Being. Proposing the Christology of Christ as “Elder Brother-Ancestor,” he notes that, “The figure of the tree (or the vine) used by Jesus to represent the way in which his life passes to his disciples reminds the Bantu of the importance of the ongoing contact with the ancestors for the maintenance of life (John 15: 5ff).”<sup>64</sup>

Post-independence realities led theologians to understand Christ as a liberator. Apart from arguing that Christianity is a non-Western religion, Kwame Bediako analyzes the role of ancestors in the social-political life of the continent. He observes that African leaders are usually seen as sitting on the stool of ancestors, whereby any criticism against their dictatorial leadership is viewed as an attack on the authority of ancestors. If democracy is to take root in Africa, Bediako suggests, the gospel should desacralize the sacred powers of African political leaders.<sup>65</sup> In *Christ the Liberator and Africa Today*,

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<sup>63</sup> See Donald J. Goergen, “The Quest for the Christ of Africa,” *African Christian Studies, The Journal of the Faculty of Theology*, Catholic University of Eastern Africa 17, no. 1 (March 2001): 6.

<sup>64</sup> Francois Kabesele, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother,” in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, ed., Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 1998), 116.

<sup>65</sup> Kwame Bediako, *African Christianity: Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 234-249; *Jesus in African Culture (A Ghanaian Perspective)* (Accra: Asempa Publication, 1990).

Laurenti Magesa argues that Christ should be understood within the socio-economic and political situations of Africa.<sup>66</sup> Yet just as socio-economic and political realities led to the development of theologies of liberation, ecological concerns now demand a theological ethics of ecological liberation. Leonardo Boff's *Ecology and Liberation*, and *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, bring a similar realization to Christian ethics.

Some theologians have particularly highlighted ecological elements in African theologies. Tumani Mutasa Nyanjeka argues that the Shona "Mutupo principle" (totem) connects humanity to the cosmos.<sup>67</sup> She adds that traditional African society did not promote humans over nature because ancestors protected nature from human abuse. In *Environmental Crisis*, Samson K. Gitau has attempted to develop an eco-theology based on African cosmologies (Maasai and Kikuyu) and the biblical tradition. He contends that environmental degradation is rooted in biblical misinterpretation. Specifically, he notes that the biblical teaching on stewardship has much in common with African Traditional religions that understand Earth as sacred.<sup>68</sup> In *African Earthkeepers*, Marthinus L. Daneel illustrates the interconnectedness of creation. Besides noting that Earthkeepers relate to

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<sup>66</sup> Laurenti Magesa, "Christ the Liberator and Africa Today," in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, 154; Harvey J. Sindima, *Religious and Political Ethics in Africa: A moral Inquiry* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998).

<sup>67</sup> Tumani Mutasa Nyanjeka, "Shona Women and the Mutupo Principle," in *Women Healing the Earth*, ed., Rosemary R. Ruether (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 1996).

<sup>68</sup> Samson K. Gitau, *The Environment Crisis: a Challenge for African Christianity* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2000).

trees on family terms, he argues that Jesus is an Earthkeeper who suffers with his kin in creation. Further, he argues that God and ancestors are directly involved in creation.

### **Research Methodology**

This dissertation is an interdisciplinary attempt to propose an African Christian ecological ethic. It particularly considers African and Western theologians/ethicists of the Christian tradition. However, this study is also informed by my association with the Gwembe Tonga of Simamba who were forcefully resettled when the Kariba Dam was constructed, and subsequently includes a study of published works on the valley Tonga people of Zambia and Zimbabwe. Additionally, this study draws on personal experiences during a period of field research conducted in the Lake Kariba region of Zambia.

### Culture in Context

While Colson and Scudder have studied people's beliefs about the universe, sacred groves and nature spirits, my personal experience among the Tonga will help interpret and confirm these observations from an ecological perspective. Whereas Scudder argued that after the resettlement, the rain making rituals (*lwiindi*) were no longer popular among the valley Tonga, my own investigation revealed that today these ceremonies remain common.<sup>69</sup> While traditionally Earth priests were the officials, today

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<sup>69</sup> Thayer Scudder, "The Human Ecology of Big Projects: River Basin Development and Resettlement," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 2 (1973):45-55. The Lusitu relocatees of Chief Chipepo do

chiefs a perform this ritual.<sup>70</sup> As an ecological guardian of the land among the living, the chief presents requests on behalf of his community to the royal ancestors (*basangu*).

Simamba Tonga are part of the Gwembe Tonga resettled during the construction of the Kariba Dam and trace their origin to the Rozvi Empire in today's Zimbabwe. While their history is complex, Simamba Tonga's cosmology is similar to that of the Shona in many respects. Although they are matrilineal, they refer to their ancestors as *mizimu* and prefer to call their royal ancestors as *mhodolo* as opposed to *basangu*.

Scudder and Colson argue that the Tonga were an amorphous or stateless people, who were usually led by Earth priests. Until the coming of colonialism when the office of the chief was instituted, Scudder and Colson maintain that Earth Priests were the leaders of the Tonga. This study concurs with these observations but adds that the Tonga lived in *ecological* rather than *political* states. In ecological states, Earth priests (*sikatongo*) controlled the fertility of the land. As such, the *sikatongo* was central to the community's wellbeing.<sup>71</sup> Of course, some Earth priests commanded more respect than the others due

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not have the *Lwiindi*. Other Tongas have the *Lwiindi* twice a year, however. Dan O'Brien; Carolyn O'Brien, "The Monze Rain Festival: The History of Change in Religious Cult in Zambia," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 29, no.3 (1997): 519-541; Dan O'Brien, "Chiefs of Rain, Chiefs of Ruling: A Reinterpretation of Precolonial Tonga (Zambia) Social and Political Structure," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 53, no.4 (1983): 23- 43.

<sup>70</sup> Elizabeth Colson, *The Social Consequences of Resettlement* (Lusaka: University of Zambia, 1971), 226.

<sup>71</sup> Tim Mathews, "Notes on the Precolonial History of the Tonga, with Emphasis on the Upper River Gwembe and Victoria Falls Area," in *The Tonga-Speaking Peoples of Zambia and Zimbabwe*, ed., Chet Lancaster and Kenneth P. Vickery (New York: University Press of America, 2007), 15-21; See also, O'Brien and O'Brien, "Religious and Group Identity of the Tonga: An Examination of the *Lwiindi*

to their rain calling powers. Such priests had control over larger villages and upon contact with colonial rule, they were transformed into political chiefs.<sup>72</sup>

As chapter two will reveal, Simamba Tongas believe in an interconnected ontological hierarchy of spiritual forces of *Leza* (the Supreme source of all life), the *basangu* or *baami bamfula* (lords of the rain), and family ancestors (*mizimu*). These forces are the principal guardians of the land. The community's enjoyment of the fruits of Earth is dependent on how they behave in time and space. During the *lwiindi*, the living feed their ancestors with the produce of the land at the *malende* (sacred groves) before they present their supplications for their ecological wellbeing to the *basangu* and ultimately to *Leza*. Such supplications, however, are conditional, based on how they have lived their lives on Earth in the past year.

Today, the ecological wellbeing of Africa and its people (the Gwembe Tonga included) is threatened by land degradation and other environmental problems. As noted above and further illustrated in chapter five, Africa's population growth is a huge challenge for the continent. So its effects on the environment can hardly be ignored. Lisa Cliggett, another scholar on the Gwembe Tonga, argues that overpopulation and drought have continued to have negative impacts on food security and conditions of food scarcity in the valley. Cliggett observes that prior to the construction of Kariba Dam, the Gwembe

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Festival," in *The Tonga-Speaking Peoples of Zambia and Zimbabwe*, ed., Chet Lancaster and Kenneth Vickery (New York: University Press of America, 2007), 65.

population was about 86,000 of which 52,000 lived on the Zambian side. By 1987, “the Zambian population of the Gwembe Valley was approximately 125,000. Although portions of the Gwembe remain forested and uninhabited, some areas, especially the land close to the lakeshore or tributaries, have become densely populated.”<sup>73</sup> Unfortunately, Cliggett’s argument does not address the ecological integrity of the Gwembe. As evidenced by Operation Noah, the valley is the habitat for millions of other biota. In fact, what Cliggett sees as empty forested and uninhabited areas are homes to millions of creatures. Human settlement will have adverse effects on these species.

Further, the belief that Earth is a commons was behind the power of territorial cults in African societies. Matthew Schoffeleers, Wim van Binsbergen and Terence Ranger all argue that cultic observances are critical to the sacralization of the land. As manifestations of the ecological aspects of African religion, territorial cults influenced communal modes of production and distribution of natural goods and worked against ecological degradation.<sup>74</sup> For this reason, droughts, floods, famines, and many other natural disasters were and are still understood ecologically. Among the Tonga people for example, persistent droughts in the Gwembe area are attributed to the annoyance of their God and ancestors over the forced resettlement.<sup>75</sup> Among the Goba people of the same

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>74</sup> Mpanya, “The Environmental Impacts of a Church Project,” 91.

<sup>75</sup> Elisabeth Thomson, *Our Gods Never Helped Us Again --The Tonga People Describe Resettlement and its Aftermath* (Lusaka: Panos Southern Africa, 2005).

region, such misfortunes are due to the Tonga people's failure to respect the *Goba malende* or sacred groves when they were resettled.<sup>76</sup>

### *Ethical Analysis*

The Christian doctrine of creation is in line with the African ontology of creation in which God, Spirits, humanity, and the rest of creation are actively interconnected. In this ontology, God, ancestors, and other vital forces in creation exist in constant harmony. Ethically, this belief implies that each ontological category has intrinsic value and rights, which are to be protected and defended; to destroy one is to break the harmony of the entire universe. In this sense, to be ethical is to respect the harmony and interaction of each ontological category. Any person who disturbs or destroys this ontological harmony is considered immoral or a witch. For this reason, African morality opposes individualism and favors cooperation and community. Since an individual exists in a web of active relationships, African morality promotes the abundant life of Earth community.

As with these African moral concepts, African religions, customs, and rituals serve the promotion of abundant life. In an interconnected ontology in which God and ancestors are regarded as sources of the ethics of abundant life, social and religious norms are one and the same. African social and religious norms have one goal: to protect and ensure land productivity, rain, good health, many children, and other social and

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<sup>76</sup> Patrick Makukisi, interview by the author, November 2006, Lusitu, Zambia, tape recording.

economic blessings. Although the Supreme Being is the ontological source and guardian of morality, Africans regard “elders” as guardians of morality. Since, however, the term “elder” can apply to both ancestors and “old people” in community, African ethics is negotiated between the living elders and the ancestors. Ancestors as the “dead elders” are closer to the Supreme Being and therefore ontologically superior to the living. As living-dead elders, ancestors are the custodians of morality and a route to abundant life.

The quest for abundant life has economic, sociopolitical and ecological implications. In 2009, Africa’s population reached 1 billion; it is expected to be 1.2 billion by the year 2050. This growth is not and will not be matched by economic growth across the continent. Moreover, desertification, global warming, shrinking cropland area, species extinction and deforestation will worsen across the continent.<sup>77</sup> Even where economic growth will take place, it will do so in large part alongside severe environmental degradation. As chapter five illustrates, Africa’s population growth is compromising our responsibility to Earth and future generations of life, including human communities. It is also encouraging extreme poverty and environmental degradation.

Ancestors sanctioned unlimited procreation, but ever increasing population numbers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are putting extreme pressure on Earth’s carrying capacity. Population increase is also contributing to the loss of ancestral lands due to soil erosion

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<sup>77</sup> The State of the World 2000 acknowledges that population, global warming, shrinking cropland area, species extinction and deforestation threaten the quality of life and life itself. The World Watch Institute, *The State of the World 2000* (New York: Norton Books, 2000).

and land degradation, as is the case among the Gwembe Tonga. Just as tribal lands are failing to meet the needs of their communities, African governments are finding it hard to address the social needs of the ever growing populations. Aside from widening the gap between rich and poor across Africa, economic development promotes irresponsible exploitation of natural goods.

One powerful example of an area in which economic development has come at the cost of environmental degradation is Gwembe, Zambia. There, the ecological destruction wrought by the Kariba dam project (mentioned above and further addressed in chapter two) far out-weighs economic benefits. Projects such as the Kariba dam have, in fact, been major reasons why Africans have heralded the advent of “sustainable development.” They have advocated for sustainable development policies as providing viable economic paths for ensuring the future of Africa and the world as a whole.<sup>78</sup>

Proponents of sustainable development argue that development should attempt to improve the livelihoods of the majority of the world population while maintaining human responsibility to future generations. The ethical value of this argument is critical in the face of the occurring crisis. To be sensitive to the just demands of future generations and

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<sup>78</sup> According to WCED, “The concept of sustainable development provides a framework for the integration of environmental policies and development strategies - the term ‘development’ being used here in its broadest sense. The word is often taken to refer to the processes of economic and social change in the Third World. But the integration of environment and development is required in all countries, rich and poor. The pursuit of sustainable development requires changes in the domestic and international policies of every nation.” United Nations, “Our Common Future: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development,” <http://www.un-documents.net/ocf-01.htm>; Internet. Accessed 07/05/ 2008.

the natural world, we need an economic path that would grant both economic growth and ecological integrity.

There are, however, theological limitations to the sustainable development model. As with other economic theories, the goal of sustainable development is “unlimited economic growth.” Africa’s economic growth is mostly dependent on the overexploitation of natural goods for the global North markets.<sup>79</sup> This “heavy reliance on natural capital” (which the World Bank acknowledged as a major obstacle to sustainable development in Sub-Saharan Africa) has led to severe environmental degradation.<sup>80</sup> In this case, endless economic growth is simply impossible to maintain. In addition, the notion of sustainable development does not go very far in addressing the economy of Earth. Like Earth in general, the continent of Africa has a limited carrying capacity. The looming crises noted above demand that we live within the limits of Earth’s capacity.

In short, we need an ethic of “sustainable living,” whereby people across the world learn to live by needs rather than wants. This ethic demands global responsibility and action by all Earth dwellers. Furthermore, any discussion of sustainable development should address the role played by international forces in Africa’s development. In this regard, developed nations and developing nations should act responsibly towards Earth and one another. This will particularly mean that the Global North will have to change its

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<sup>79</sup> Wolfgang Sachs, *The Development Dictionary* (London: Zed Books, 1991).

<sup>80</sup> The World Bank, *Toward Environmentally Sustainable Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: A World Bank Agenda* (Washington D.C: The World Bank, 1996), 11-13.

consumption patterns, while making its markets fair and just. It will also mean that the Global South will need to address massive corruption, employing measures that will protect the poor and the entire Earth community.<sup>81</sup>

Most African countries are parties to Western-developed environmental protocols and program, but this is not matched by how these countries view natural goods. Almost all African countries continue to exploit natural goods without any ethical regard for the poor, ecosystems, and future generations of life. But as Mercy Amba Oduyoye observes, the African identification “of the divine spirit in nature and the community spirit between human beings, other living creatures and natural phenomena could reinforce the Christian doctrine of Creation as well as contribute to Christian reflection on ecological problems.”<sup>82</sup> Although Oduyoye is right in arguing that Africans have traditional resources for ecological reflection and action, the dilemma that Leonardo Boff points out is pertinent here. Africans, like other “human beings, especially with the advent of the industrial revolution, have proved that they are exterminating angels, veritable demons of Earth. But human beings could also become guardian angels, intent upon saving Earth, which is their fatherland and motherland.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *Boundless Faith: The Global Outreach of American Churches* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

<sup>82</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “African Religious Beliefs,” in *African Theology En Route* (1979), 110.

<sup>83</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 19.

It is here that the ethics of *Ubuntu*, which accepts the interconnectedness of life, can inform and direct how Africans relate to Earth and one another. As chapter four illustrates, uncontrolled exploitation of natural goods is driven by human greed and corruption, vices that are contrary to *Ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* should challenge the corrupt African leadership to stop abusing Earth's goods for political gain. *Ubuntu* should encourage the equitable distribution of natural goods to the Earth community.

Admittedly, the values of hospitality and sharing, which once characterized *Ubuntu*, are contradicted by rampant corruption across the continent. Traditionally, Africans understood natural goods as coming from the world of ancestors, and how they were shared was a matter of great importance. Today, however, corruption and unequal distribution of natural goods continue to threaten ecological integrity.

The exploitation of Earth's goods cannot last forever. Africans should find ways and means of replenishing renewable natural goods such as trees, animals, and fish stock. This is even more pressing as populations explode and natural goods become scarce. In short, the ethic of replenishing Earth is imperative to African Christian Ecological Ethics. The African Earthkeepers' ministry of tree planting is an excellent example of this ethic. Since African ethics is open to other ethical systems, African Earthkeepers employs diverse theological and scientific outlooks in their endeavor to heal the bleeding Earth. Therefore, African ecological ethics of *Ubuntu* should provide the spiritual and ethical basis for replanting trees and for repopulating wild-life, including fish and other species. Such an ethic should pay attention to all religious heritages that inform Africa today.

Allowing that African Christians are faced with many economic challenges, the ethic of replenishing can unite Christians and people of other faiths in Earthkeeping ministries. As Daneel has shown, capitalizing on the people's diverse historical, religious, and cultural heritages can enhance religious ecological responsibility and action.

### *Theological Analysis*

The concept of interconnectedness has bearing on the ancestor cult, and this study investigates the ecological significance of the ancestor cult in Africa. In particular, while theologians have understood Jesus as an "ancestor," this dissertation adds depth to these arguments by exploring an ecological ethic identifying Christ as the Primary Ancestor or an ecological ancestor of all life. As such, all beings including African ancestors (the guardians of the land) find their origin in Christ.

Chapter six argues that, while traditions pertaining to ancestors vary from community to community, ancestors are dead members of one's family, clan, or tribe who are concerned with the ecological wellbeing or the abundant life of their descendants. Among the Tonga, ancestors are usually members' of one's family (*mizimu*) or tribal line (*basangu*). As guardians of the land, the ancestors are responsible for protecting Earth from all sorts of human abuse. For this reason, the African face of Jesus as "our ancestor" begs ecological examination. In particular, the Christology of Christ as our ancestor ought to address Christ's role as an ecological ancestor of life and the guardian of the land *par-excellence*. This is in line with the Christian biblical teaching

that Jesus is the origin of life: “For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on Earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things have been created through Him and for Him, through whom all things were created” (Col 1:16; cf. John 1:3). Theologically therefore, Jesus is the origin of our ancestors and the provider of abundant life *par-excellence*.

The Christ who is our ancestor is also the first born of all creation and therefore intrinsically connected to Earth community. Christ is the origin of all creation and by default, the ancestor brother of every creature. As an ancestor-brother of all Creation, Christ sacralizes the universe, thereby making creation a sacrament of “divine immanence in, and divine engagement with creation.”<sup>84</sup> Such an understanding is critical in addressing the social and economic inequalities that have characterized Africa today. The realization that Creation (Earth’s natural goods) is a sacrament means that all natural goods are part of a sacramental commons, and belong to Earth’s community as a whole.<sup>85</sup> As such, how they are used and distributed matters to Christians. In short, understanding Earth’s natural goods as sacramental commons should influence African values of solidarity and hospitality, and the ethics of *Ubuntu*. Sharing Earth’s goods is a moral virtue to which humanity should aspire at all times.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>85</sup> The concept of Sacramental commons originates with John Hart and it is addressed fully in his book, *Sacramental Commons*, chapter four. Ibid., 61-78.

<sup>86</sup> Katherine Marshall and Marisa Bronwyn Van Saanen, *Development and Faith: Where Mind, Heart, and Soul Work Together* (Washington, DC: The World Bank. 2007).

In African cosmology, creation belongs to the ancestors and the Supreme Being, and humanity is never the “ruler” of creation *per se*. Rather, humanity is part of interconnected forces of life. This idea is in contrast with prominent and popular Christian notions of dominion, which argue that human beings have a God-given mandate to exercise unlimited control over the natural world. Most African scholars have accepted this interpretation of dominion without paying attention to the fact that traditional philosophy understood humanity as part of Earth community. As such, African theology has remained a theology without Earth. Subsequently, it has continued to be human centered and by implication, if sometimes unwittingly, promoted the domination of nature. But as John Mbiti observes,

According to African peoples, man (sic) lives in a religious universe, so that the natural phenomena and objects are intimately associated with God. They not only originate from him but also bear witness to him. Man’s understanding of God is strongly colored by the universe of which man is himself a part. Man sees in the universe not only the imprint but also the reflection of God; and whether that image is marred or clearly focused and defined, it is nevertheless an image of God, and the only image known in traditional African Societies.<sup>87</sup>

The understanding of the universe as the reflection of God does not just confirm the sacramental nature of Earth Community; it also brings to the fore the ontological natural rights of every creature. Here, the liberation of Earth (the mediation of God in Africa) should be the goal of liberation theology and ethics.

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<sup>87</sup> Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 48.

Historically, the motif of land as a gift to Earth Community from the ancestors united different tribes to fight against colonial rule. Indeed, Christian education could have provided the democratic rationale for fighting colonialism, but traditional beliefs about land provided the organizing principle in the struggle. The liberation struggle was simply this: reclaim ancestral lands from colonial exploitation. It was hoped that the coming of independence would reverse the damage caused by colonialism, dictatorship, human rights abuses, poverty, civil and ethnic wars, and landlessness characterize post-independence Africa. It is not surprising that *most* theological responses have addressed the sociopolitical and economic woes that the continent faces. As a result, the ecological crisis caught many African scholars unaware in their *self-ethicizing* and *self-theologizing*.

### **Limitations**

An attempt to construct African Christian ecological ethics has many limitations. First, Christian ecological ethics in Africa is understudied, and published literature is hard to obtain. Second, a fully comprehensive study would include participant observation of many traditional rituals, particularly since a resurgence of traditional ceremonies in Africa holds potential for illustrating ecological concerns. Unfortunately, due to financial and time constraints, I limit myself to Chief Simamba's *lwiindi* ceremony. Although my personal experience will not be used to create new data, it will be used to interpret and confirm what Schoffeleers, Scudder, Colson, and other scholars have already discovered.

Third, the relationship between African Christianity, development, and the environment deserves much more critical study, as do issues of religion and development generally. Although this study is limited in its utilization of current economic theories, it will pay attention to effects of capitalism on the environment. Fourth, while Daneel has attempted to define the concept and role of the triune-God in the process of the African Earthkeepers enacting an ecological theology, this study will limit itself to the ethics of Christ as “Origin of ancestors.” Building on Daneel, the ecological significance of the *malende* will be investigated.

Finally, an exhaustive study of this overall topic would also make use of classical Christian thought. I have opted, though, to study current theologians and ethicists in order to dialogue with them at this important moment in world history. Although St. Francis of Assisi and other mystics provide a Christian basis for understanding the concept of interconnectedness, this dissertation adds insight by exploring the concept of interconnectedness from an African perspective. Within these limitations, however, my dissertation is an attempt to develop African Christian ecological ethics.



<i>Hatichina mapango</i>	We no longer have poles for building
<i>Duwinho hatichina</i>	We no longer have pools
<i>Hove hatichina</i>	We no longer have fish
<i>Raiva dziva rava zambuko</i>	What used to be a big dam is now a road
<i>Aive madziva ave mazambuko</i>	What used to be pools are now roads

Mutukudzi further complains about poor waste management in urban areas.

People have turned rivers into dump sites (*kutsviirira munzizi segomba ramarara*), while human habitats are now landfills (*vatora marara vounganidza muberere*). In the end, water and air are polluted. Finally, he bemoans that

<i>Tatadza kuchengeta masango</i>	We have failed to care for the forests
<i>Kutadza kuchengeta nzizi</i>	We have failed to care for the rivers
<i>Mhepo yekufema yangova utsi</i>	The air is polluted
<i>Kusvipira mutsime</i>	Spitting into the well
<i>Vakuruwe pindirai!</i> <sup>3</sup>	Elders intervene!

Mutukuzi's message is clear. The ongoing environmental crisis is a result of human arrogance towards the interconnected ecosphere. While the ecological crisis demands community responsibility and action, Mutukudzi calls on *vakuru* to intervene too. Because the Bantu uphold the hierarchical ontology of beings, seeking the intervention of elders in times of crisis is within the framework of African traditional religious thought.

Mutukudzi also illustrates the interconnectedness of the ongoing ecological crisis. For instance, deforestation has overwhelming consequences on humanity, water, and the ecosphere as a whole. In a rural context where the majority depends on the natural world for survival, the impact is visible at many levels. Deforestation deprives humans of the

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<sup>3</sup> From the album *Nhava*.

comfort of *mumvuri* (the shade from the trees), under which they sit during hot seasons. It also robs the poor of *mapango* (poles) for building their homes.

The felling of trees has had negative impact on water supplies. *Duwinho* (pools), *madziva* (dams), and *nzizi* (rivers) are now dying due to human negligence. Apart from being sources of drinking water, these water bodies have spiritual significance among the Bantu since they are homes to sacred spirits (*njuzu*). In addition, they are also sources of fish (*hove*) which are important sources of protein for river communities.<sup>4</sup>

The underlying reason for this crisis is human ignorance about the interconnectedness of the universe. We are “spitting into the well,” thereby poisoning ourselves. Therefore the intervention of the elders (*vakuru*) in this crisis becomes imperative. However, the Shona word *vakuru* could mean “living elders” or “ancestors,” hence it is unclear as to whom Mutukuzi is appealing. As we shall discover, this unclear differentiation between the authority of the “living elders” and “ancestors” has been at the center of theological and anthropological contention in understanding the power of ancestors in Africa.

### **Tonga Ancestors as Guardians of Ecological Integrity**

In African cosmologies, elders/ancestors are guardians of the land and morality. It is therefore their obligation to intervene in any crisis that threatens Earth’s integrity.

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<sup>4</sup> In African traditional thought, sacred groves, mountains, rivers, animals, trees and other natural phenomena are sometimes considered abodes of spiritual forces. See Matthew Schoffeleers, (ed), *Guardians of the Land: Essays on Central African Territorial Cults* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1978).

Among the Tonga of chief Simamba in Zambia, the intervention of ancestors/elders is sought through the *lwiindi* ceremony (rain-calling ritual).

### **The Tonga of Simamba**

Although the Tonga people are widely studied, those of his Royal Highness Simamba are understudied.<sup>5</sup> The Tonga of Simamba are among the valley people resettled on the Zambian side during the construction of the Kariba dam. They are now located about 30 kilometers from Siavonga Town. The chieftainship is made up of two *Sikatongos* (traditional land guardians) or what Colson translates as Earth prophet/priest: Nambwele (who according to Charles Halubanje, the reigning *sikatongo* Nambwele, is traditionally the right person to perform the *lwiindi*), and Hakuyu. These two traditional leaders were made subordinate to Chief Simamba long before the 1958 resettlement. Simamba borders with the Tonga of Chief Chipepo resettled around Lusitu, and the Goba (Shona) tribe of chief Sikongo, in whose land the Tonga of Chipepo and Simamba were resettled.

Inheritance to the Simamba throne is from the matrilineal side. While the chiefs' sons are considered princes, only the chief's nephews from his matrilineal side are

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<sup>5</sup> Scholarly studies on the Plateau Tonga abound. Thayer Scudder and Elizabeth Colson have concentrated their studies around Chief Chipepo's area (originally resettled at Lusitu and later resettled in present day Chipepo) and plateau Tonga. Thayer Scudder, *The Ecology Of The Gwembe Tonga* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1962); Elizabeth Colson, *The Plateau Tonga of Northern Rhodesia: Social and Religious Studies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1962); *The Social Consequences of Resettlement* (Lusaka: University of Zambia, 1971).

legitimate heirs to the throne. As mothers of chiefs, all royal women are buried in the *malende* (sacred groves). However, only deceased chiefs are buried there.

### **Brief History of the Gwembe Tonga**

The people of Simamba are part of the Gwembe Tonga of Zambia. Since the *lwindi* is not unique to Simamba but widespread among the Tongas, a brief ethnic history of the Gwembe and the Tonga in general is necessary. According to F.B. Macrae, “Gwembe” was a Ndebele word for the Zambezi. Today, however, it applies to all the *cultures* of the Zambezi valley.<sup>6</sup> As for the term “Tonga,” Colson argues that the meaning of the word is unknown and probably is of foreign origin.<sup>7</sup> However, Chet S. Lancaster cites F.M. T Posselt, who in 1927 alleged that the word Tonga referred to “those who do not recognize a paramount chief, or fault-finders or grumblers.”<sup>8</sup> Macrae concluded that the inhabitants of the Gwembe valley “appear to have come into the area about a hundred years ago, according to their own tradition. At this time they say that the valley was uninhabited. They also say they came from a country called Bunyai further down the river; this name is still to be found on the maps as Banyai, a tribe who were at one time prominent on the lower reaches of the Zambezi. The Banyai were also associated with the

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<sup>6</sup> F. B. Macrae, “Some Notes on Part of the Gwembe Valley in Northern Rhodesia,” *The Geographical Journal* 91, no. 5 (May, 1938): 446.

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Colson, *Marriage and the Family Among the Plateau Tonga of Northern Rhodesia* (Manchester : Manchester University Press for the Rhodes-Livingston Institute, 1958), 1.

<sup>8</sup> In Chet S. Lancaster, “Ethnic Identity, History, and “Tribe” in the Zambezi Valley,” *American Ethnologist* 1, no. 4. (Nov 1974): 724.

Makalanga, a number of [whom still] live with the Batonga in the Gwembe valley at the present day.”<sup>9</sup>

Although Colson did not consider the Shona word, “*kutonga*” (to rule/judge), it is probable that the word *Tonga* referred to groups who sought to rule (the verb *kutonga*) themselves. The Shona origin of this group can be adduced from how they refer to their ancestors. Like the Shona, Simbamba Tongas call their ancestors as *mizimu* and their royal ancestors as *mhodolo* rather than the Tonga *basangu*. This assertion is complemented by Lancaster’s oral evidence that suggests that the Tonga “never had any real chiefs or paramounts except Mambo [a Rozvi King] south of the Zambezi whom they ran from so that they could be free people. So they were called Tongas, which means grunTERS, dissatisfied people who complained and rebelled against their chief.”<sup>10</sup> In this regard, the word is a “descriptive term that refers to a cultural status deriving from Southern Rhodesian history as Shona speakers see it.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Macrae, “Some Notes on Part of the Gwembe Valley in Northern Rhodesia,” 446. .

<sup>10</sup> Lancaster, “Ethnic Identity, History, and “Tribe,”” 724. Tim Matthews reaches a similar conclusion when he argues that the name Tonga should have derived from how the Shona viewed outsiders. Tim Matthews, “Notes on the Precolonial History of the Tonga, with Emphasis on the Upper River Gwembe and Victoria Falls Area.” In *The Tonga-Speaking Peoples of Zambia and Zimbabwe*, 13-33, ed. Chet Lancaster and Kenneth P. Vickery. New York: University Press of America, 2007. Elisabeth Thomson, *Our Gods Never Help us Again: The Tonga People Describe Resettlement and its Aftermath* (Lusaka: Panos Southern Africa), 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Lancaster “Ethnic Identity, History, and “Tribe,”” 724; See also Tim Matthews, “Notes on the Precolonial History of the Tonga, with Emphasis on the Upper River Gwembe and Victoria Falls Area,” in, *The Tonga-Speaking Peoples of Zambia and Zimbabwe*, ed. Chet Lancaster and Kenneth P. Vickery (New York: University Press of America, 2007), 13-33.

Unlike the term “Gwembe” which refers to all valley Tongas, the word “Tonga” has been applied to different ethnic groups in Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. In Zambia for example, Tonga describes both Plateau and Gwembe Tongas. However, some of these groups are historically and linguistically unrelated.<sup>12</sup>

The lack of common history is not limited to Plateau Tongas. For instance, while the Gwembe Tonga of Chief Mukuni in the valley trace their origin from the Luba-Lunda Empire on the Congo basin, those of Simamba maintain that they originated from the Rozvi Empire in present day Zimbabwe. Despite lacking a common history, valley Tongas have been studied by outside observers as a social and cultural unit.<sup>13</sup>

Scholars have observed that Zambezi valley has always maintained a limited population and unorganized political leadership. The mountain range between the Plateau and the valley could have provided protection to valley Tongas from invading cultures, but environmental factors far outweighed security benefits. First, the valley was a home to big animals which threatened human livelihood. Second, it was also disease infected; an aspect that made it impossible to keep larger populations. Further, the rainfall was highly unpredictable. Valley Tongas could have enjoyed two farming seasons, but “the Gwembe system of riverside flood farming was probably too unreliable to offset the

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<sup>12</sup> Matthews argues that the pre-colonial political disorganization of the Tonga made them easy victims of raids from the Ndebele, the Kololo-Lozi and the Chukunda slave raiders. Matthews, “Notes on the Precolonial History of the Tonga,” 13-33; See Lancaster, “Ethnic Identity, History, and “Tribe,””711- 713.

<sup>13</sup> Scudder, *The Ecology Of The Gwembe Tonga*; Colson, *The Plateau Tonga of Northern Rhodesia; Social Organization of the Gwembe Tonga; The Social Consequences of Resettlement*.

disadvantages of the uncertain rainfall.”<sup>14</sup> This situation handicapped the residents’ political organization.

Adding to the complexity of Tonga history is lack of centralized political leadership. As we shall discover, the word *mwami*, though rendered as chief, was originally applied to the royal and other sacred spirits (*basangu*), *basangu* mediums (persons possessed with *basangu* spirits), and occasionally to *sikatongos*. Although *mwami* was later adopted to refer to political chiefs in the colonial sense, Scudder, Colson, and Lancaster among many others have maintained that organized chieftainships were absent in Tonga life; hence they were an amorphous or stateless people.

Tim Matthews agrees with the above argument but adds that raiding cultures in the nineteenth century forced the Tongas to organize around certain charismatic Earth priests (*sikatongos*). Using the rain-calling ritual (*lwiindi*) as an organizing tool, charismatic *sikatongos* managed to build a sizable group of followers who defended themselves against raiding *cultures* and colonialism. Hence despite lacking hierarchical or hereditary structures of political authority, “there are signs that certain Tonga groups adapted to the exigencies of trade and defense in the nineteenth century, and in places earlier, by strengthening and secularizing leadership positions.”<sup>15</sup> One example is that of

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<sup>14</sup> Matthews argues that the pre-colonial political disorganization of the Tonga made them easy targets for raiding cultures among them the Ndebele, the Kololo-Lozi, and the Chukunda slave raiders. Matthews “Notes on the Precolonial History of the Tonga,” 15.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

chief Monze who used his rain-calling power to address the social and political challenges of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>16</sup>

Matthews' analysis is plausible, but the *Tongas* practiced what I term an "ecological state" which gathered around a *sikatongo* (Earth priest). In other words, the *sikatongo*'s leadership was ecological rather than political in the sense that we would understand that concept today. Indeed, political leadership as practiced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century was unknown. But the ecological leadership of ancestors and the *basangu* provided the basis for the office of the political chief. This is because the ancestors and *basangu* are the guardians of the land in Tonga religion.<sup>17</sup> In times of crisis, this ecological leadership turned political, as Matthews and the O'Briens have independently noted.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Tonga Religious Worldview**

Simamba Tongas believe in an interconnected ontological hierarchy of spiritual forces. In line with Placides Tempels' Bantu philosophy discussed in chapter one, *Leza*

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<sup>16</sup> Dan O'Brien and Carolyn O'Brien, "The Monze Rain Festival: The History of Change in a Religious Cult in Zambia," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 29, no. 3 (1997): 519-528.

<sup>17</sup> Colson argues that in order to ensure fertility in the land, samples of the seeds to be planted were placed under the bed on which the *sikatongo* and his *mulela* would be intimate. Colson, *Tonga Religious Life in the Twentieth Century*, 116.

<sup>18</sup> Colson argues that, the ethnic identity of the Tonga as we know it today is a colonial imposition. Elizabeth Colson, *Tonga Religious Life in the Twentieth Century* (Lusaka, Bookworld Publishers, 2006). Dan O'Brien, however, argues that Tonga chiefs were more political than the *sikatongo*. Dan O'Brien, "Chief of Rain – Chief of Ruling: A Reinterpretation of Pre-Colonial Tonga (Zambia) Social and Political Structure," *Journal of the International African Institute* 53, no. 4 (1983): 23-42. Matthews, "Notes on the Precolonial History of the Tonga," 21; O'Brien and O'Brien, "Religious and Group Identity of the Tonga," 65.

(God) is the Supreme Vital force and the source of life who is concerned with community welfare. The *basangu* or *baami bamfula* (chiefs of rain) are second in this hierarchy.

They include royal ancestors and other spirits associated with natural phenomena such as trees, mountains, pools, and sacred creatures residing in the *malende* (sacred groves).<sup>19</sup>

The *malende* occupy an important place in Tonga cosmology. Colson observes that the *malende* are regarded as inherently sacred because they are associated with unseen powers associated with nature. The *malende* “sites may be rock faces, springs, deep pools or large hallow trees. Here neighborhood representatives make appeals [to the *basangu*] in times of stress, especially in drought years.”<sup>20</sup> In addition, royal burial spaces are called *malende*. Such *malende* are marked by one or several small shelters in form of a *kaanda* (tiny hut) mostly too small to enter.<sup>21</sup>

Like *Leza*, the *basangu* are concerned with community issues. *Basangu* mediums warn of community disasters brought upon society due to human infringement of social and moral order. They also determine the time for holding the *lwiindi*.<sup>22</sup> Because the *basangu* spirits are closer to *Leza*, they are usually confused with the Supreme Being. Major A. H. Gibbons, who took the expedition on the Zambezi from 1895-1900, did

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<sup>19</sup>The *malende* (sacred grove) play an important role in the selection of the next chief. According to Emmanuel Moonga, the current Simamba, the ancestors, and the *basangu* residing in the *malende*, should approve of the elder’s choice before one can be enthroned as chief. Interview with Chief Simamba, Lusaka; Siavonga, November 2006. On tape.

<sup>20</sup> Colson, *Tonga Religious Life in the Twentieth Century*, 66- 67.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>22</sup> Colson, “Rain Shrines of the Plateau Tonga of Northern Rhodesia,” 276-277.

exactly that. He confused the *malende* (sacred shrine) of the *Basangu* spirit Nyami-Nyami to be the headquarters of the Tonga deity. “This, the boys assured me to be the headquarters of the great river god; and although many boats have gone down within these sacred precincts, neither boat, nor goods nor bodies have ever been recovered. The Portuguese – by which I presume is meant the black article – always throw in wine and calico to propitiate the deity.”<sup>23</sup>

Frank Clements followed Gibbons in associating this river spirit with *Leza*. To him, the problems that characterized the construction of the Kariba dam were due to the struggle of this river god, which he identifies as *Nyami-Nyami*. Yet he contradicts himself when he asserts, “it is not clear what status Nyami-Nyami had as an ancestral shade, but it caused those foolish enough to shoot the Kariba Gorge to disappear from the face of Earth, and its tail was blamed for the destruction of bridges and coffer dams.”<sup>24</sup> Although the Gwembe Tonga interviewed attributed the destruction of the dam to *Nyami-Nyami*, they nevertheless argued that *Nyami-Nyami* was a creature of *Leza* and one of the most powerful *basangu* of the river Zambezi.<sup>25</sup>

In Tonga cosmology, family matters are the prerogative of family ancestors (*mizimu*) who are the guardians of the family line. The *mizimu* demand continuity of

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<sup>23</sup> Major A. S. H. Gibbons, *Africa from South to North through Marotseland*, vol. 1 (London: J. Lane, 1904), 45-46.

<sup>24</sup> Frank Clement, *Kariba: The Struggle with the River God* (London: Methuen, 1959), 12.

<sup>25</sup> Colson, “Rain Shrines of the Plateau Tonga of Northern Rhodesia,” 276-277.

approved behavior and customs from their descendants. Any attempt to reform such traditions is considered insubordination by the ancestors.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, ancestors are open to change once something has been approved by the *basangu*, who are ontologically superior to *mizimu*. Like the *basangu*, *mizimu* can possess individuals with healing-powers.

In similar fashion to the relationship between *Leza* and *basangu*, the differences between the *basangu* and *mizimu* are complex. During the *lwiindi*, for instance, the *basangu* and *mizimu* are invoked interchangeably. Likewise, the individuals who are possessed by either the *muzimo* (singular) ancestral spirit or the *musangu* (singular) spirit can claim to be prophets or mediums of these spirits interchangeably. Since *basangu* intermediaries are usually held in higher esteem than *mizimu* mediums, most prophets associate their authority with *basangu* when addressing community issues. Nonetheless, they revert to the *mizimu* when addressing individual matters.

One important example of the complex relationship between the *basangu* and *mizimu* was in evidence during the construction of the Kariba dam. Despite the threats posed by the dam, most people resisted resettlement for religious reasons. According to the report of the Commission appointed to inquire into the violence that characterized the building of the dam, the Tonga believed that the construction of the dam would not be

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<sup>26</sup> Colson differentiates the *Basangu* from the *mizimu* based on their social functions. The *basangu* are initiators of new form of behavior while the *mizimu* are protectors of traditions. Colson, *Tonga Religious Life in the Twentieth Century*, 52.

possible, and that Europeans could not close the dam.<sup>27</sup> Although the report does not provide the basis for such beliefs, many people interviewed pointed to religious convictions. People believed that the *basangu* spirits (chiefly Nyami-Nyami) would defend the land from western encroachment. Some, however, pointed out that they hoped that their royal ancestors (*basangu/mizimu*) would punish the Europeans for obliterating the *malende* (sacred groves). Others equally feared the wrath of their ancestors should they abandon their graves.<sup>28</sup>

To calm these fears, the *basangu* mediums played a vital role. Although they previously warned people not to move, they later declared that the spirits had agreed to move after the people had performed certain traditional rituals. They also encouraged people to carry soil and branches from their sacred groves as a way of taking their ancestors with them.<sup>29</sup> Such innovation convinced many Tongas to move, although others ignored the rulings of the mediums and vowed to defend their land.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Northern Rhodesia, *Report of the Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Circumstances Leading up to and Surrounding the Recent Deaths and Injuries Caused by the Use of Firearms in the Gwembe District and Matters Relating Thereto* (Lusaka: Government Printers, 1958), 9.

<sup>28</sup> Colson, *The Social Consequences of Resettlement*, 211.

<sup>29</sup> Mr. Patrick Kakukisi was 11 at the time of the resettlement. He claimed that his family survived the Lusitu illnesses (usually called the Lusitu condition) that killed many relocatees in 1958 due to the help of his ancestors. "I remember what my father did. He followed the instructions of the elders and carried the soil with him. When we got to Lusitu, he mixed it with water and gave us to drink. That is why we survived." Patrick Makukisi, Interview with the author, Lusitu, Zambia, October, 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Clement, *The Struggle of the River God*, 1959; Northern Rhodesia. *Report of the Commission*, 1958.

The Kariba case illustrates the social and religious influence of the *basangu* medium/prophets not only over the *lwiindi* but also over socio-economic and political changes in Tonga life. This is not the first time when such negotiations have taken place. As we shall see, the authority of Monze and Mweemba were a result of their roles as *basangu* prophets. Just as Mbuya Nehanda of Mashonaland used her prophetic powers to resist colonial rule, Monze employed his *basangu* prophetic powers to organize resistance against Lewanika and colonialism in Northern Rhodesia/Zambia. Dan O'Brien alludes to this when he argues Monze's political leadership was religiously sanctioned.<sup>31</sup>

The confusion that surrounds the *basangu* and *mizimu* extends to the offices of *basangu/mizimu* medium and the office of the *nganga* (*diviner*). Today, a *nganga* can claim to be possessed by *basangu*, *mizimu* or both. Such individuals possess healing powers and can occasionally call the *lwiindi*. Nonetheless, most of the *nganga* activities are tailored to meet individual and family needs. Importantly, diviners control evil forces such as witches (*balози*), community illnesses, *zelo* or *zilube* (dangerous ghosts), and *masabe* (alien spirits).<sup>32</sup>

### **The *Lwiindi* Ceremony of Simamba of the *Bagande* (frog) Clan**

The *lwiindi* (rain ritual) ceremony illustrates the ecological significance of Tonga religion among the people of Simamba. Although their original shrines are now buried

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<sup>31</sup> O'Brien, "Chief of Rain – Chief of Ruling," 21, 23-42.

<sup>32</sup> Colson, *Tonga Religious Life in the Twentieth Century*, 41-42.

under the waters of the dam, the people of Simamba have reconstructed their heritage through the *lwiindi* ceremony. Because valley life highly depended on balanced rainfall, the cult of supplicating royal *basangu* for rain (*lwiindi*) was central to Tonga religion.

Generally, the Tonga people observe the *lwiindi* based on the ecological calendar. Among the plateau Tonga, *lwiindi lwa kulyata mukuba* is held during the clearing of the fields prior to planting; *lwiindi lwa mwaka* is held during the planting season; *lwiindi lwa kuyamina* is held during the weeding and scaring of birds season; *lwiindi lwakuloka* is celebrated during the eating of the first fruits while *lwiindi lwakutebula* takes place during the celebration of the harvest and the calling of rains.<sup>33</sup> In addition to all these *lwiindis*, a special *lwiindi* can be called during times of community crisis. While the specific details of each *lwiindi* and the name of such a ritual differ from place to place, generally the ceremony involves going to the *malende*, giving ritual beers to *basangu* in huts (*ganda*), dancing, and making socio-ecological requests to the same.<sup>34</sup>

#### Major actors in Simamba *Lwiindi*

Historically, the *sikatongo* (Earth priest) is the rightful person to perform the *lwiindi*. However, chief Simamba is the ritual officiant and the most important actor in

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<sup>33</sup> The people of Simamba seem to combine all these *lwiindis* into an annual event. However, *sikatongo* Nambwele and Siakuyu celebrate all the *lwiindis* in accordance with the tradition of the ancestors. Interview with *Sikatongo* Nambwele, Simamba, February 27, 2009.

<sup>34</sup> For the descriptions of other *lwiindi* ceremonies, see Colson, *Tonga Religious Life in the Twentieth Century*, 2006; "Rain Shrines of the Plateau Tonga of Northern Rhodesia," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 18, no. 4 (Oct., 1948): 272 -283; O'Brien and O'Brien, "The Monze Rain Festival," 1997.

this *lwiindi*. Equally important, however, is a woman known as *mulela* (from the verb *kulela*, “to care for”).<sup>35</sup> Aside from being the official keeper of the *ganda* (sacred hut where the chief spends special nights and traditional artifacts are kept), a *mulela* is also the keeper of the royal artifacts.<sup>36</sup> Selected among the virgins from the line of *mulela*, she is given to the ancestors as a ritual wife and takes care of all the needs of the chief, including sex while in the *ganda*. Unlike the wives of the reigning chief whose status changes with the death of their husbands, a *mulela* remains in the *ganda* until she is too old to perform ritual duties. Only then can she be replaced by another *mulela*.

In addition to a *mulela*, a man called *muzambi* plays an important role in the *lwiindi*. A *muzambi* is expected to be an expert in preventative traditional medicines.<sup>37</sup> Traditionally, his duties included sampling wild roots prior to the chief during the times of famine. He also provided spiritual protection against witchcraft by consulting with

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<sup>35</sup> Perhaps the most revealing aspect of Tonga religion is the gender balancing role. According to Colson, the *sikatongo* and his wife (*mukaintu wamfula*) are critical to Tonga religion. Their performance of *lwiindi* “symbolized the continuity of human life in the area.” Colson, *The Social Consequences of Resettlement*, 226.

<sup>36</sup> At *Bagande Palace*, the official residence of Chief Simamba, the official *ganda* is located outside the main palace. It is a small, round hut where all traditional symbols of authority such as royal clothes, spears, axes (*bukanu*), tails, and other sacred objects are kept. The *ganda* is known by different names in different chieftainships. The Tonga of Mukuni call it *ntandala* while the Plateau Tonga call it *kaanda*. Colson, *Tonga Religious Life in the Twentieth Century*, 66-72; O’Brien and O’Brien, “The Monze Rain Festival,” 533.

<sup>37</sup> According to *sikatongo* Nambwele, in the old days a *muzambi* was picked among slaves. During the *lwiindi*, he checks on the chief whilst in the *ganda*. During my initial research in November 2006, senior *muzambi* Peter Hamunteka stopped me from using a camera at the shrine.

“medicine persons” in the chiefdom. During the *lwiindi*, a *muzambi* consults with the chief and protects him against evil powers of his enemies.<sup>38</sup>

### Calling the Rain: *Lwiindi* Ceremony

The *lwiindi* begins with a *basangu* medium declaring to the chief and the *sikatongos* that it is time to supplicate the *basangu* for rain. This usually takes place around October/November when people are preparing their fields for planting. Thereafter, the chief, in consultation with the *sikatongos*, calls a meeting of royal members and councilors to determine the date for holding the *lwiindi*.

Since traditional ritual beer (*kankata*) is essential to the *lwiindi*, each household is expected to contribute grain for brewing the beer. The *sikatongos* and other community elders collect the grain from each household from the previous harvest. The grain (sorghum, millet, or maize) is then given to old women who brew the ritual beer.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>According to Colson, “powerful or prosperous persons, including chiefs, diviners and politicians, are assumed to have medicines that assist and protect but also kill.” Colson further observes that although the Tonga generally associates witchcraft with men, *buloz* (witchcraft) is ambiguous in that it includes empowering medicines (*misamu*) which are used for personal protection and for public ends. Tongas also believe in *ciposo* (literary “to throw) which is sent via a treated duiker horn (*insengo*) to kill a victim. Other medicines are used to create familiars such as *ilomba* or *zikobelo*. The *ilomba* (or *idomba*) is a snake with human head *zikobelo*. Witches use these familiars to attack their victims. “Some witches have medicine to move about as crocodiles, snakes, lions or hyenas. Some are dancers, *bazyani*, who dance or sit naked in the yard or garden while ill-wishing members of the homestead.” Elizabeth Colson, “The Father as Witch”: *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 70, no. 3 (2000), 333-358. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1161065> Accessed: 09/04/2009.

<sup>39</sup> This is in line with Colson and Scudder’s statement that traditional beer linked “almost everything that Gwembe people thought important.” Elizabeth Colson and Thayer Scudder, *For Prayer and Profit: The Ritual, Economic, and Social Importance of Beer in Gwembe District, Zambia, 1950-1982* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1988), 65.

Seven days before the ceremony, the Chief and *mulela* enter the sacred hut (*ganda*). During this period, they are excluded from all social activities until the *lwiindi* ceremony. No mourning of the dead is allowed during this period.<sup>40</sup> Around the same time, the elders and the *muzambi* go to the royal graves to clean and rebuild the sacred huts (*nsaka*). Constructed like a hut except that they are very small and low, the *nsaka* is believed to be the dwelling place of both male and female ancestors. At the *malende*, the gender of specific ancestors is symbolized by the way the hut is thatched. Males have their huts thatched with the roof having grass shaped like horns, while female huts are identified with a cone.

A night before the ceremony, the chief, his councilors, royal family members, and the *muzambi* take *kankata* (ritual beers) to the *malende*. Unlike other African cultures that pour the beer on the ground as libation, Simamba Tongas pour it into clay pots. These pots are later placed in each hut as food for the ancestors. After invoking the ancestors to accept their people's offerings, the party leaves the shrine for their respective homes. However, the chief returns to the *ganda*.

Aside from the two *sikatongos* and some people who await the chief's party at the *malende*, the majority of the people gather around the *ganda* at the chief's palace to wait for the coming-out of their chief on the following day. In the *malende*, the two

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<sup>40</sup> Just as the Chief enters the *ganda* for seven days during the *Lwiindi*, he is also expected to spend seven days in it when he dies. On the seventh day, his four front teeth and all nails are removed and buried separately from the body. Simamba Tongas believe that chiefs buried with teeth and nails manifest in dangerous animals such as *shumbwa* (lion) when they return to visit their people. This belief illustrates the link between the sacred and the natural phenomena in Tonga cosmology.

Sikatongos position themselves at specific places resembling the directions of their villages, and will join the procession at two different points during the ceremony.<sup>41</sup>

As the number of people continues to grow around the palace, people gather at the entrance of the *ganda* where drummers, dancers and children sing various rain-calling songs.<sup>42</sup> At the appointed moment, the *muzambi* enters the *ganda* to alert the Chief and the *mulela* that it is now time to come out.

As keeper of chiefs, the *mulela* confers power on the chief by handing him the symbols of his authority; among these are traditional spears and a *bukanu* (axe) used by the founding ancestor. After this, the *muzambi* emerges holding spears and the *mudima* or *budima* (special beat) is played on drums. At this moment, the people stop singing in anticipation of the coming out of the chief. As soon as the chief emerges from the *ganda*, people make loud sounds and gesticulations.

The people continue singing as the chief leads an adult-only procession to the shrines.<sup>43</sup> As the parade moves towards the shrines, men and women separate. Women continue towards the place called *nakalindi* or *cihiba* (pool) while men go hunting in the

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<sup>41</sup> According to my Tonga informants, the joining of the *sikatongos* at different times symbolizes how the three groups were made part of the Simamba chieftainship. As we shall see, their union is characterized by ill feelings.

<sup>42</sup> “*Tukalabe bulongo ku mamba tikalabe debe*” (let us go and pick beads from mamba, let us go and pick debe). When we inquired about the meaning of this song, Peter Hamunteka, the senior *Muzambi*, and *sikatongo* Nambwele expressed ignorance but pointed to the past when people used to dress in beads.

<sup>43</sup> The *lwiindi* of Simamba prohibits young children, young adults without children, and nursing mothers from entering the shrines. This is in contrast to Colson’s findings among the Plateau Tonga where no one is excluded from the *lwiindi* except the *Luanga* Tonga who exclude women. See Colson, “Rain Shrines of the Plateau Tonga of Northern Rhodesia,” 280.

sacred grove. At this time, the chief and his *muzambi* await the hunting party under a special tree.<sup>44</sup> Just as the hunting party rejoins the chief, the people of *sikatongo* Nambwele emerge from their hiding place to confront Simamba with spears in an enacted war. Simamba's people fight back until Nambwele recognizes his authority. After making peace, they together proceed towards *nakalindi*, where they are met by dancing women.<sup>45</sup>

The *sikatongo* Hakuyu and his people join the party at *nakalindi*. However, Nambwele, he must first fight Simamba. After this enacted battle, Hakuyu accepts the authority of Simamba and joins the party.<sup>46</sup> The people celebrate the unity of Simamba's neighborhood with dancing for several minutes while the three traditional leaders are standing-by until the chief calls for order by raising his axe.

After everybody is quiet, a ritual of water-drinking is performed. Chief Simamba is served first by his first wife, followed by his *muzambi* and his *sikatongos*. While

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<sup>44</sup> According to Mr. Simamba, the son of the late chief Simamba, "the *nakalindi* is the central place where the chief meets his *sikatongos* whenever he wants to find out how they are doing in their respective places. It is a place where each *sikatongo* makes a report and advice is given by the chief." Simamba, Interview with the author on Tape, November 25, 2006.

<sup>45</sup> According to informants, in the past, the ancestors would provide them with meat for the feast during the *lwiindi*. This was possible, since people were only allowed access to the animals in the grove during the ceremony. Aside from the fact that this kept the number of animals in the grove in check and also provided meat for the *lwiindi*, the grove helped to conserve nature. Due to the overexploitation of animals, no animals were found during the 2006 *lwiindi*, an indication of the current ecological disturbance in the valley.

<sup>46</sup> According to the informant, the original *nakalindi* had a sacred stone with a small pool where water used to collect throughout the year. It is from this pool that people used to get water for ritual purposes. Today, however, the new *nakalindi* which was constructed after the resettlement does not hold water continuously. Since the 2006 *lwiindi* was held after the first rains, it had some rain water nevertheless.

traditionally the water for this ritual came from the *nakalindi*, today tap water is used.

After drinking water, the chief takes a roll call of his people. Whenever each neighborhood is called, the people from that area shout with joy. Thereafter, Simamba addresses his *sikatongos*: *Ndakwaanzya Hacijibi* (I greet you, *Hacijibi*).

*Sikatongo* Nambwele responds, *kukaita ku kajiba* (you greet me because you know me).<sup>47</sup>

He then greets Hakuyu: “*Ndakwaanzya Hakuyu*” (I greet you, Hakuyu).

Hakuyu responds: “*Tulinamuntengwe tutandila busi*”(We are like the Southern black flycatcher, we follow the smoke).<sup>48</sup>

After the exchange of each greeting, the chief inquires from his *sikatongos* how their neighborhoods are faring. The *sikatongos* inform the chief about the problems being faced in respective areas.<sup>49</sup> They also request the chief to supplicate the *basangu* for good rains. The *sikatongos* are followed by women who similarly solicit the chief for rain in an artistic fashion. Unlike the *sikatongos* who simply make verbal supplications, women do it through dancing, clapping, and kneeling before the chief. After getting all the requests,

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<sup>47</sup> According to *sikatongo* Nambwele, it was a taboo for him and Simamba to meet face to face except during the *lwiindi*. “In the past, if I saw him (Simamba) coming, I would change direction. Today, however, we meet.” Interview with the author, Feb. 2009, on video. During the ceremony, however, Nambwele cannot still visit the shrines of Simamba. Doing so would provoke the ancestors into cursing the land. By responding, “You greet me because you know me,” Nambwele is pointing to this traditional belief.

<sup>48</sup> *Sikatongo* Siakuyu’s response characterizes his role in the Gwembe and his pride. He is always prepared to aid whenever needed.

<sup>49</sup> During the 2006 ceremony, the *sikatongos* informed the Chief that very few people from their respective neighborhoods attended the ceremony due to hunger. They asked the chief to remind the *basangu* that their children needed food.

the chief on behalf of all living elders leads the procession towards the royal graves, leaving behind *sikatongo* Nambwele.

Simamba royal graves resemble a Tonga village with many huts (*nsaka*). Since each hut represents a *musangu* (singular) residing therein, people check individual huts to determine whether that royal ancestor has accepted the beers left the previous night. As Alexr G. MacAlphine observed about the Tonga more than 100 years year ago, “If the frothy scum on the beer has been disturbed, or if any of the offering seemed to be less in quantity than when they had been placed in position, the omen was good. If no change was noticeable, they judged that they and their gifts had been unfavorably received, and they set themselves to gain favor by larger and better sacrifices.”<sup>50</sup>

Although this observation applies to some extent, Simamba Tongas believe in supplicating each ancestor individually. If the beer from the clay pot is consumed or the scum is disturbed, that specific ancestor is pleased with them. However, should they find the scum undisturbed on another grave; they conclude that the specific ancestor is unhappy with them. At the 2006 *lwiindi*, for example, the grave that was untouched belonged to the immediate late chief, who happened to be the current Simamba’s uncle. According to informants, the rejection of gifts indicated the unfavorable relationship between the current Simamba and his late uncle.

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<sup>50</sup> Alexr. G. MacAlphine, “Tonga Religious Belief and Customs: 4. Worship,” *Journal of the Royal African Society* 6, no. 24 (Jul., 1907):380.

In order to bring about reconciliation, the chief did make another sacrifice. Rather, verbal confessions were used to implore his late uncle to accept the gifts. The current chief reminded his uncle that when he was living, he also made mistakes and annoyed the ancestors. However, when he asked for forgiveness, they forgave him. Therefore, he continued, “if we, your people, have done wrong, we ask for your forgiveness (*kulekelelwa*) and implore you to accept our gifts.”<sup>51</sup> Then he dances around the shrine for several minutes. When all shrines are visited, the chief reminds the ancestors of their moral responsibilities to their descendants. Thereafter, a general request to the *basangu* for abundant rain, harvest, and their help in controlling rats (*mbeba*), insects, birds and illnesses that may hinder abundant life is finally made.

After these supplications, the chief leads his party back to *nakalindi*, where *Sikatongo* Nambwele rejoins the procession back to the *ganda*. Because children are not allowed to visit the *malende*, they eagerly await the chief’s return outside the vicinity of the *malende*. When the party emerges from the *malende*, the children, young people, and nursing mothers rejoin the procession back to the *ganda*. Upon reaching the *ganda*, the chief performs his final dance around the *ganda* for several minutes before retiring into the *ganda*, where the *mulela* reclaims the spears and all the royal symbols. The chief is now free to go back to the palace and the *lwiindi* celebrations continue with feasting.

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<sup>51</sup> Ceremony on Video, November 25, 2006, shot by the author. The Tonga of Simamba believe that ancestors are obliged to provide them with abundant life on earth, provided they uphold the traditions of the living dead. According to MacAlphine, some Tonga prayers are worded in this fashion, “Guard us from sickness, do not molest the children, help us in our gardens, give us enough fish and food etc.” MacAlphine, “Tonga Religious Belief and Customs,” 380.

### Discussion of the *Lwiindi* ceremony

Matthew Schoffeleers observed that territorial cults are usually fertility cults. For groups like the Shona, Tonga and Chewa, rain-calling is therefore central to their religion. Thus, territorial cults and by extension the rain-calling cults have influence on local, tribal, state, and federal levels.<sup>52</sup> In their discussion of “The Monze Rain Festival,” The O’Briens accept Schoffeleers’ argument. But they also contend that there are instances when territorial cults are regional as was the case with the cult of Monze (*lwiindi*) which “transcended scattered geographical confines” of the land of the Tonga.<sup>53</sup>

In order to dispute Colson’s assertion that the Tonga were loosely organized before colonialism, the O’Briens suggest that the Gwembe Tongas were politically organized around the cult of Monze, who was both the rain caller and the healer (*n’ganga*).<sup>54</sup> They maintain that the ability of Monze to appeal to the *basangu* for rains, and his power to heal, made him the political center of Tonga life.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Schoffeleers, *Guardians of the Land*, 1978. Especially the introductory essay.

<sup>53</sup> Dan O’Brien, “Chief of Rain – Chief of Ruling,” 23-42; O’Brien and O’Brien, “The Monze Rain Festival,” 519; Reprinted in *Tonga-Speaking People of Zambia and Zimbabwe* as “Religious and Group Identity of the Tonga: An examination of the Lwiindi Festival,” ed. Chet Lancaster and Kenneth P. Vickerly (New York: University Press of America, 2007).

<sup>54</sup> To them, the trial of Monze (the rainmaker in 1902), the evidence that David Livingstone speaks about chief Monze and the fact that Monze invited the Ndebele to defeat the Lozi King Lewanika, are some of the facts that suggest the political leadership of Monze. O’Brien and O’Brien, “The Monze Rain Festival,” 519-522.

<sup>55</sup> Colson’s sentence reads: “The continued importance of the shrine of Monze may have political overtones of which I am aware.” This quote is absent in the O’Briens’s 1997 essay on the Monze cult. Nonetheless, they used it in their 2007 version to make a case for the political role of the Monze among the Tonga. O’Brien and O’Brien, “Religious and Group Identity of the Tonga,” 63.

But as already noted, the power to perform the *lwiindi* is a prerogative of *sikatongos*. To Colson, “the modern chief has political power. He has the right to rule men. The sikatongo is not per se a leader or ruler of men. He is of importance only in relation to his katongo which is specific to a neighborhood. Through him [people] relate themselves to the land on which they live, which provides their sustenance. In any other neighborhood, he is powerless. He cannot take his ritual position with him.”<sup>56</sup>

Monze’s power to call rain and to heal could have placed him at the center of Tonga cosmology. As a *sikatongo*, Monze confronted ecological disasters and unexplained illnesses in his community.<sup>57</sup> This role made *sikatongos* the centers of ecological states. In this sense, charismatic *sikatongos* like Monze could have been viewed as chiefs in the European sense and conferred with “political” power during colonial rule. The Tonga are aware of this colonial interpretation since they refer to such chiefs as “chiefs of the book” (pointing to the role of collecting hut taxes, which such *sikatongos* played in colonial times). To gain traditional legitimacy in the new political order, these *sikatongos* have turned their *lwiindis* into regional cults. *Sikatongo* Nambwele’s (Charles Halubanje) insistence that he was a rightful person to perform the *lwiindi* points to the impact of colonialism on Tonga cosmo-vision.

Just as critical were the impacts of the forced resettlement on the *lwiindi*. The loss of ancestral land, coupled with the completion of the dam and resettlement, apparently

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<sup>56</sup> Colson, *Social Organization of the Gwembe Tonga*, 65.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

indicated the failure of the *basangu* to protect their land as noted earlier. Worse still, Colson and Scudder have argued, between 1960 and 1963, the relocatees had much better harvests than they used to get in the valley. That Earth could still produce without the help of Earth priests (*sikatongos*) created a cognitive dissonance among the Tonga who now interpreted the *basangu* as powerless in the new environment. Once the ecological conditions changed, the roles of the *basangu* were revitalized.<sup>58</sup>

#### Ecological Chieftainship in Tonga life

The ecological nature of Tonga chieftainship is expressed in the *lwiindi*. To start, the Tonga believe that nobody can become a chief without the protection of the *basangu* and *mizimu*. As a living elder, the chief is entrusted with powers to receive his people's supplications and to present them to the ancestors, who in turn hand them over to the Supreme Being. By spending time in the *ganda* at critical moments during his reign, the chief remains interconnected with the vital forces of past elders, his people and other spiritual forces in the community.<sup>59</sup>

The holding of *lwiindi* after the first rains is indicative of how people understand the role of ancestors and God in their daily life. The fact that the first rains have fallen does not translate into abundant harvest. Since God is the only giver of rains, remaining

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<sup>58</sup> Colson, *The Social Consequences of Resettlement*, 233.

<sup>59</sup> Scudder, *The Ecology Of The Gwembe Tonga*, 111; Colson, *Tonga Religious Life in the Twentieth Century*, 116.

connected to the *basangu* and other vital spiritual forces through the *lwiindi* is critical to the realization of abundant life on Earth. In this regard, the *lwiindi* is not only meant to implore the *basangu* for more rains, but also to ask them to prevent non-human creatures from destroying the harvest.

Just as Mutukudzi called on the elders to intervene in the occurring ecological crisis, the Tonga believe that the ancestors and God have power to intrude in any life threatening situation. Equally important is the belief that despite the negative effects of rats, birds, and insects on human life, they are nevertheless part of the sacred universe of life. Rather than destroying them, the Tonga entreat the *basangu* to intercede with God to control their activities.

Despite calling on the *basangu* for rains, the Tonga understand *Leza* as the sole rain giver. Supplications to the *basangu* dominate the *lwiindi* ceremony, but it is believed that rain is only granted “through their intervention with *Leza*, a god who controls all things.”<sup>60</sup> Nonetheless, the absence of the mention of God in *lwiindi* is due to the belief that ancestors and the *basangu* are the ones who direct their descendants’ supplications to *Leza*. However, should these forces be deemed not able, the people will bring their supplications directly to *Leza*.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Colson, *Tonga Religious Life in the Twentieth Century*, 277; Elisabeth Colson and Max Gluckman, (eds), *Seven Tribes of Colonial Central Africa* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1959), 156.

<sup>61</sup> Colson, *Tonga Religious Life in the Twentieth Century*, 51.

Furthermore, the Simamba *lwiindi* seems to be a combination of both the ancestor cult and the rain making ritual. To the chief, the time spent in the *ganda* is meant to reconnect with his matrilineal ancestors. It is also meant to entreat the *basangu* for rain on behalf of his community. From this perspective, chief Simamba's ancestors are considered *basangu* within the confines of the *malende*, and ancestral spirits at the personal household level. As *Sikatongo* Nambwele explained, household ancestors exist to protect their descendants from individual calamity. "When I move in the bush and see a snake, I say the ancestor has protected me. I can't say, O my Lord, but *mizimu, yandi*... I believe that if somebody dies in my family, he is the one watching after my movements. He is protecting me."<sup>62</sup> As a ritual officiant, however, chief Simamba appeals to the *basangu*, who "are concerned with community affairs and not with the narrow sphere of individual or private matters."<sup>63</sup>

### The Ecology of the Gwembe

As already alluded to, the ecology of the Gwembe valley has always been challenging. Aside from the geographical hardships, rainfall in the area has been

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<sup>62</sup> A similar statement was made by both the *sikatongo* Nambwele and the *Muzambi* independently on February 27, 2009. To them, immediate help comes from the ancestors rather than God or other spirits. Unlike other Bantu cultures who attribute ancestorhood with age and gender, the Tonga of Simamba associate it with descent. For instance, all family members are accorded the status of *muzimu* when they die. In case of the royal family, all women and chiefs are considered royal ancestors; hence, their power to protect is equally sought. This understanding is confirmed by Colson, who argues that the Tonga attribute help and protection to all ancestors. Colson, *Tonga Religious Life in the Twentieth Century*, 51.

<sup>63</sup> Colson and Gluckman, *Seven Tribes of Colonial Central Africa*, 156-157.

sporadic. Although some Tonga people interviewed attributed the lack of rain to the destruction of their original sacred groves, the area has always been prone to droughts. Writing in 1938, F. B. Macrae observed that the vegetation in the valley is much more tropical than the rest of the country. While big trees abounded, the area had a great deal of thorn bush and a fair number of euphorbia trees. He further noted that the area “receives about 10 to 12 inches of rainfall during the rain season, while the rest of the country to the north gets anything from 25 inches upwards.”<sup>64</sup>

Despite sporadic rainfall, the Zambezi valley provided the valley Tonga with two farming seasons (one when the rain came and another after the floods). Notwithstanding, these two farming seasons depended on balanced rainfall. Bennett S. Siamwiza, Scudder, and Colson have independently argued that too much or too little rainfall led to severe famines and hunger in the valley.<sup>65</sup>

In addition to unpredictable rainfall, the valley was vulnerable to insects, locusts, and other biota-related illnesses. Chief Simamba’s appeal to ancestors to control insects, locusts, rats, and illnesses, points to this historical phenomenon. Despite these shortfalls,

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<sup>64</sup> Macrae, “Some Notes on Part of the Gwembe Valley in Northern Rhodesia,” 447.

<sup>65</sup> Scudder, *The Ecology Of The Gwembe Tonga*, 15ff; Colson, *Social Organization of the Gwembe Tonga*, 9; Bennett S. Siamwiza, “Famine and Hunger in the History of the Gwembe Valley, Zambia, c. 1850-1958,” in *The Tonga Speaking Peoples of Zambia and Zimbabwe*, ed. Chet Lancaster and Kenneth P. Vickery (New York: University Press of America, 2007), 237-261.

the ecology of the valley provided the Tonga with edible flora and fauna which supplemented their diet in the years of hunger.<sup>66</sup>

Tonga religious beliefs and history seem to point to these existential realities. Apart from the preeminence of the rain-calling rituals, the myth of *Nyami-Nyami* suggests the harsh ecological conditions of valley life.<sup>67</sup> Informants revealed that the snake-like *Nyami-Nyami*, only became visible during the time of starvation. It is believed that the serpentine spirit would slowly move from village to village along the Zambezi valley, exposing its own body and allowing people to cut portions of meat from it. Although the valley Tonga would get as much meat as possible to fulfill their needs, *Nyami-Nyami*'s body would heal instantly. This made it possible for the people to survive the famine that characterized the valley.

Moreover, the observation that during the time of famine, a *muzambi* would eat wild roots prior to the chief, confirms the vulnerability of the Tonga long before the

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<sup>66</sup> Siamwiza argues more than thirty natural foodstuffs such as wild-seeds, grass, roots, tubers, and wild fruits were available. Siamwiza, "Famine and Hunger in the History of the Gwembe Valley," 237-243.

<sup>67</sup> Colson and Scudder have overlooked this myth. According to Scudder's e-mail to this author on Wednesday, February 22, 2006 "there is no evidence that the Gwembe Tonga (who were over 50,000 of the population undergoing resettlement) believed in the spirit snake." He added that Elizabeth Colson and Scudder "did not find any evidence of the myth among the Gwembe Tonga in spite of the fact that Kalanga and other non Tonga on the Zimbabwe side close to Kariba Gorge did. I recall seeing a comic book stating how the Kariba resettlers believed that *Nyami-Nyami* (the spirit snake's name there) would destroy the dam. ...Possibly the Goba, Shona-speakers in Chief Sikongo's area in Zambia, who came from Zimbabwe and have been culturally influenced by the Tonga, had a similar belief, but very few Goba if any were resettled." However, my interviews in the Lusitu revealed that *Nyami-Nyami* has been part of their belief system. Valley chiefs threatened to call on *Nyami-Nyami* to destroy the dam if their demands were not met. Zambia National Broadcasting Services TV documentary, October 21, 2006. One woman claimed to be possessed by *Nyami-Nyami*. Chief Simamba called *Nyami-Nyami* a powerful creature. Interview with the author, Siavonga, Sept 26, 2006. Another informant called *Nyami-Nyami* "*zani mutende*" (come and take; in reference to when the serpent provided its meat to the people). Interview with the author, Siavonga, October, 2006, on Tape.

resettlement. Nevertheless, relocation robbed them of traditional survival skills they had gathered over the ages along the waters of the Zambezi. Whereas starvation in the valley could be attributed to many factors as Lisa Cliggett has rightly demonstrated, the forced resettlement made it even worse.<sup>68</sup>

### **Ecological aspects of Tonga Holy Shrines**

According Michael J. Sheridan and Celia Nyamweru, the supremacy of sacred groves and community beliefs are mutually dependent. Since sacred forests are considered places of memory (*lieux de memoire*), it is a taboo to harvest natural goods from such groves.<sup>69</sup> Doing so is considered an attack on ancestors and other spirits. From this perspective, people are likely to conserve nature out of reverence for spiritual forces resident in nature as opposed to instrumental reasons alone. For this reason, most sacred areas are lightly used as compared to the less sacred ones.<sup>70</sup>

Sheridan and Nyamweru further note that religious beliefs inform social construction of power and shape ecological relationships.<sup>71</sup> “Traditional beliefs governing

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<sup>68</sup> Lisa Cliggett, *Grains From Grass: Aging, Gender, and Famine in Rural Africa* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Elizabeth Colson, “Converts and Tradition: The Impact of Christianity on Valley Tonga Religion,” *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 26, no. 2 (Summer, 1970): 143-156. Available from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3629308>. Accessed: 09/04/2009.

<sup>69</sup>Michael J. Sheridan and Celia Nyamweru, *African Sacred Groves: Ecological Dynamics and Social Change* (Oxford: James Curry, 2008), 6ff.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

access to sacred groves work to maintain orderly ecological, social and moral relationships.”<sup>72</sup> Nonetheless, they contend that historical and religious beliefs may enhance motivation for conservation, but “do not present sufficient motivation by themselves. In countries where there is no alternative source of future income, the temptation to exploit remaining forests is great.”<sup>73</sup>

As already alluded to, the current Simamba *malende* came into existence during the years of crisis caused by perennial drought that led to lower yields in the new land. Unlike the people of Chipepo who moved without their ancestral relics, the people of Simamba moved with their royal symbols and reestablished a new shrine next to their new neighborhood.<sup>74</sup> Aside from multidimensional psychological, physiological, and socio-cultural insults that characterized the resettlement, the current shrines were developed as a security mechanism.<sup>75</sup> Today, however, the new *malende* has become part of their cultural heritage in the new environment.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>74</sup> Colson observes that although the origin of the *lwiindi* as a rain-ritual is unknown, it is likely to be of human origin. Colson, “Rain Shrines of the Plateau Tonga of Northern Rhodesia,” 281. Aside from the Monze shrine, Colson argues, none of the Tonga shrines could have existed prior to 1850. Colson and Gluckman, *Seven Tribes of Colonial Central Africa*, 158.

<sup>75</sup> According to Scudder, forced resettlement usually leads to unforeseen problems and illnesses which might force people into clinging to “old behavior patterns, old institutions and old goals” as the way of securing favor with their ancestors. “Where these appear unsuited to the new habitat, they will either be dropped (perhaps entirely, perhaps temporarily) or altered incrementally.” Thayer Scudder, “The Human Ecology of Big Projects: River Basin Development and Resettlement,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 2 (1973): 51.

Amid the current ecological crisis caused by overexploitation of the new environment, these shrines hold promise for ecological diversity. Sheridan and Nyamweru are right in contending that African sacred groves are not relics of pristine forests as previously held. Rather, they are constructed over a period of time as people place sacredness on them.<sup>76</sup> In the Simamba context for instance, despite being reconstructed in the new environment, the grove has gained spiritual reverence in the neighborhood.

Across the Gwembe valley, disrespect of the sacred shrines is believed to endanger the entire community. Colson reports that it is strictly forbidden for anyone to gather roots or wood in the shrine's vicinity, or to burn the grass without the consent of Earth-priest. Ignoring this sanction is regarded as an insult to the entire community. Even newcomers in the area are expected "to observe the taboos which surround the particular shrine of the place."<sup>77</sup> For this reason, while most of Simamba's area shows signs of degradation due to overpopulation and deforestation, the sacred grove is relatively undisturbed. Therefore, placing sacredness on Earth can inform ecological action and

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<sup>76</sup> The authors denounce the relic theory for a more dynamic paradigm. Sheridan and Nyamweru, *African Sacred Groves*, 1-13.

<sup>77</sup> The Lusitu Tonga of Chief Chipepo have a spiritual explanation for the illness that characterized their immediate resettlement. They argue that the deaths were due to the authority's failure to respect the Goba *malendes* on which they were forcefully resettled. Patrick Makukisi, interview by the author, November 2006, Lusitu, Zambia, tape recording. This belief is in line with Colson's observations that misuse of the *Malende* would "ensure general disaster for the community, unless the offenders were punished and a ritual of cleansing performed. If it is discovered that someone has cut the wood in the immediate vicinity of a shrine he is ordered to pay a black chicken." Colson, "Rain Shrines of the Plateau Tonga of Northern Rhodesia," 275.

sensibility. Nonetheless, amid the ever increasing populations and land shortages in Simamba's area, this sacred grove is threatened.

Sheridan and Nyamweru's contention that sacredness does not necessarily mean conservation stands.<sup>78</sup> Because people's attitudes change over time, overpopulation and unplanned resettlements are threats to sacred groves.<sup>79</sup> Speaking about the sacred grove of Mount Mugabe (not related to President Robert Mugabe), Marthinus Daneel observes that commercial interests and unplanned resettlements desecrated the holy groves around Lake Kyle in Masvingo, Zimbabwe. Although traditional sanctions worked to protect holy groves (*murambatemwa*) and prohibited the cutting of ancestral trees, social and political dynamics such as commercial exploiters and land shortage led to the destruction of such groves, which, he argues, is the "epitome of human hubris in the face of ultimate forces of life."<sup>80</sup> From this perspective, the role of sacred groves in conservation highly depends on the level of sacredness people associate with them.<sup>81</sup> It remains to be seen how long the sanctions against harvesting trees from Simamba's sacred groves will stand in the face of the current land shortages and deforestation in the area.

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<sup>78</sup> Sheridan and Nyamweru, *African Sacred Groves*, 3-6, 29ff.

<sup>79</sup> Marthinus L. Daneel, *African Earthkeepers: Wholistic Interfaith Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 9.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>81</sup> Sheridan and Nyamweru point out that one reason why many sacred groves are left untouched is due to dangerous snakes which reside in such groves. Sheridan and Nyamweru, *African Sacred Groves*, 7, 55, 200. While snakes can deter people from entering sacred forests, it is important to note that snakes are also the manifestation of spirits in sacred groves.

### The Visibility of the Spirit in Nature

Many African cultures believe that God, ancestors and other spirits can manifest in nature. According to Jack Glazier for example, the Mere people of Kenya believe that ancestors reside in sacred forests, caves, water pools and valleys.<sup>82</sup> These spaces play a vital role in different cultic observances.<sup>83</sup> The Chewa of Malawi and Zambia believe that ancestors (*mizimu*) reside in certain trees, graveyards, cooking stones, and rivers. Further, particular animals such as zebras, *kaiingo* (leopard), *mkango* (lion), and certain snakes are considered ancestral avenues through which ancestors visit their former communities and are often recognized by their descendants.<sup>84</sup> This belief represents many other myths found among Africans.

### Manifestation of the Divine in Snakes

The Tonga are not alone in attributing sacredness to serpentine Nyami-Nyami. Among the Dogon of Cameroon, *Lebe* (the Supreme Being) is “represented as the snake in most

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<sup>82</sup> Jack Glazier, “Mbeere Ancestors and the Domestication of Death,” *Man, New Series* 19, no. 1 (Mar., 1984): 133-147. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2803228>. Accessed: 18/12/2008.

<sup>83</sup> In the Holy Land, Amots Dafni explores why Muslims, Christians and Jews tie rags to trees. He concludes that, the Middle East trees are incorporated “into rituals of curing, initiation, marriage and death. Trees used in any of these contexts stand for the divine and represent the sacred belief honored through the ritual.” Amots Dafni, “Why are Rags Tied to the Sacred Trees of the Holy Land?” *Economic Botany* 56, no. 4 (Winter, 2002): 315.

<sup>84</sup> James L. Brain, “Ancestors as Elders in Africa. Further Thoughts,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 43, no. 2 (Apr., 1973): 122-133. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1159324>. Accessed: 18/12/2008.

myths.”<sup>85</sup> Many Bantu cultures attribute creation to a python.<sup>86</sup> Besides, John Mbiti observes that “a considerable number of societies associate snakes with the living-dead or other human spirits and such snakes are given food and drink when they visit people’s homes.”<sup>87</sup> Bembas believe that spirits or *imikishi* of the ancestors take up the form of snakes and inhabit springs, rivers, waterfalls, plains, and large trees.<sup>88</sup> John Hudson, once the district Commissioner in colonial Zambia, wrote about Nyala as a place which “had a melancholy history and did not last long. In 1898 Drysdale noticed a pair of black snakes at the stream which was the source of the station’s water supply. Ignoring the advice of local people, who warned him that the snakes were spirits and that he would die if he harmed them, Drysdale shot one. He died shortly afterwards, possibly of black water. His replacement Miller, also disregarded warning and shot the other snake. He too died within a few days. After this the station was abandoned.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Walter E. A. Van Beek, “Coping with Evil in Two African Societies,” in *Religion in Africa*, ed. Blakely D. Thomas, Walter E.A. van Beek and Dennis L. Thomson (London: James Currey 1994), 209

<sup>86</sup> Luc de Heusch, “Myths and Epic in Central Africa,” in *Religion in Africa*, ed. Blakely D. Thomas, Walter E.A. van Beek and Dennis L Thomson (London: James Currey, 1994), 229-138.

<sup>87</sup> According to Mbiti, “The snake is thought by some ... to be immortal. Others have sacred snakes, especially pythons which may not be killed by people.” Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 51.

<sup>88</sup> W. M. J van Binbergen, “Explorations in the History and Sociology of Territorial Cults in Zambia,” in *Guardians of the Land: Essays on Central African Territorial Cults*, ed. Matthew Schoffeleers (Gwelo: Mambo Press, 1978), 56.

<sup>89</sup> John Hudson, *A Time to Mourn* (Lusaka: Bookworld Publishers, 1999), 72.

Owen J. M. Kalinga equally points to the sacredness of snakes in Malawi. The people of Malawi, Kalinga argues, acknowledged *Mbamba* (lightning) as the Creator of Earth and all its inhabitants.

Since Mbamba was considered to be too remote to be directly involved in the everyday affairs of men, it was possible to approach him through an intermediary spirit who, it was believed, took the physical form of a big snake.... The snake was mostly concerned with health, wealth, and the fertility of the whole land. Indeed, it was believed that if it passed through the foundation of a new cattle shed or near a feeding pasture, cows would produce more milk.... The divine snake was believed to move from place to place, and its movements were detected by the blowing of the wind from one location to another.<sup>90</sup>

Similarly, David Chidester asserts that the Zulus presented ritual sacrifices to snakes because ancestral spirits are believed to revisit Earth and appear to their descendants in the form of certain serpents. Chidester notes this belief led William Holden to conclude that the Zulu were “serpent worshipers.”<sup>91</sup>

In some instances, the Supreme Being and the mother goddess manifest in nature.<sup>92</sup> In her book, *Reinventing Africa: Matriarch, Religion and Culture*, Ifi

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<sup>90</sup> Owen J. M. Kalinga, “Trade, the Kyungus, and the Emergence of the Ngonde Kingdom of Malawi,” *International Journal of African Studies* 12, no.1 (1979): 19.

<sup>91</sup> David Chidester, Robert P. Scharlemann, (eds), *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 128. Among the Shonas, Tonga, and Bembas, ancestors sometimes appeared in forms of wild animals and snakes with messages for their people. See Gumbo Mufurahunzi [Marthinus L. Daneel], *The Guerrilla Snuff* (Harare: Baobab Books), 1995. Thomas D. Blakely, Walter E. A. van Beek and Dennis L. Thomson, (eds), *Religion in Africa: Experience and Expression* (London: James Currey, 1994).

<sup>92</sup> The Luo also hold the python as the divine. Agai Yeir, “Good Luck Python Brings Hope and Joy to Nyanza,” *The Nation*, Nairobi, <http://www.allafrica.com/>, 3/19/2003.

Amadiume argues that the mother goddess Idemili revealed herself in a python. In fact, “it was their all-embracing goddess Idemili who reigns above all deities and the ancestors; she provided an overall administrative system, embracing the organization of periodic markets, the days of the week and the seasonal festivals.”<sup>93</sup> Although the worship of the goddess was banned in the 1940s, the deliberate killing of the holy symbol of the mother goddess *Idemili* (python) or “*Eke Ogba*” is an abomination.<sup>94</sup>

Bons O. Nwabueze, who studied python worship among the Igbo, discovered that the cult is as strong as before. Aside from the mainstream belief that the python is the “defender of the Land” or “the mother goddess,” Nwabueze was advised not to kill the python in the interest of his life and family. He concluded, “Having lived in America for almost twelve years at the time, I thought that our ancestors have all died and so was their idol worshipping. Unfortunately not.”<sup>95</sup>

### **Ecological Implications of the Manifestation of the Divine in Nature**

There is no doubt that the belief in the manifestation of the divine in nature sacralizes God’s creation in people’s understanding. Wande Abimbola, who argues that in traditional Yoruba thought nature is part of the sacred universe, seems to concur with

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<sup>93</sup> Ifi Amadiume, *Reinventing Africa: Matriarch, Religion and Culture* (New York: ZED Books, 1997), 127-131.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 130.

<sup>95</sup> Bons O. Nwabueze, “Our Ancestors and the Oracle they Left Behind,” *Africa Economic Analysis*. Available from, <http://www.africaeconomicanalysis.org/articles/13/1/OUR-ANCESTORS-AND-THE-ORACLE-THEY-LEFT-BEHIND>. Accessed 08/ 17/2009.

this view. In his article, “Ifa: A West African Cosmological System,” Abimbola asserts that Yoruba cosmology is opposed to any unbridled exploitation of nature for material purposes. This is because the Yoruba believe in an ancient covenant of mutual respect between humanity and nature.

While *Olodumare*, the High God, is the origin of every existence, the *orisas* (gods) control daily life in Yoruba cosmology. These *orisas* are believed to turn themselves (after completing their assignment on Earth) into “objects of nature such as trees, rocks, hills, mountains, rivers, lagoons and the ocean.”<sup>96</sup> For this reason, many aspects of nature demand human respect due to their sacred qualities; hence the natural world “must be nurtured and respected rather than seen as nonliving and therefore shamelessly exploited.”<sup>97</sup> Similar to what Placide Tempels observed regarding the Bantu, the Yoruba believe that every object and creature is alive, and participates in upholding the harmony of the universe. The conviction is that “when the four hundred orisa finished their work on Earth, they changed into mountains, hills, trees, and so forth. Others entered the Earth’s crust and disappeared.”<sup>98</sup> For this reason, all nonhumans are personalized “as if they are all human beings.”<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Wande Abimbola, “Ifa: A West African Cosmological System,” in *Religion in Africa: Experience and Expression*, ed. Thomas D. Blakely, Walter E. A. van Beek and Dennis L. Thomson (London: James Currey, 1994), 114.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Abimbola argues that the Orisa are divinities responsible for every aspect of earthly life. Ibid., 104.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 114. The personalization of creation was also evident in St. Francis of Assisi. See John R. H. Moorman, *St. Francis of Assisi* (London: SPCK, 1963), 74-75.

The personification of nonhumans is behind the belief that ancestors and the Supreme Being sometimes make their will known through natural phenomena. Generally, ancestral spirits are believed to be quasi-material and can manifest themselves in natural phenomena or “objects that have no obvious recognizable characteristics belonging to their prior human counterparts. They can reside, for example, in artifacts such as masks or living creatures such as cattle.”<sup>100</sup>

Although Abimbola’s observations reveal the ecological sensitivity of Africans, such beliefs were once viewed as indicative of African backwardness and animism. Yet, the belief that Earth is sacred cannot be limited to human species has biblical support. The biblical God has manifested in natural phenomena; snakes, bushes, clouds, wind, and many more (Exodus 3:1-4; 7:10; Numbers 21:8).

According to J. H. Driberg, however, Africans attribute sacredness to natural phenomena based on the principle of importance.

The river is still a river to be utilized: the sun and rain are still sun and rain. They are of religious importance only because they enshrine those manifestations of the Power-principle which are most significant to the community. Power is most profoundly immanent in them and therefore they are worshipped and offered sacrifices; not because they are themselves divinity, but because of the divine essence which informs them. This class of deifications, therefore, consists rather of identifications or manifestations of Power, one in all its many aspects, than of locally individualised gods.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Lee M. Brown, “Understanding and Ontology in Traditional African Thought,” *African Philosophy* (Feb., 2004): 158.

<sup>101</sup> J. H. Driberg, “The Secular Aspect of Ancestor-Worship in Africa,” *Journal of the Royal African Society* 35, no. 138 (Jan., 1936), 5.

The above positions illustrate how different African cultures understand the relationship between God and nature. While levels of divine involvement differ from society to society, the association of the sacred with nature reveals both the interconnectedness of creation and the African phenomenology of life. In reality, it “is very difficult to differentiate clearly between man and the world, and man and God and God and the world.”<sup>102</sup> Therefore, the materialization of ancestors’ and gods’ nature is an indication of the interconnectedness of the universe to which humanity is a part. To limit this relationship to humans alone is to deny, in a Christian perspective, the sacramental nature of God’s creation.

### **Relating the *Lwiindi* to Anthropological and Theological Literature**

Lee M. Brown observes that central to African traditional thought is the conviction that the intentions of Ancestors can be known.<sup>103</sup> While ancestors do not will evil for their descendants, they can punish them if they go against established morality. The rejection of the ritual beer by chief Simamba’s late uncle pointed to some form of moral lapse among the living. In fact, Chief Simamba’s prayer on behalf of his people pointed to the moral authority of ancestors. As Mutukudzi already illustrated, ancestors

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<sup>102</sup> Nkafu Martin Nkemnkia, *African Vitalogy: A Step Forward in African Thinking* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 1999), 110.

<sup>103</sup> Brown, “Understanding and Ontology in Traditional African Thought,” 158-193.

upheld ethical standards during their lifetime and know the consequences of ignoring them. Therefore, their moral guidance is sought in times of community crisis.

### Are Tongas Ancestor Worshipers?

The absence of God in the *lwiindi* seems to suggest that the Tonga are ancestor worshipers. The time the chief spends in the *ganda*, the sacrifices in the *malende*, the songs and prayers at the grove all point to worship of ancestors. But as already observed, Tonga cosmology holds *Leza* (God) to be the sole giver of rains. Nonetheless, the absence of *Leza* and ultimate importance of *basangu* and the reigning chief in the *lwiindi* illustrate the difficulty that has dominated anthropological and African studies. Although this problem was raised at the beginning of this chapter, it is important to ask “To whom is Oliver Mutukudzi appealing for intervention in the ecological crisis?”

As early as 1936, J. H. Driberg argued that the ancestor cult is purely a secular act. In his article, “The Secular Aspect of Ancestor-Worship in Africa,” Driberg argues that Africans do not generally apply the words, “worship, sacrifice, offerings, and prayer” to the ancestral system. Accepting the fact that it is difficult or even impossible to find English words that will convey the real meaning of the words employed by Africans to the cult, Driberg contends that

For no African “prays” to his dead grandfather any more than he “prays” to his living father. In both cases the words employed are the same: he asks as of right, or he beseeches, or he expostulates with, or he reprimands, or (as the Eastern *Ewe* word epode puts it) he gives an address to his ancestors, as he would to the elders sitting in a conclave: but he never uses in this context the words for “prayer” and “worship” which are

strictly reserved for his religious dealings with the Absolute Power and the divinities. The Latin word *pietas* probably best describes the attitude of Africans to their dead ancestors, as to their living elder.<sup>104</sup>

Almost thirty years later, Meyer Fortes, (one of the leading anthropologists) built on Driberg's argument in his analysis of the Tallensi of the Sudan. Similarly to Driberg, he contended that the cult is an act of mutual *pietas* or obligation between parents and their children.<sup>105</sup> It is expected that children respect their parents not just when they are alive but even when they die. Nonetheless, he departed from Driberg's argument when he observed that the Tallensi differentiate between living elders and ancestors. Maintaining that ancestors occupy a higher position in Tallensi cosmology, Fortes argues that ancestors constitute "the ultimate tribunal and the final authority in the matters of life and death."<sup>106</sup> Hence, they deserve ultimate reverence and worship .

Fortes further argues that the authority of ancestors also depends on the world of the living to be realized. Since only the living kin can make one an ancestor, filial reciprocity between the dead and the living is an ontological requirement. For this very reason, filial piety is instrumental to the cult since "a person becomes an ancestor not

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<sup>104</sup> J. H. Driberg, "The Secular Aspect of Ancestor-Worship in Africa," *Journal of the Royal African Society* 35, no. 138 (Jan., 1936): 6. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/716389>. Accessed: 05/04/2009. Cf. Bolaji E. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (London: SCM Press, 1973), 181-182.

<sup>105</sup> He observed that "kinship and ancestor cult are so prominent in the household and neighborhood arrangements, the economic pursuits, and the routine social relations among the Tallensi." Meyer Fortes, *Pietas in Ancestor Worship: The Henry Myers Lecture* (1960): 166. <http://era.anthropology.ac.uk/Ancestors/fortes1.html>. Accessed 02/06/2009.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 176. To Fortes, the ancestors are the Supreme authority in Africa. But Bolaji Idowu argues that Africans make a distinction between Deity, the divinities, and the ancestors. "Deity and the divinities are distinctly, out and out, of the supersensible world, while the ancestors are of the living persons' kith and kin." Idowu, *African Traditional Religion*, 184.

because he is dead but because he leaves a son, or more accurately, a legitimate filial successor, and he remains an ancestor only so long as his legitimate lineal successors survive.”<sup>107</sup> Just as ancestors are obliged to protect their descendants, the living are obliged to offer sacrifices to their ancestors and to submit to their discipline.

Unlike Fortes who concluded that Africans worship ancestors, Igor Kopytoff reverted to Driberg’s original argument that the ancestor cult should be understood as a cult of “elders living and dead.”<sup>108</sup> Kopytoff followed Driberg in arguing that most Bantu languages do not distinguish between living elders and dead ancestors. In this sense, the authority of elders is the same whether they are dead or alive.<sup>109</sup> Consequently, any argument that seeks to view ancestors as objects of worship (as Fortes did) fails to comprehend the phenomenon of ancestors in Africa. Differently stated, African ancestors are part of the living community of elders who deserve respect from their kin.<sup>110</sup> “If I am

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<sup>107</sup> Fortes argues that all ancestor worshipping cultures believe that ancestorship depends on having sons. “The Tallensi believe that a man who dies sonless has wasted his life, and the Chinese compare such a one to a tree without roots.” Fortes, *Pietas in Ancestor Worship*, 181. In order to confirm his argument that the cult was an extension of mutual obligation, Driberg asserts that without funerary rites, “the dead man cannot take up his proper status.” Driberg, “The Secular Aspect of Ancestor-Worship in Africa,” 10.

<sup>108</sup> Igor Kopytoff, “Ancestors as Elders in Africa.” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 41, no. 2 (Apr., 1971): 133. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1159423> Accessed: 18/12/2008.

<sup>109</sup> Kopytoff, “Ancestors as Elders in Africa,” 134; Cf. Driberg, “The Secular Aspect of Ancestor-Worship in Africa,” 6. However, James L. Brian argues that, although Bantu languages do not have words for ‘ancestor,’ they do have a word for ‘ancestral spirit (*mizimu*). James L. Brian “Ancestors as Elders in Africa. Further Thoughts,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 43, no. 2 (Apr., 1973): 122 – 133. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1159423>. Accessed: 18/12/2008.

<sup>110</sup> Kopytoff maintains that the authority of ancestors is derived from the mystical powers that eldership confers. “An elder’s curse, always implicitly made in the name of the lineage, can only be removed by an older elder-one to whom the previous elder is a junior.” Kopytoff, “Ancestors as Elders in Africa,” 131.

young, I go to my elders who happen to be alive. The old people go to their elders; but since these are dead, they are to be found at the grave or at the cross-roads at night.”<sup>111</sup>

Kopytoff’s argument appears to be evidenced in the *lwiindi* when the two *sikatongos* and women present requests to the chief, who later presents those requests to the *basangu*.

A similar conclusion was independently reached by Jomo Kenyatta, who argued that just as the living elder is respected for his or her seniority and wisdom, s/he, in turn is expected to respect “the seniority of the ancestral spirits.”<sup>112</sup> Thus,

Ancestors are vested with mystical powers and authority. They retain a functional role in the world of the living, specifically in the life of their living kinsmen; indeed, African kin-groups are often described as communities of both the living and the dead. The relation of the ancestors to their living kinsmen has been described as ambivalent, as both punitive and benevolent and sometimes even as capricious. In general, ancestral benevolence is assured through propitiation and sacrifice; neglect is believed to bring about punishment. Ancestors are intimately involved with the welfare of their kin-group but they are not linked in the same way to every member of that group. The linkage is structured through the elders of the kin-group, and the elders' authority is related to their close link to the ancestors. In some sense the elders are the representatives of the ancestors and the mediators between them and the kin-group.<sup>113</sup>

Since African ontology demands that elders protect or discipline their juniors in life, ancestors dispense “both favors and misfortune; they are often accused of being

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 131

<sup>112</sup> Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal life of the Gikuyu* (London: Secker and Arburg, 1938), 255.

<sup>113</sup> Kopytoff argued that “African living elders and dead ancestors are more similar to each other than the Western living and dead can be” and that an African elder's social role does not radically change when one crosses the line dividing the living from the dead.” Thus “African ‘ancestorship’ is but an aspect of the broader phenomenon of ‘elder-ship’” Kopytoff, “Ancestors as Elders in Africa,” 140.

capricious and of failing in their responsibilities, but, at the same time, their actions are related to possible lapses on the part of the living and are seen as legitimately punitive.”<sup>114</sup> Like chief Simamba's address to the ancestors, the living appeal to their ancestors in words that combine “complaints, scolding, sometimes even anger, and at the same time appeals for forgiveness.”<sup>115</sup>

Responding to Kopytoff's critique of his original argument, Meyer Fortes countered that the linking of the authority of ancestors to that of the living elders does not fully address the issue.<sup>116</sup> This is because Africans differentiate between the authority of living and dead elders. They employ the word “elder” in the secular sense and “ancestor” in a ritual sense. In other words, the elders' influence is limited to the secular sphere, while the ancestors' authority is in the spiritual sphere. Thus, ancestral rituals represent the continuous presence of the ancestors among their descendants in a state of existence that “represents a transformation of secular parenthood.”<sup>117</sup> While this argument is plausible, it is already established that in the African worldview the secular and the spiritual spheres are interconnected.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>116</sup> Meyer Fortes, “The Authority of Ancestors,” *Man, New Series* 16, no. 2 (Jun., 1981): 301.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 301-302.

### **Theological Discussion of the Cult of Ancestors**

According to Bolaji Idowu, ancestors are the primary objects of African supplications and are considered “as heads and parts of the families or communities to which they belonged while they were living human beings; for what happened in consequence of the phenomenon called death was only that the family life of this Earth has been extended into the after-life or super sensible world. The ancestors remain, therefore, spiritual superintendents of family affairs and continue to bear their titles of relationship like ‘father’ or ‘mother.’”<sup>118</sup>

While accepting that the difference between the authority of the living elders and ancestors is complex, Idowu argues that the anthropological theory that “ancestor worship is the root of all religions” controlled scholars’ positions on the ancestor cult. Those who argue that Africans worship ancestors seek to prove this theory, while those who favor veneration over worship want to reject it. From a theological standpoint, Idowu argues that the differentiation of veneration from worship seems to ignore the complex nature of the human mind. Worship and veneration, he argues, are psychologically close and the human mind swings between the two depending “on the spiritual climate of the moment.”<sup>119</sup>

Contrary to Idowu who does not favor one position over the other, Gabriel Setiloane agrees with J.H. Driberg and Igor Kopytoff in contending that ancestors are not

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<sup>118</sup> Idowu, *African Traditional Religion*, 184.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

worshipped. “Even after death, ‘the vital participation’ of the deceased is experienced in the community in general and in the home clan circle in particular. What has been described as, ‘the ancestral cult of the Africans,’ refers to this experience in the life of the people.”<sup>120</sup> While accepting the important role ancestors occupy in African cosmology, Setiloane argues that it is misleading to associate ancestors with the Divinity. To him, it is safe to speak of service (*tirelo*) to the ancestors, which he argues is the same service rendered to one’s parents while they are alive. The Tswana speak of fulfilling their duties to *Badimo* (ancestors) and “pray” to *Modimo*.<sup>121</sup>

As the *lwiindi* illustrated, ancestors as elders are a vital link between various vital forces in Bantu cosmology. According to Setiloane, their rank “spans the various levels of being in this life, across the homes and clans in the total community of village and tribe as well as the unseen world of *BoModimo* (Divinity) which is strongly inclined to be identified with the underworld.”<sup>122</sup> For this reason, ancestors are uniquely moral and just; thus, they are guardians of morality.<sup>123</sup>

It is this study’s contention that the authority of ancestors is derived from the religious worldview that informs African cosmologies. Although ancestors rank above the “living elders” in the hierarchy of beings, they are directly connected to the living

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<sup>120</sup> Gabriel M. Setiloane, *African Theology: An Introduction* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1986), 17.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 18

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

elders. Indeed, in an interdependent universe, ancestors and living elders constitute the court of the *vakuru* (elders), whose guidance and wisdom is sought, especially in the time of national crisis. In this regard, the basis for the primacy of the ancestor cult is due to their ontological position in Bantu ontology. As guardians of the land, the *vakuru* (elders and ancestors) are expected to monitor people's actions on Earth.

In regard to the Tonga, the *lwiindi* ceremony does not pronounce one role over the other but multiple or pervasive roles. Like the royal ancestors of Simbamba, they “do not occupy a single ‘position’ in a structural sense but are embodied in a number of different ways in a wide range of activities and material culture. These multiple manifestations suggested a variety of possible identities for ancestors rather than a unified model.”<sup>124</sup>

Placide Tempels is right in arguing that ancestors “occupy so exalted a rank in Bantu thought that they are not regarded as merely ordinary dead. They are no longer named among the *manes*; ancestors are spiritualized beings; beings belonging to a higher hierarchy, participating to a certain degree in the divine Force.”<sup>125</sup> Despite their position, however, the ancestors are not omnipotent and on their own, for example, they cannot

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<sup>124</sup> John C. McCall, “Rethinking Ancestors in Africa,” *Journal of the International African Institute* 65, no. 2 (1995): 258; 264-65. The argument that only those who have lived long and morally upright lives can become ancestors does not pay attention to founding fathers who were mostly community misfits. See Thomas Q. Reefe, “Traditions of Genesis and the Luba Diaspora,” *History in Africa* 4 (1977): 183-206; William Govan Robertson, “Kasembe and the Bemba (Awemba) Nation,” *Journal of the Royal African Society* 3, no. 10 (Jan., 1904): 183-193.

<sup>125</sup> Tempels argues that ancestors, though different from the Supreme Being, are usually confused with God by outsiders. “There is, however, no identification, but a simple comparison, a practice analogous to that in which a Chief's deputy is treated as the Chief himself, since he is his sensory manifestation and his speech is often the word of him who sent him.” Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, 42.

send rain “for the salvation of their tribal heads and lands; the utmost they can do in such an important matter is to intercede with the Great Chief of the spirit world, with whom they are supposed to be as influential as clan-heads are with political superiors. It is the superhuman quality of their power, not its omnipotence that makes it so valuable, and sometimes so dreadful, to their descendants in extremity.”<sup>126</sup>

### **Revisiting some lost Ecological insights in Bantu Traditional Thought**

In 1928, W. C. Willoughby made a very revealing point about the Bantu.

According to him, Africans are not content with a religion that does not address every aspect of life or that seeks to interpret the divine solely in human terms.

The relation of the individual to the family, the clan, and the ethics, law, war, status, social amenities, festivals, all that is good and much that is bad in Bantu life is grounded in Bantu religion. Religion so pervades the life of the people that it regulates their doings and governs their leisure to an extent that it is hard for Europeans to imagine. Materialistic influences from Europe are playing upon Africa at a thousand points and may break up Bantu life; but the Bantu are hardly likely to be secularized, for they will never be content without a religion that is able to touch every phase of life and to interpret the divine in terms of humans.<sup>127</sup>

Willoughby’s observation is right, and those attempting to address the ancestor cult as a secular phenomenon miss the point. Africans understand life ecologically. In this case, African worldviews in which the cult of ancestors and the Supreme Being are

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<sup>126</sup> W. C. Willoughby, *The Soul of the Bantu: A Sympathetic Study of the Magico-Religious Practices and Beliefs of the Bantu Tribes of Africa* (London: Student Christian Movement, 1928), 80.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 1. Cf. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1969.

celebrated and experienced are ecologically significant. Henry Rowley and Marthinus Daneel are among the scholars who have paid close attention to the ecological basis of African traditional religion.

### **Henry Rowley: The Forgotten African Theologian** <sup>128</sup>

Henry Rowley did not spend much time in Africa and his work on Africa is not widely known. As such, he is not acknowledged among the pioneers of African theology. Nonetheless, his conclusions on African religion demand attention. Writing in 1861 about Nyanja/Chewa religions in present day Malawi, Rowley argued that the ancestor and the *Mbona* cult were ecological rituals that should be used as stepping stones for the conversion of Africans to Christianity. <sup>129</sup>

According to Rowley, the Manyanja/Chewa religion had rain-calling at its center. Unlike the Tonga who put emphasis on the ancestors, the Nyanja placed it on *Mpambi* (God). Whereas the chief is the major player among the Tonga, a woman priestess controlled the Nyanja ritual. Thus;

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<sup>128</sup> Henry Rowley came to Malawi in 1861 as part of the Universities Missions to Central Africa under the leadership of Bishop Charles Mackenzie. Henry Rowley, *The Story of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa: from its Commencement, under Bishop Mackenzie, to its withdrawal from Zambesi* (Saunders: Otley and Co. 1867). The death of Mackenzie in 1861 and of many other missionaries led to abandonment of the mission for Zanzibar. Andrew Walls, "The Legacy of David Livingstone," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (July, 1987); Tim Jeal, *Livingstone* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1973); Owen Chadwick, *The Mackenzie's Grave* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1959); David Livingstone and Charles Livingstone, *The Expedition to the Zambesi and Its Tributaries* ([Originally published in 1865] New York: Harper & Bros., 2001).

<sup>129</sup> His conclusions about *Mbona* cult are similar to those of Mathew Schoffeleers in *Guardians of the Land*, and Landeg White, *Magomero, Portrait of an African Village* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

A woman called Mbudzi who acted as priestess entered the hut and offered libation while calling out in a high pitched voice, *Imva Mpambi* (Hear thou, O God). This was done over and over again and after the supplication was over, Mbudzi came out of the hut, fastened the door, sat on the ground, threw herself on her back; all the people followed her example, and while in this position, they clapped their hands and repeated their supplications for several minutes. This over, they stood up, clapped hands again, bowing themselves to the earth repeatedly ... then they danced like mad things --Then all the women rushed forward with calabashes in their hands and dipping them into the jar threw water into the air with loud cries and wild gesticulation. And so the ceremony ended.<sup>130</sup>

One hundred and twenty six years later, Landeg White reproduces this account without mentioning Rowley:

Chigunda assembled his people outside the stockade ... and entered the enclosure surrounding the prayer hut... His sister Mbudzi went into the hut carrying a pot of pombe and a basket of flour. While she poured out the flour and the beer, she prayed in a high-pitched voice: *Imva Mpambi* Listen Mpambi *Adza Mvula*. Send us rain. – When the sacrifice was complete, Mbudzi fastened the door and lay down on the ground for several minutes, repeating the prayers and clapping. Then the whole village stood up, clapping, and the women danced around Chigunda where he sat. A jar of water was brought and placed before him. Mbudzi washed her arms and face and water was poured over her. Then all women dipped their calabashes in the jar and threw water in the air.<sup>131</sup>

Whereas Rowley interpreted this rain-calling ceremony as indicative of the ecological role of African religion, White links it to the 1915 Chilembwe uprising (in which Africans stood up to oppose colonial rule in Nyasaland and today's Malawi). Thus,

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<sup>130</sup> Rowley, *The Story of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa*, 227.

<sup>131</sup> White, *Magomero*, 53.

by this ceremony, “Chigunda’s people were reclaiming their village. They believed - that the English would depart before very long.”<sup>132</sup>

During our discussion on the *lwiindi*, a case was made for eco-socio-political overtones of the rain calling ceremony. The Nyanja, like the Tonga of Simamba, hold land as a “public symbol” that defined their social identity and linked them to past and future generations. As Abraham Rosman and Paula G. Rubel argue, in situations “where land symbolizes the continuity of the social group from mythical times to the present, the land could not be sold for money without destroying the identity of the group itself.”<sup>133</sup>

It is not surprising that John Chilembwe attributed the 1915 uprisings to the fact that “Europeans had cruelly robbed Africans of their motherland.”<sup>134</sup> It is on this assumption that White seems to base his analysis of the rain-calling ritual. Nonetheless, White fails to realize that the 1861 conditions under which the first missionaries settled at Magomero were totally different from those of John Chilembwe’s Nyasaland. Missionaries considered themselves as strangers who needed local support for their existence. In fact, David Livingstone and Bishop Mackenzie were considered as

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Abraham Rosman and Paula G. Rubel, *The Tapestry of Culture: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (New York, Random House, 1985), 149-53.

<sup>134</sup> D.D. Phiri, *Malawian to Remember John Chilembwe* (Lilongwe: Longman, 1976), 75; see also Robert I. Rotberg (ed), *Strike a Blow and Die;” A Narrative of race Relations in Colonial Africa by George S. Mwase* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

liberators and defenders of the Nyanja from the warlike *cultures*.<sup>135</sup> To a greater extent, the presence of the missionaries provided much needed security in Nyasaland. This partially explains why missionaries were highly respected among Chigunda's people.<sup>136</sup>

In addition, White ignores the cordial relationship that existed between Africans and missionaries in his analysis of the rain-calling ritual. To start with, Rowley himself argues that Africans would only allow an outsider who has won their trust to observe their rain-calling ceremony. In this regard, Rowley's presence was indicative of their trust. Secondly, both David Livingstone and Rowley respectively argue that this ceremony was called because of the drought that had affected the land long before the arrival of the missionaries. It is for this reason that Rowley notes that after the ceremony, it rained for a while and then became dry again.<sup>137</sup> In short, this ritual was held to call back the rain, which was vital to an African ethic of abundant life, and to Bantu religion as a whole. Like the *Mwari* cult of the Shona, the *Mbona* cult of the Chewa, the *Makumba* cult of the Ushi and the *Iwiindi* of the Tonga, among many others, this ritual sought to address the ecological harmony of the land through rain-calling.

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<sup>135</sup> Bishop Charles Mackenzie liberated more than 400 slaves, and many of them made Magomero their village. Chigunda accepted missionaries in his village to shield himself from the war-like Chewas or Yaos. See Harvey Goodwin, *Memoir of Bishop Mackenzie* (Cambridge: Bell and Co., 1864), 325.

<sup>136</sup> According to Goodwin, even when the missionaries sought peace with the Chewa people, the Chewa responded "We do not want to have anything to do with the English; they help the Nyanjas against us." Goodwin, *Memoir of Bishop Mackenzie*, 340-342. White's analysis also ignores the fact, that "when Burrup, one of the missionaries died, the Nyanja accorded him a royal funeral and fired guns as they did when their chiefs died" Rowley, *The Story of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa*, 113,243; Goodwin *Memoir of Bishop Mackenzie*, 393-94; Livingstone and Livingstone, *The Expedition to the Zambesi*, 270.

<sup>137</sup> Rowley, *The Story of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa*, 227.

On a different front, Rowley's analysis of the African religion was more positive than most missionaries of his time. Aside from arguing that African religion is earthly and ecologically based, he argued that Africans had "a system of religion, a regular philosophy from which they think no problem in life is too hard."<sup>138</sup> This philosophy is behind all customs, traditions and rituals.<sup>139</sup> Although Rowley did not identify the philosophical basis of this religion, Placides Tempels identified it as the "vital force."

Rowley did not just address the rain-calling ritual but also the African concept of God, ancestors, land ownership, community, rites of passage and divination. In terms of political organization, he argued that African traditional government was a form of theocracy. The *Rundo* was the supreme chief but he was not the supreme authority in the affairs of the country. Rather, a "certain Spirit – whether some great departed chief or not, did not clearly appear – whom they call *Bona* [*Mbona*] was supposed to have an abode on top of the mountain called *Choro*. [*M*]bona is responsible for the fertility of the land and was the sole dispenser of peace and plenty as well as the wise counsel."<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 229. Rowley used the word "philosophy" when speaking about the religion of the Nyanja people of Lake Malawi. While Placide Tempels and John Mbiti could have benefitted from Rowley's observations, his works are still to find room in African theology.

<sup>139</sup> According to Rowley, Africans simply point to the customs of their country. "The idea which gave life to their customs...has been forgotten...If at all they had any reason, this reason has been forgotten and the people are totally ignorant of it." Ibid., 229-230.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 224.

Accordingly, *Mbona* “was said to have a physical presence but no one could say they had seen him or heard him.”<sup>141</sup>

Like *Nyami-Nyami* of the Tonga, *Mbona* abides in the pool on the sacred mountain. However, his instructions are made through a woman medium, who is officially the spirit’s wife. This woman mediates between the people and *Mbona*. For instance, whenever the chief wanted advice, he or his deputies would go to the mountain while blowing horns and shouting to alert *Mbona*’s wife of their presence. “She then retired to the seclusion of her hut, heard without seeing those who came to her, sought and found [*M*]bona in sleep, received from him, in this condition, that which he wished her to make known, and when [she woke up, she] declared to the expectant people the message which [*M*]bona had given her to deliver.”<sup>142</sup>

On the cult of ancestors, he argues that the Chewa and Nyanja of Lake Malawi did not believe death was the end of life, for they had a firm belief in the existence of *Msimi (muzimu)* “the spirits, or more properly ‘shadows’ of men after death; and they even thought that the spirit of some of their chiefs possessed the power of hearing their

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 224. Rowley’s doubt about *Mbona*’s nature is similar to that of Schoffeleers. At one point, Schoffeleers argues that *Mbona* is “the divinized human being” while on others, he sees him as a spirit. Christopher Wrigley, however, observes that *Mbona* was the name of the priestess, “whose husband as in many other rain-shrines in the region, was a snake – sometimes the python (*nsato*), sometimes the mythical serpent called *Thunga*. It follows that ...*Mbona* must have had serpentine form. And so he did, entering his priestess wife as a python, before emerging as a storm wind to possess his medium.” Christopher Wrigley, “The River-God and the Historians: Myth in the Shire Valley and Elsewhere,” *The Journal of African History* 29, no.3 1988: 368-372. Rowley’s argument that *Mbona* is unknown, however, should be understood from his argument that the cult should be used as the stepping stone for Christianizing Africa. Like modern African theologians, probably Rowley could not reconcile how a snake deity can become a symbol of God.

<sup>142</sup> Rowley, *The Story of the Universities’ Mission to Central Africa*, 224.

prayers and granting their requests, and it frequently happened that when they did not immediately get what they had supplicated *Mpambi* [God] for, they would pray to the spirit of these chiefs.”<sup>143</sup>

In what appears to be addressing the African concept of time, Rowley argues that the African religious worldview does not have any eschatology as Christianity teaches. “Whatever their idea of duty or laws was, they did not believe in any future punishment for violation of duty, or the breaking of law; neither did they expect a reward for a faithful observance of both. The only rewards and punishments they believed in were of Earth, Earthy.”<sup>144</sup> The earthy aspect of African religion has made it communalistic rather than individualistic. “Their religious belief did not influence them as individuals; no man, for instance, thought of praying to God alone. If God were supplicated, it was by all, for the benefit of all; to receive common advantages, protection, or favor, or escape from disaster. Their terror of death was great, and in order to preserve life they resorted to innumerable follies, but it did not occur to them to commit themselves individually to Divine protection.”<sup>145</sup>

As already observed, Africans looked to family ancestors for individual protections and to God and the royal spirits (*basangu*) for community protection.

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 229. In his analysis, Rowley seems to suggest that the ancestors were above *Mpambi*, which is contrary to what we observed concerning African religions where the ancestors (*basangu*) are consulted first before calling on God.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 229.

Africans were astonished when missionaries prayed to God individually rather than as a community of the living and the dead.

In regard to the Land, Rowley argues that

No individual can possess a freehold. The separate possession of individuals is secured to them only so as they occupy; no one can transfer land to another. The chief has power of allowing the alienation of land, but the common rights of the community restrain him; without the common consent he could not dispose of any part of his territory. There is no limit to the extent of land a man may occupy, but he must cultivate what he holds, for cultivation alone makes property. If a man gave up a parcel of ground upon which he had bestowed much labor, he receives no compensation; as the representative of the community, the land reverted to the chief, in whom alone the power of disposal rested. But a man going away from the ground he had tilled could sell the crops upon it, and as they ripened the purchaser was allowed to gather them. The petty chiefs derived but little profit from their position. – He [chief] supported himself, his wives, and his families, by the produce of his garden.<sup>146</sup>

Rowley's comment on the chiefs' authority seems to contradict Kwame Bediako's perspective on the religious roots of authoritarian political leadership in post-colonial Africa.<sup>147</sup> Bediako attributes abuse of power in Africa to the cult of ancestors, but dictatorship was abhorred in most African ecological states.<sup>148</sup> When leadership became selfish, authoritarian or ignored its moral obligations to the God and ancestors, community leaders would depose, and in extreme cases assassinate the guilty leaders to

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>147</sup> Kwame Bediako, *African Christianity: Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 239-242.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid. 244-246. Discussing the ethics of Power in Africa, John Pobee argues for service and moral accountability to the ruled as the essence of power. Power should promote harmony. John Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 146-149

ensure the continuation of the society.<sup>149</sup> In addition, unlike in modern Africa where leadership is associated with riches, maximum profit, and corruption, in the traditional worldviews, some chiefs profited very little from their position.

Indeed, Rowley deserves a special place in the history of African theology and ethics. Arguably, he is among the first missionaries to urge that African customs and traditions provide the groundwork upon “which to build the Christian common faith, a sure and better way of making them Christians than totally ignoring all they know as useless, superstitious, and everlastingly preaching to them.”<sup>150</sup> Likewise, his study of the *Mbona* cult, ancestors, land, the rain-calling ceremony, communal aspects of prayer, and the authority of the political leaders in traditional Africa provide the groundwork for developing ecological and political ethics in Africa today.

### **Marthinus L. Daneel: The *Mwari* Cult**

In his book, *The God of the Matopo Hills*, Marthinus Daneel argues that the Shona deity *Mwari* is the source of creation, including our ancestors.<sup>151</sup> Like *Mbona* and *Leza*, *Mwari*'s concern is with the entire tribe rather than individuals. Similarly, *Mwari*'s presence is usually felt in times of crisis and it has political and moral sanctions in Shona

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<sup>149</sup> Bujo makes a similar argument. Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), 113.

<sup>150</sup> Rowley, *The Story of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa*, 226.

<sup>151</sup> Marthinus L. Daneel, *The God of the Matopo Hills an Essay on the Mwari Cult in Rhodesia* (The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1970).

cosmology.<sup>152</sup> As with the case of *Mbona*, a woman communicates *Mwari*'s will at Matonjeni, in the Matopo hills.

While the origin of the word *Mwari* is still unknown, many scholars have found a clear link to the *Muali* of Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, a point Daneel also advocates.<sup>153</sup> Like *Mbona*, *Mwari* is understood as the God of fertility and is associated with rain and manifests in rain and thunder.<sup>154</sup> Daneel further observes that *Mwari* (like *Mpande*) is directly supplicated for rain at the annual rain-calling ritual.<sup>155</sup>

Concerning the gender of *Mwari*, he argues that, "*Mwari* is both male and female. The term *Dziva*, *Mbuya* (grandmother) and *Zendere* (the young woman who is regarded as *Mwari*'s emanation), represent the female aspect of this ambivalent deity; the male is revealed in *Sororenzhou* (head of the Elephant, and as such Father), *Nyadenga* (Possessor of the sky) and *Wakumusoro* (the one above)."<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>153</sup> According to Shoko, the cult of *Mwari* was responsible for rainmaking. Originally established at Great Zimbabwe before moving to Matonjeni, the voice of *Mwari* spoke through natural phenomena like animals, trees, and grass. Food was mysteriously served by spiritual beings. Shoko, *Karanga Indigenous Religion in Zimbabwe*, 38.

<sup>154</sup> In his *Karanga Indigenous Religion in Zimbabwe: Health and Wellbeing*, Tabona Shoko follows Daneel's Understanding of the cult. Tabona Shoko, *Karanga Indigenous Religion in Zimbabwe: Health and Wellbeing* (Burlington, V.T: Ashgate, 2007), 38.

<sup>155</sup> Although *Mwari* is associated with royal ancestors, Daneel argues that "*Mwari* is not a deified ancestor." Rather *Mwari* is above the ancestors and ancestors are accountable to *Mwari*. Daneel, *God of the Matopo Hills*, 18.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 16.

From this perspective, Daneel argues that *Mwari* is not an “abstract power, void of anthropomorphic attributes.”<sup>157</sup> Certain attributes such as *musiki* (creator), *musikavanhu* (creator of humanity), and *muvumbapasi* (founder of the land) show that *Mwari* is a transcendent and immanent deity. In short, there exists no demarcation between *Mwari* and creation.<sup>158</sup>

On the question of ancestors, Daneel argues that the Shona have senior tribal ancestors (*mhondoro*) and family ancestors (*mizimu*). The High God is

accessible to man only through the mediation of the senior tribal ancestors (*mhondoro*), or through his messengers who came from afar to the Matopo shrines to hear *Mwari*'s pronouncements about the community of man. To the individual, who in everyday life had to depend on his family ancestors for his well being, this God of fertility was the transcendent being who spoke at far off Matonjeni; or who...manifested Himself in vivid lightning, driving clouds and shooting stars. Private prayers were directed to family ancestors (*mizimu yapamusha*) and these judged whether they could give direct solace or whether such petitions should be forwarded to senior tribal ancestors and ultimately to *Mwari*.<sup>159</sup>

Daneel argues that *Mwari* and the ancestor manifest in nature.<sup>160</sup> Karl Mauch, whom Daneel quotes, observed that during the rain-making ritual a black cow was

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 18. According to Tempels, Bantu have two types of ancestors: the clan ancestors and tribe ancestors. Among these, the clan ancestors possess extraordinary force. The “spirit of the first ancestors, highly exalted in the supernatural world possesses extraordinary force in as much as they are the founders of the human force and propagators of the divine inheritance of vital human strength. The other dead are esteemed only to an extent to which they increase and perpetuate their vital force in their progeny.” Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, 31.

<sup>160</sup> Daneel, *God of the Matopo Hills*, 24; 60.

offered to *Mwari* and two other beasts were slaughtered, one for the people and the other for the wild animals. The latter was left in the bush “near the Temple and if signs of scavengers could be found at a later stage, it was believed that *Mwari* and senior tribal spirits had accepted the offerings.”<sup>161</sup>

While Daneel situates the origin of the *Mwari* cult in the vicinity of Lake Tanganyika, the cult has many similarities with the *Mbona* cult of Malawi and warrants further investigation. Since one tradition associates the cult’s origin with the place called Guruuswa, which is north of the Zambezi, it is possible that the two cults were originally related.<sup>162</sup> Whereas the relation between these cults is beyond the scope of this study, attention should be paid to the following similarities. To start with, both cults are territorial and therefore ecological in their outlook. In some instances, these cults have possessed political and moral power in socio-political life of their communities. For instance, Daneel shows how the *Mwari* cult directed the war of liberation (*chimurenga*) in Zimbabwe. *Mwari* is also consulted on various eco-social and political issues.<sup>163</sup>

In Malawi, Matthew Schoffeleers argues that during colonial days, *Mbona* was considered as the African Christ and took the political and liberative role. After

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<sup>161</sup> Cited in Daneel, *God of the Matopo Hills*, 22.

<sup>162</sup> Shoko, *Karanga Indigenous Religion in Zimbabwe*, 38.

<sup>163</sup> Schoffeleers’ concludes that the “cults are by nature political since they are the religious representation of what are basically and primarily territorial and political groups, and because the boundaries between religion and politics are notoriously difficult to demarcate.” Schoffeleers, *Guardians of the Land*, 10. His observation about territorial cults applies to the *lwiindi* of Simamba and other Tongas of the Gwembe Valley. The enactments of traditional conflicts between the *Sikatongo* and Simamba are indicative of this religio-political interplay in the history of the Tonga people.

independence, however, *Mbona* became the guardian of the land and by the late 1970, *Mbona* assumed the political role as a voice of the suffering masses.<sup>164</sup> In this case, appealing to the High-Gods and ancestors during an ongoing ecological crisis is within the perimeters of their influence.

Correspondingly, both have female mediums and are associated with rain-calling. In post-colonial Africa, these two cults have assumed a critical role in standing up for the needs of the poor. Additionally, both deities are associated with both genders; *Mwari* and *Mbona* are male and female.<sup>165</sup> While *Mbona* has a wife, Daneel does not consider the possibility of *Mwari* having a wife. Yet this is implied by his observation that “Dlembewu, the first Rozvi Mambo (King), was the son of chief Nembire’s granddaughter, who some believed to have been impregnated by *Mwari*.” Even the oral sources that Daneel interviewed considered *Mwari* as “a human being with a son.”<sup>166</sup> Could it be that *Mwari*’s voice at Matonjeni was once his ritual wife?

The *lwiindi*, *Mbona* and *Mwari* cults illustrate the ecological emphasis of African religions. These cults celebrate the sacred interconnectedness of creation and hold the cosmos as the center of divine activities. They also illustrate the religious aspect of land as a commons. For Africans, Earth is our home; hence destroying Earth is spitting into the well from which we drink. Whereas the Western Christian worldview sees death as

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<sup>164</sup> Schoffeleers, *Guardians of the Land*, 147-78; Wrigley “The River God and the Historians,” 368.

<sup>165</sup> Wrigley, “The River God and the Historians,” 368.

<sup>166</sup> Daneel, *God of the Matopo Hills*, 22.

escape from this fallen world to the heavenly city, in African religion, Earth is our sacred home in life and death.

### **Christian Perspectives: Preliminary presentation**

Christian theologian Daniel Maguire warns that a theology that denies Earth as our home “might do more harm than opiate the social conscience with hope for the sweet by and by. It can make our Earth-life the prologue, not the text and context of our being. It can de-territorialize our identity. It can make us strangers in this paradise, and estrangement is the gateway to enmity. If we have a claim on afterlife, and the plants and the animals do not, we are not kith and kin, nor do we share their perils. Earth as prolegomenon and Earth as destiny are the ultimate in divergent worldviews and ethics.”<sup>167</sup>

If there is anything that the *lwiindi* illustrated, it is the belief that ancestors are resident with us on Earth and depend on the produce of Earth for their continual existence. To destroy Earth is to destroy our life force. For an African therefore, there is no after-life without Earth.

Unlike the biblical view which places the underworld as the world of torment and suffering, the African underworld is home to ancestors, the place to which all people aspire. Although the underworld is the most feared for its moral sanctions, it is also the

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<sup>167</sup> Daniel Maguire, “More People: Less Earth,” In *Ethics for a Small Planet*, ed. D. Maguire and L. Rasmussen (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), 44.

world from which life and blessings flow. As the Muzambi and *Sikatongo* pointed out above, protection for the living flows from the world of ancestors and God. Since what happens to this world affects the underworld, those in the underworld have the duty to defend Earth from human abuse.

Any African Christology or theological ethic that utilizes the paradigm of ancestor ought to take the ecological role of ancestors into consideration. Oliver Mutukuzi's appeal to the ancestors/elders to intervene in the ecological crisis of Zimbabwe is an excellent example of the role of ancestors in primal imaginations. In times of crisis, Africans seek the directions of ancestors/elders, since their insights "reflect the ancestors' experiences; they give wisdom and life. Whoever lives in accordance with ancestral ethics chooses life. To reject them means death, that is, the destruction of one's own life and that of the clan, both in their visible and invisible dimensions."<sup>168</sup>

Questions of land, fertility, water, and other ecological issues are matters of ancestral concerns. To treat the cult of ancestors as merely addressing social, religious and political issues is ignoring the ecological significance of the cult in African religions. As the discussion on the *lwiindi* revealed, most researchers who have discussed the ancestor cult paid little attention to ecological elements present in the cult. Nonetheless, one can go further and say that the ancestor cult is the cult of Earth since it seeks to

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<sup>168</sup> Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 27.

uphold the ecological balance of the Earth Community. To associate Jesus with our ancestors is to invite the ecological Christ into people's earthly experiences.

The eco-political implications of the ancestor cult deserve further investigations. Jesus our ancestor is, by default, the guardian of the land *par-excellence*. Mutukudzi's appeal to elders to intervene in the ecological crisis can therefore be equally directed to Jesus in Africa. Equally important, Africans will adequately relate to Jesus who assures them of abundant life within their life worlds. That most Africans depend on the land for their daily needs invites an ecological face of Jesus in Africa today. Among the Tonga of Simamba for example, Jesus should become the *sikatongo*, the charismatic rain caller, who intercedes with Leza and the *Basangu* spirit on behalf of God's people. These Christian themes and perceptions will be explored in depth in the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER THREE  
UNDERSTANDING MORALITY

**Christian and African Traditional Perspectives**

In chapter two, we observed that African ontology of God, Spirits, humanity, animals, plants, and the nonliving has something in common with the Christian doctrine of creation. In both religions, each ontological category has intrinsic value to be protected and defended. This is even more so when we realize that to destroy one is to break the harmony of the universe and therefore to invite the wrath of the Creator God. For this reason, although colonialism negatively impacted African morality, many people remained faithful to the moral codes of their ancestors while practicing the codes of the new order, a trend that has continued to this day. As is the case among the Tonga, Bantu ontology places emphasis on spirits, ancestors (*basangu*), and God. These spiritual forces are the most dreaded and their sanctions cannot be violated without severe consequences.

African moral order is basically ontologically interconnected; hence, it is hard to differentiate between social and religious norms. Thus, African ethics is at once philosophical, social, and religious. Accordingly, Ogbu Kalu argues that the goal of African morality “was the preservation of a religious moral order. Likewise, religious rituals were instruments of preserving social order.”<sup>1</sup> In African worldviews, spiritual

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<sup>1</sup> Ogbu U. Kalu, “Religion and Social Control in Igboland,” in *Religious Plurality in Africa: Essays in Honor of John Mbiti*, ed. Olupona K. Jacob and Sulayman S. Nyang (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1993), 115.

beings police human actions while tradition “supplies the moral code and indicates what people must do to live ethically.”<sup>2</sup>

Laurenti Magesa concurs that “African Religion’s conception of morality is steeped in tradition; it comes from and flows from God into the ancestors of the people. God is seen as the Great Ancestor, the first Founder and Progenitor, the Giver of life, the Power beyond everything that is. God is the first Initiator of a people’s way of life, its tradition. However, the ancestors...are the custodians of this tradition.”<sup>3</sup> Magesa further notes that ancestors often ““intrude” into the life of humanity with specific intentions on their own or through the agency of the spirits. The spirits are active beings who are either disincarnate human persons or powers residing in natural phenomena such as trees, rocks, rivers, or lakes.”<sup>4</sup> To Magesa, God, ancestors and sprits are active “moral agents.”<sup>5</sup> Hence, while the “living dead” have ethical obligations to their descendants, it is conditional on the premise that people meet the ancestral moral codes.

Indeed, the Bantu moral conscience promotes recognition of the harmony and interaction of forces, and respecting them. Along these lines, the utilization of natural goods has ethical implications. As Placide Tempels observed, the Bantu “have a notion of what we may call immanent justice, which they would translate to mean that to violate

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 35.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 35-36.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 36.

nature incurs her vengeance and that misfortune springs from her. They know that he who does not respect the laws of nature becomes ... a person whose inmost being is pregnant with misfortune .... This ethical conscience of theirs is at once philosophical, moral and juridical.”<sup>6</sup>

Consequently, among the Bantu, an individual exists in a web of active ecological relationships. An individual member of any given community is obliged to honor the life of that society. While it has been argued that such obligations were limited to one’s community, Tempels contends that it extended to other cultures as well. However hostile intertribal relations may be, it is forbidden to kill an outsider without reason since “the diminution and destruction of an outsider’s life involves the disturbance of the ontological order and will be visited upon him who disturbs it.”<sup>7</sup>

The Bantu also have a notion that obligations increase with the vital rank, experience and knowledge. It is one thing for a young person to fell a sacred tree and it is another for an adult to do the same. For this reason, elders, chiefs, and kings are considered custodians of the moral order. These humans are regarded as living symbols of moral authority, but they are never above the ancestors and the Supreme Being. If anything, one is always reminded that nobody can deceive the “living dead.”

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<sup>6</sup> Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, [translated from *La philosophie bantoue* 1945 by A. Rubbens] (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1952), 88. This point explains the norm of hospitality towards strangers which made it possible for strangers, missionaries, and colonists to settle in Africa. Among the Shona of Zimbabwe, the *Ngozi* (avenging spirit) of a foreigner is highly feared. See Marthinus Daneel, *Zionism and Faith Healing in Rhodesia* (The Hague: Morton, 1970). Also James Pfeiffer, “African independent Churches in Mozambique: Healing the Afflictions of Inequality,” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 16, no.2 (2002): 176-199.

<sup>7</sup> Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, 88.

### **The African Heritage and the Ethics of Interconnectedness**

According to Amina Mama, human identities and communities influence ethical predispositions. As a result, norms and values are culturally conditioned and are “informed by our identifications with particular communities and the values they uphold.”<sup>8</sup> For example, African moral values are usually expressed in proverbs, rituals, myths, oral literature, folktales, songs, customs, and other cultural symbols. The Bembas say that *umukulu apusa kabwe tapusa cebo* (elders can miss a blow; never a word). This proverb implies the wisdom and spiritual influence of elders in society. As Ogbu Kalu observes, “age is crucial to African social relations because with age, wisdom, proximity to land of the spirits, and closer contact with the ancestors go together.”<sup>9</sup>

But as Benezet Bujo argues, “duty” for Africans includes reciprocal obligations:

The duties of children towards parents, and the connected obligations towards the ancestors, constitute a major part of African morality. The good life depends not only on the ancestors, but also on the degree of esteem which a person shows for parents and the clan elders. – When old people are no longer able to make an active contribution to the life of the group, they are still life-givers in the sense that they have wisdom and experience to hand over to their successors. As in the Old Testament and so in Africa: the welfare of their children, and their enjoyment of family possessions, depend on their obedience to the elders and on their willingness to profit from their experience.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Amina Mama, “Is it Ethical to Study Africa? Preliminary Thoughts on Scholarship and Freedom,” *African Studies Review* 50, no. 1 (April 2007): 6.

<sup>9</sup> Ogbu Kalu U., “Religion and Social Control in Igboland,” 115.

<sup>10</sup> Benezet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1992), 34.

As already observed, the *telos* of African morality is abundant life or “fullness of life.” Since life is central to African morality, any act that promotes life is good while that which destroys it is evil.

Africans understand that abundant life depends on how humanity relates with nonhuman beings. A person with *ubuntu* cannot mistreat nonhumans or destroy Earth. Yet, despite the ecological biasness of African ethics, some Western theologians and African philosophers alike have too often concluded that African ethics is anthropocentric. To them, human wellbeing constitutes abundant life.

However, African life cannot be understood without its eco-relational dimension. Neither can life be conceived without addressing the role of God and ancestors in the land. Benezet Bujo seems to imply this idea. To him, African ethics is fundamentally theo-centric; thus, “it is highly questionable...whether this [anthropocentric] approach does justice to what is essential to African ethics. Indeed, it is hardly conceivable that the African, whose thinking is always set in a religious context, could have a morality without God. Though the human person stands in the center of African morals, the position of God is distinctly emphasized, since as creator he has to intervene in the moral order if the human person does not follow the laws set up by him.”<sup>11</sup>

In *African Theology in its Social Context*, Bujo adds that “God is not far from the African world; all relationships, between person and person, living and dead and between

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<sup>11</sup> Benezet Bujo, *The Ethical Dimension of Community: The African Model and the Dialogue between North and South*, Translated from the German by Cecilia Namulondo (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998), 23.

persons and nature, are rooted in God and point towards God and towards the end of all things in God....Every person's future lies with God... for the African, God cannot be imagined without God's creation, nor without God's saving will for humankind."<sup>12</sup>

William R. O'Neill also notes that "the ideal of abundant life serves as a rich, polyvalent symbol in traditional moral wisdom, integrating what in the West have emerged as discrete cognitive, moral, and expressive modes of knowing.... African moral wisdom is irreducibly religious."<sup>13</sup>

The above observations are vital in understanding the theo-centric foundation of African morality. As observed in previous chapters, African ontology views God as the source of morality, but ancestors, spirits, and elders are the guardians of ethics. For this reason, these vital forces are feared more than government law enforcement officers.

Across Africa, living elders are the visible authority figures in society. Although chiefs and elders are expected to guide the living in making right moral choices, the ancestors and the *basangu* (whose sphere of knowledge is far superior to that of chiefs and living elders) are the just judges of human conduct. Unlike human elders who can easily err, ancestors are all-knowing, and therefore above human corruption. They hold the living accountable and expect them to abide by the set moral codes, thus "ancestralship primarily implies moral activity."<sup>14</sup> As the *Lwiindi* illustrated, natural

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<sup>12</sup> Benezet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 32.

<sup>13</sup> William R. O'Neill, S.J., "African Moral Theology," *Theological Studies* 62 (2001):127.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

epidemics are due to the fact that “the higher forces are disturbed: God, the ancestors, the dead; in short, the whole order of beings has been provoked.”<sup>15</sup>

This religious understanding directs the morality of abundant life. To confirm this ontological reality, Africans trace creation to God, the Supreme Being, and the origin of ancestors and life as a whole. In this regard, while an anthropocentric ontology is highly promoted in African theology, the theo-centric focus should be advocated as the true representation of African ontology. It is expected that human involvement in creation would follow the example of a caring Creator and ancestors.

Africans used animals and other natural goods, but cruelty to animals was generally discouraged. Even wild animals experienced some community protection. Only edible animals were killed, and hunting for pleasure was unheard of. This is because Africans believed that animals were creatures of God or simply *children of God* with rights to life. Among the Tonga of the Gwembe for example, domestic animals are named after their dead relatives. Apart from the spiritual significance of such naming, the act shows how Africans relate to the natural world.

Africans experience abundant life in interdependent community relationships. Due to this community emphasis, African ethics has been declared “deeply anthropocentric,” an assertion many theologians and philosophers have supported. Mageza cites Charles Nyamiti as arguing that African religion is “centered mainly on man’s life in this world, with the consequences that religion is chiefly functional, or a

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<sup>15</sup> Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, 98.

means to serve people to acquire earthly goods (life, health, fecundity, wealth, power and the like) and to maintain social cohesion and order.”<sup>16</sup> Magesa adds, all creation is “intended to serve and enhance the life force of the human person and society.”<sup>17</sup>

There is no doubt that humanity (including the living and the yet to be born) is the beneficiary of God’s love. Yet Africans understand that although Earth was given to founding ancestors as a gift, it was conditional on how humanity relates to other vital forces in creation. This is because Earth belongs to God, who is the Supreme ontological guardian of creation. Mbiti puts this in context when he argues that “God is the Originator and Sustainer of man; the spirits explain the destiny of man; man is the center of this ontology; the animals, plants and natural phenomena and other objects constitute the environment in which humanity lives, provides a means of existence and if need be, humanity established a mystical relationship with them.”<sup>18</sup>

Although Mbiti argues that humanity is at the center of this ontology, in African cosmologies humanity is connected to other vital forces because the center depends on other forces to hold itself together. In this regard, humanity is at the center; but, as John Mbiti observes, African “anthropocentric ontology is a complete unity or solidarity which nothing can break up or destroy. To destroy one of these categories is to destroy the whole existence including the destruction of the Creator, which is impossible. One mode

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<sup>16</sup> Cited in Magesa, *African Religion*, 51.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 16.

of existence presupposes all the others, and a balance must be maintained so that these modes neither drift too far apart from one another nor get too close to one another.”<sup>19</sup>

From the above analysis, it seems the conclusion that African ethics is deeply anthropocentric was reached too quickly and without paying attention to the concept of interconnectedness on which African ontology rests. One of the many factors that led to this conclusion could be the anthropocentric ideologies that informed African theology in its early days. Indeed, in the Western worldview human beings were, and to some extent still are, at the center of the universe; human beings have become the focal point of life and ethical analysis. In a Latin American context, Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff warns that it is time that humanity rejected this understanding because “ecology requires that we humans advance beyond our anthropocentric viewpoint, which is deeply embedded in Western culture and continually reaffirmed by a certain type of interpretation of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. We believe ourselves to be the focal point of everything. We see all other beings as existing for our purposes, and all creatures as finding their meaning and praising God through human beings, at the mercy of human beings, to be dominated and where convenient to be used.”<sup>20</sup>

Africans, however, know that not all creatures are at the mercy of humanity; some creatures are said to be above humans in that they represent God, ancestors, and spirits in

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>20</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 1995), 85.

the cosmos. In some cases, some animals are clan totems, and thus deeply integrated with the people they represent.

In the African ontology of interconnectedness, human actions have community consequences. Whereas in Western ethics emphasis is placed on individual actions, rights and obligations, African ethics emphasizes the consequences and rewards of individual actions on a wider community. That which benefits the community is favored over that which favors an individual. For instance, if a person has wrongly killed another person, the entire clan is guilty of murder.

As I will discuss in following chapters, an individual has a duty to transmit community life from one generation to another. Particularly, in chapter five I argue that, in this view, every person is expected to get married and have many children. While Bemba proverbs like *mayo mpapa naine nkakupa* (my mother takes care of me today and I will take care of her in future) and *kolwe akula asabilwa nabana* (when a monkey grows old, it is the young ones who take care of it) point to the instrumental value of children, the need for vital transmission of community life is definitely at the core. Since African morality puts emphasis on promoting community life, then infertility, impotency and same-sex marriages are viewed as evil. According to O'Neill, the process of procreation is an "intergenerational transmission of ... the vital forces uniting those living with the ancestors (remembered dead) and those yet to be born reflect the inseparability of the Spiritual and the natural domains."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> O'Neill, "African Moral Theology," 127.

Since African life is “collective,” possessing *ubuntu* means upholding community values and norms. A good person builds community life while the evil person destroys it. It is for this reason that African morality does not work to promote individualism. Questions of population growth, economic justice, social development, corruption, and poverty should also be addressed from this collectivist perspective.

### **Ecological Ethical Themes in African Theology**

Ecological issues are not widely addressed in African theology, yet African theology possesses several ecological themes that can inform Christian ecological awareness.

#### Land as Common Trust

Throughout Africa, land is regarded as a public trust that belongs to the community of the past, present, and future generations. The living have access to the land but it is the duty of the living dead to safeguard the interests of future generations. When Africans refer to ancestors as guardians of the land, they are pointing to the role of the “living-dead” in ensuring the rights of future generations to the land. Although this subject will be explored in detail later, it is important to note that the theme of land as an ancestral trust is imperative in developing African ecological ethics.

*Vital Force: The Spirit that Holds the Universe Together*

Placide Tempels's theory of vital force can inform African ecological ethics. Despite the criticisms that Tempels's theory has received from scholars like Mbiti, Africanists have not discussed African theology, philosophy, or ethics without referring to the concept of vital force.

As already observed in chapter one, Tempels argues that the Supreme Being is the vital force-self. Through creation, however, God shared this vital force with all creatures. Thus, the vital force connects creation to a web of dynamic and intricate relationships. Nkafu Martin Nkemnkia's book, *African Vitalogy*, illustrates this notion. The author follows Tempels in arguing that African life is centered on the notion of vital force, which he argues is the principle of life. This vital force is expressed in relationships with God, the ancestors, others, and the natural world. For this reason, Africans do not accept the theory that things happen without a cause. One should look for answers in this world before resigning one's fate to God. Only afterwards can Africans accept that "God has given and God has taken."<sup>22</sup>

Africans value community, but they also recognize that communities are linked to individuals and other forces. As Nkemnkia concludes, "the African community is that entity which gives account of everything and everyone. The African being is not being-in-oneself but a being-with-everyone. This is African vitalogy."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Nkafu Martin Nkemnkia, *African Vitalogy: A step Forward in African Thinking* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1999), 117

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 121.

Tempels expressed this “African vitality” when he observed that in the Western world, children or descendants may exist apart from their parents or ancestors and still have the right to their support. Among the Bantu, by contrast,

the very existence of children apart from their progenitors is inconceivable. They are unable to have force except through their relationship with their parents, for they have a right to it only in dependence upon their elders. To say that ancestors or parents have a duty of vital strengthening can be understood only as an intrinsic duty, an ontological duty to preserve the clan, a duty towards that force which is superior to them. . . . In his vital action on behalf of his dependants, the ancestor or the elder is strengthening himself in a line of numerous descendants.”<sup>24</sup>

Unfortunately, this understanding does not pay attention to non-human vital forces. Humanity does not constitute the entire vitality since God, spirits, ancestors, and other beings are equally vital forces.

### *Creation Myths*

The creation of Earth is a religious given among Africans. Humans, animals, and the entire Earth community are creatures of God. That is what they were meant to be and always will be. God created the founders of the clan who, behaving according to God’s laws, founded the tribes. Belonging to the tribe implies participating in the vital force of the ancestors. Those who live a long life possess, in greater intensity, the reality of the vital force. Africans believe that humanity and nonhumans share the same elements that constitute the material world. It is from this perspective that *Earth* is called the mother of

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<sup>24</sup> Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, 99-100.

all living beings. While some scholars argue that humanity is the highest form of all living beings and that all other creatures find their meaningful existence in the human world, “humanity finds meaningful existence in a spiritual dimension through his relationship with others, the world and with God.”<sup>25</sup> To this effect, Africa has many creation myths that illustrate the origin and interdependence of creation.

According to a Sudanese Bassa myth of creation, for example, God created the world and all creatures including humanity. At that time there were no animosities between humanity and animals; humans and nonhumans lived in peace. Unlike other myths that blame animals for death, the Bassa attribute death to human disobedience. The ever working and watching Supreme Being *Lolomb* had warned humanity to resist sleeping. That humanity chose to fall asleep is the reason death came into this world. This led to hostility between humans and the rest of creation.

The Bassa are not the only culture that views animals as closely related to humanity. The Chewa people of Malawi have a myth of *Kaphiri-Ntiwa*. According to this myth, human beings, animals, and God lived together in harmony until one person “invented fire and set the grass ablaze. The animals fled in terror and God too escaped into the sky, leaving humans alone with their disastrous power and knowledge.”<sup>26</sup>

The Lozi of Zambia attribute death to human arrogance towards other creatures. In a fashion similar to that of St. Francis of Assisi in distant Europe, the Lozi argue that

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>26</sup> Christopher Wringley, “The River-God and the Historians: Myth in the Shire Valley and Elsewhere,” *The Journal of African History* 29, no. 3 (1988): 378-379.

humanity and other creatures were meant to exist as a family. The failure to abide with the family principle forced God out of *Earth* and brought about death. According to the myth, *Nyambe* created *Earth* and all its creatures. Unfortunately, one creature called *Kamonu* (human being) imitated God, forged iron spears and killed an antelope. *Nyambe* was very annoyed with *Kamonu* for killing his own brother. *Nyambe* forgave *Kamonu* but *Kamonu* did not repent. Armed with his spears, he killed a buffalo and other animals. *Nyambe* was very upset and sent misfortune on Earth and then retired to the sky. To date, the Lozi believe that it is evil to kill certain animals and birds.<sup>27</sup>

Closely related to such myths is the belief in totems which we shall address fully in the following chapter. Through totems, Africans remind each other of their deep relationship with nature. They are also ontological reminders of the presence of ancestors among the living.<sup>28</sup>

### *Sacred Spaces*

As discussed in chapter two, the sacred spaces (*malende*) can inform ecological consciousness and action. G. Parrinder observes that Shona sacred groves

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<sup>27</sup> G. Parrinder, *Religion in Africa* (London: Penguin Books, 1969), 32. Also in John Kaoma, "God, Humanity and Nature: Reflecting on the Relational Approach," *Listening Journal of Religion and Culture* vol. 35, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 233. "Kuomboka," Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) documentary. February 2000. The documentary called the Lozi people traditional environmentalists.

<sup>28</sup> Kalu argues that among the Igbo, tabooed acts were an offense to Earth and Divinity alike. Since life depends on Mother Earth, the Earth Goddess is given great prominence. Thus "offenders would propitiate the Earth Goddess, and the cost of the propitiatory rituals could serve as deterrence. While totems relate more to myths of origin and ancestral symbolism, taboos are used by the Igbo to restrict individuals; taboos and cleansing rituals are religious, because they under-prop a religious worldview." Kalu, "Religion and Social Control in Igboland," 119.

(*murambatemwa*) are refuge space for every creature. The Zimbabwe ruins, he argues, are “uncanny and sacred places. It is said that if one tries to break a twig from a tree, it cries out ‘do not break me.’ No living creature may be killed there, and if an animal is pursued into the ruins it calls out, ‘do not kill me.’”<sup>29</sup> In the *malende*, animals and trees have natural rights to be protected. It follows that humanity, ancestors, and the Supreme Being must enforce these natural rights in time and space.

These ecological ethical themes and beliefs, which reinforce the understanding that God cares for all creatures, not just human creatures, further suggest that African myths relate to biblical perspectives (see the creation story in Genesis 1, God’s covenant with all creation in Genesis 9, and so forth) and can inform Christian ecological ethics.

### **African Concept of Time: John Mbiti**

John Mbiti is held as the voice behind the thesis that Africans conceive time differently but other scholars struggled with the African notion of time long before he did. Arguably, Edward E. Evans-Pritchard was one of the first European scholars to realize that Africans reckoned time differently. In his work *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People*, published in 1940, Evans-Pritchard argued that the Nuer notion of time could be divided into two: “ecological time,” which had more to do with the rhythm of nature; and “structured

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<sup>29</sup> Parinder, *Religion in Africa*, 59.

time,” which had to do with human or age-related developments.<sup>30</sup> Ecological activities constitute days, the months, and years; birth, marriage, death, and other rites of passage constitute life time. In his analysis, he concluded that Africans understand time differently; this is the very point John Mbiti explored later.

According to John Mbiti, African time is event-oriented. That which has not happened, or “what has no likelihood of an immediate occurrence falls in the category of no-time. What is certain to occur, or what falls within the rhythm of natural phenomena is the category of *inevitable* or *potential time*.”<sup>31</sup>

Unlike Evans-Pritchard, Mbiti asserts that African time is two-dimensional: “a long past (*zamani*), a present (*sasa*) and virtually no future. The linear concept of time in Western thought with an indefinite past, present and infinite future, is practically foreign to African thinking. The future is virtually absent because events which lie in it have not taken place, they have not been realized and cannot, therefore constitute time. If, however, future events are certain to occur or if they fall within the inevitable rhythm of nature, they at best constitute only *potential time*, not *actual time*.”<sup>32</sup>

Mbiti nonetheless agreed with Evans-Pritchard on the aspect of natural phenomena. “People expect the years to come and go, in an endless rhythm like that of day and night, and like the waning and waxing of the moon. Each year comes and goes,

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<sup>30</sup> Newell S. Booth, Jr. argues that prior to Mbiti’s discussion of the concept of Time, Edward E. Evans-Pritchard and Paul Bohannan had already pointed out some of what Mbiti observed. Newell S. Booth, Jr, “Time and African Beliefs,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* VII, Fasc. 2 (1975): 85-87.

<sup>31</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 17.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

adding to the time dimension of the past. Endless time or eternity for them is something that lies only in the region of the past.”<sup>33</sup>

To Mbiti, African time moves backward rather than forward, and people emphasize events that are happening, or that have happened, rather than those that will or might happen in the future. Thus, Africans have “little or no active interest in events that lie in the future beyond, at most, two years from now; and the languages concerned lack words by which such events can be conceived or expressed.”<sup>34</sup>

Since the future does not constitute actual time, Mbiti argues, Africans consider only a relatively short future, which is part of the present (*sasa*). The *sasa* is the “now period,” and has the sense of immediacy, nearness, and newness. It is the period of present concern, since the *sasa* is at the center of human existence. What lies beyond the *sasa* cannot exist, as it is beyond actualization. “*Sasa* is the time in which people are conscious of their existence, and within which they project themselves both into the short future and mainly into the past (*zamani*).”<sup>35</sup>

*Sasa* events should have occurred, are about to occur, or are in the process of occurring. The *sasa* is the most meaningful period since it carries personal recollection of

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 17-19. Newell S., Booth, Jr. compliments Mbiti’s findings about the Kikamba language. The Kiluba of southern Democratic Republic of Congo are similar to the Akamba. Quoting H.W. Beckett’s *Handbook of Kiluba* of 1951, he notes that the Kiluba tenses belong to three times groups: the present, near from present and further from present. The Kiluba “pay careful attention to the past and present, but are much more vaguely interested in the future....The further tense practically exists only in the past, and ...is rarely found in connection with future time.” Ibid., 81.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 22.

life events. For this reason, before an event enters the *zamani*, it must be actualized in the *sasa* period. Thus, the “*zamani* is the period beyond which nothing can go. *Zamani* is the graveyard of time, the period of termination, and the dimension in which everything finds its halting point. It is the final storehouse of all phenomena and events, the ocean of time in which everything becomes absorbed into a reality that is neither after nor before.”<sup>36</sup>

As the period of conscious living, the *sasa* binds individuals and the environment together. Nevertheless, it is the *zamani* which provides the sense of security to the *sasa* through myths, customs, and rituals. In ecological terms, it is the *zamani* that binds creation into the web of life.

Mbiti further argues that the African concept of history moves backwards and there is no expectation of a “golden age” in the future. “People look more to the past for the orientation of their being than to anything that might yet come into human history. For them, history does not move towards any goal yet in the future: rather it points to the roots of their existence, such as the origin of the world, the creation of man, the formation of their customs and traditions, and the coming into being of their whole structure of society.”<sup>37</sup> To Mbiti, the notion of a “messianic age” as expressed in some African cultures is due to the influence of Christianity and Judaism.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>37</sup>John S. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background: A Study of the Encounter between New Testament Theology and African Traditional Concepts* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 24. Unlike in *African Philosophy*, Mbiti limits himself to the study of his own people, the Akamba this study.

Mbiti contends that the concepts of civilization, development and progress are foreign to Africans. He argues that “African peoples have no ‘belief in progress,’ the idea that the development of human activities and achievements move from a low to a higher degree. The people neither plan for the distant future nor ‘build castles in the air.’ The center of human thought and activities is the *Zamani*, since for them there is no ‘World to come,’ such as found in Judaism and Christianity.”<sup>38</sup>

### **Revisiting African Concept of Time**

With the advent of ecological consciousness and spirituality, Mbiti’s observations on time deserve critical examination. If Africans lack a sense of the future, an ethical rationale for human responsibility toward future generations can be elaborated or defended with great difficulty.

Mbiti did not also address why most Africans consider the living dead as those who have gone ahead. Although Africans appear to emphasize the past (*zamani*), all customs and norms associated with rites of passage are future-oriented. Missing one stage compromises one’s future life. Death, in particular, is a future event through which one enters into the *zamani*.<sup>39</sup> So, because we live in time, death does not end time; rather, it moves time beyond the grave. In African cosmologies, for somebody to be born, grow,

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<sup>38</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 23.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

marry, have children, die in old age, and become an ancestor, future-oriented rites must be performed.

The duty of those who have gone ahead (dead) is to ensure the future security of their descendants. Among the Bemba, for example, the dead are said to have gone *kuntanshi* (ahead) as opposed to *kunuma* (backwards). This notion is also found among the Shona and the Tonga.

Africans may put emphasis on the past (tradition) but that does not demote them to futureless peoples. Undeniably, Africans do not have an eschatology that moves humanity from this Earth, due to their Earth-affirming religions. But to suggest that they do not plan for the future is an overstatement. Similarly, some African cultures may lack “expressions [that] convey the idea of a distant future,”<sup>40</sup> but they plan for the future.

In the same way, it is misleading to argue that Africans do not believe in progress as Mbiti did. The pyramids in Egypt, the *n’gombe Ilede* ruins, the great Zimbabwe ruins, and many other historical ruins throughout Africa suggest that Africans believed in progress and planned for the distant future—as a time past the grave or a time from where ancestors guided their descendants in the present.<sup>41</sup> In addition, one of the major reasons why Africans opposed the selling of land was based on the belief that it belonged to

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<sup>40</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 17. In eschatological terms, Mbiti’s argument is to the point. Africans do not expect a golden age in the future, nor do they await one. The golden age is in the past, when people observed the traditions of the elders without the corruption of Western civilization.

<sup>41</sup> According to the MaKomati Foundation, Southern Africa shows some evidence of a lost civilization, based on some 20,000 stone structures or historical ruins which constitute “the largest continuous stone settlement ever built on Earth as it stretches over thousands of [miles] from South Africa all the way to Kenya and beyond.” <http://www.makomati.com>. Accessed 12/12/2008.

future generations resident in the ancestors. That the rights of unborn generations to land were considered suggests that Africans had a strong sense of the future.

Dominique Zahan concurs with the above argument when he argues that Africans conceive time in relation to future generations. Giving an example of human succession to illustrate how Africans understand the past, present, and future, he maintains,

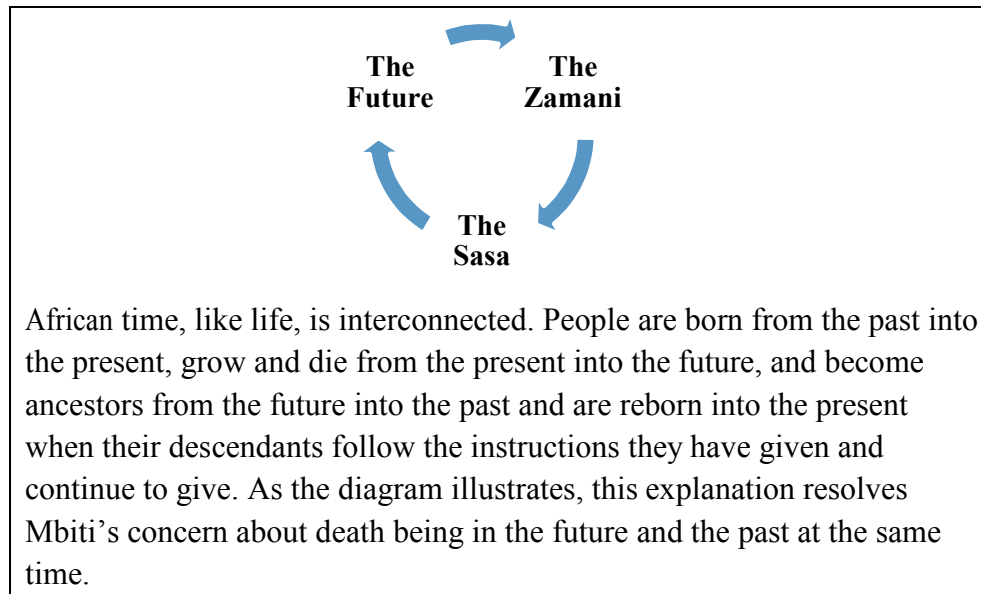
Contrary to what we might expect, a succession of individuals linked by ties of birth appears on the ideal axis of time facing the future and past. The human being goes backward in time: he is oriented towards the world of ancestors, toward those who no longer belong to the world of the living, while he turns his back on what is to come, the future. Future and past are thus determined in relation to the two major sides of the human body, the back and the front. Between them, the flanks, containing the ribs, are analogous to the present, connecting the two extremes.<sup>42</sup>

Although Mbiti's futureless notion of time is contradicted by Zahan's observations, they both failed to recognize that the African concept of time is circular and not linear. Due to the interconnectedness of "periods" of time, or moments in time, Africans experience the future in the circle of life. To a great extent, African cosmologies follow this circular pattern. There is no future without the past, and no past without the future, in the African notion of time.<sup>43</sup> Events take place in the circle of time and space as illustrated below.

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<sup>42</sup>Dominique Zahan, *The Religion, Spirituality, and Thought of Traditional Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 45.

<sup>43</sup> Benezet Bujo links John Mbiti's concept of time to the cult of ancestors. While agreeing with Mbiti that Africans look to the past for salvation, Bujo notes that it is the past planted in the present and the future. The fullness of life is available only to persons who look to their ancestors for directions and inspiration. Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 23-32.



### The Ecological Implication of Time

How people understand and conceive time is imperative to developing ecological ethics and actions. For instance, a futureless community cannot engage in conservation of natural goods. The same can be said about an ethic of replenishing *Earth*.

African theologians are right in contesting that African traditional thought pays more attention to the past, but it is a past that plants and is planted in the future. The *zamani* cannot exist without the future and vice versa. For this reason, just as the *zamani* overlaps with the *sasa*, it also transcends it into the future. By implication, “it is not time that moves into the past, but events....Time as such, does not run anywhere.”<sup>44</sup> In this way, the *zamani* is the *telos* of events.

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<sup>44</sup> Newell S. Booth, Jr., “Time and Change in African Traditional Thought.” *Journal of Religion in Africa* VII, fasc. 2 (1975): 84.

Africans fear death, but they also accept it as an entry into future life. In other words, death does not necessarily break life. The dead are not dead; they continue to exist in, and influence the circle of time and space. By dying, one enters a spiritual world and therefore, has the power to influence the activities of this circle of life. As alluded to in previous chapters and fully discussed in chapter four, the cults of ancestors and high gods spring from the belief that spiritual beings can alter the future.<sup>45</sup>

In addition, time in African worldviews is linked to abundant life in future. The dead are buried according to the traditions so that they can direct future events and life. It is to this reality that even Mbiti points when he speaks of the ancestors and unborn (future generations) as part of the present (*sasa*) human community. The living depend on Earth, but equally so do the dead and the unborn. Thus, how Earth is cared for is of great concern to the ancestors and Supreme Being.

Furthermore, since Mbiti's analysis of time was based on the Western concept of time, it ignored the place of God, Spirits, ancestors, and creation in time. Africans did not emphasize the future because it is in the hands of these spiritual forces. It was not that Africans did not worry about the future. Rather, the future was and is simply in their hands since it depends on how they behave today towards the world of ancestors. As we shall see in chapter five, the role of ancestors in African time and space has implications for population control.

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<sup>45</sup> Oliver A. Onwubiko, *African Thought, Religion and Culture* (Enugu: SNAAP Press, 1991), 90.

In addition, the prominence of diviners in African cultures also suggests the future orientation of African time. Diviners have the powers to transcend time and space, a point both Mbiti and Zahan overlooked. Among the Tonga and in other African cultures, diviners, like ancestors, have some power to know the mind of the *zamani* and the future alike: as Bemba say, *ebaishiba ifya kuntanshi* (they are the ones who know the future). It is here that the interconnectedness of African spirits and ancestors becomes important. If diviners can communicate with the ancestors, it follows that they can migrate into the *zamani*. Likewise, if they have the power to read the mind of ancestors, they can migrate into the future. In this case, human life is a journey in time and space; any attempt to break this journey jeopardizes one's future.

Booth attributes the separation of periods into past, present, and future to an abstract conception of time, which he rightly argues is foreign to Africans.

Actually, the whole distinction of "stages" due to an abstract notion of "time" as an entity is alien to African thought. There are not "times" but "events." These are completed and "perfect," or still developing and thus incomplete or "imperfect." If one wished, one might say that these incomplete events are in all three "times": past, present and future. The "past" of an incomplete event is quite different from the "past" of a completed event; it may have less in common with completed past than it has with the "present" and the "future." The distant past or the [*zamani*] period is not simply past in a linear sense; it transcends our distinction of past, present and future and provides the basis for a timeless communal life.<sup>46</sup>

Being human therefore means having limited knowledge of timeless communal life, as illustrated by the Bemba saying, *bashiba uko wafuma tabeshiba uko uleya* (we

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<sup>46</sup> Booth, Jr., "Time and Change in African Traditional Thought," 92.

know where we are coming from but we do not know where we are going). In Mbiti's terms, we can understand the *sasa* but not the *zamani*. This does not mean that the future is absent; rather, it is the future that the *sasa* can alter, based on its relationship with the *zamani*. Again, this understanding has critical implications for ecological action.

### **The Interconnectedness of Morality and Traditional Religion**

Since the time of Plato, philosophers have grappled with his Euthyphro dilemma: "Is what is ethical commanded by gods because it is moral, or is it moral because it is commanded by God?"<sup>47</sup> Although Plato had wrestled with this dilemma, it is mainly the promotion of Christian norms that led Enlightenment era thinkers to question the relationship between religion and morality.<sup>48</sup>

While gods played an important moral role in Plato's world, the Enlightenment belief that humanity has a capacity to make right choices reduced the power of religion in morality. In addition to aiding separation of the sacred from the secular, the Enlightenment era led people to contemplate a moral society without religion.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Plato's Euthyphro dilemma sought to answer the question "Is the pious (*τὸ ὅσιον*) loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods?" This dilemma has continued to present a problem for ethicists of all persuasions. To Euthyphro, what is moral is what is loved by the gods. Socrates, however, contends that since gods may disagree among themselves, morality is not always commanded by gods. See Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates*. Reprinted and Translated, and with an introduction by Hugh Tredennick (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 20ff.

<sup>48</sup> Writing in 1896, Otto Pflieger concluded that "religion and the ethical ideal, so far from being in conflict, stands in as close a relationship to each other as underlying reality and appearance, as root and tree." Otto Pflieger, "Is Morality without Religion Possible and Desirable?" *The Philosophical Review* 5, no. 5 (Sept., 1896): 451.

<sup>49</sup> During modern times, truth was purely rational; knowledge was objective and tradition denounced as primitive and superstitious. As a sad result, nature was viewed as a resource to be exploited

W. W. Bartley questions the extent to which morality and religion may be interdependent.<sup>50</sup> While accepting the fact that religion influences morality, Bartley argues that in certain moral issues, “no directive of a religious character is available. So that, even if we are to accept that one ought to do what God wills, one would still have to ascertain by moral reasoning independent of religious teaching what to do with those situations concerning which God had not spoken.”<sup>51</sup> Bartley’s observations suggest that in certain situations, reason and other social forces should be appealed to when making moral decisions.

Just as the Euthyphro dilemma was revisited during the Enlightenment, the assumption that African morality and religion were one and the same has come under scrutiny from African scholars. From social scientific and philosophical perspectives, some scholars have rejected an argument that African traditional religion is the basis of African morality. Since the separation between the sacred and the secular is not easy to establish, however, African scholars have difficulties in making a compelling case against the interconnectedness of African morality and religion.

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for human development. Progress and technological expansion became the goal of human development. Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Nashville: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996). See also Gabriel C. Rochelle, “Aphophatic Preaching and the Post modern Mind,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (2006): 397-419.

<sup>50</sup> W.W. Bartley, III, “The Reduction of Morality to Religion,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 67, no. 20, Sixty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division (Oct.22, 1970): 756.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 764.

The fact that African society is interconnected implies that any action has both social and religious bearings. As a result, many Africanists contend that African communities are religiously biased. As John Mbiti stated at the very opening of his noted book, *African Religions and Philosophy*, “Africans are notoriously religious.”<sup>52</sup> The “notoriousness” of African religiosity is that religion touches all aspects of life.

Consequently, one of the obstacles to defining African religion is that in African traditional life, “religion is an ontological phenomenon; it pertains to the question of existence or being.”<sup>53</sup> To Mbiti, a person is immersed into religious participation even before birth; hence everything is understood religiously. Laurenti Magesa adds that in Africa, “religion is far more than ‘a believing way of life’ or life itself, where a distinction or separation is not made between religion and other areas of human existence. If one is to speak of ‘revelation’ or ‘inspiration,’ it is not to be found in a book, not even in the people’s oral tradition, but in their lives.”<sup>54</sup> Thus, to speak about African Christian ethics is to accept the community in which life is experienced as normative for ethical behavior. In this regard, African ethics is fully embedded in culture, and to address African ethics is to speak more about African cultures than written texts.

Arguably, those who question the religious bias of African morality do so from an Enlightenment influenced individualist perspective. For example, when studying Western

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<sup>52</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>54</sup> Magesa, *African Religion*, 25.

ethics, specific individuals' or philosophers' thoughts are used to determine what is right and wrong. But, while African ethics can be said to be philosophical and theological, its collective nature places it in community. So, when studying African ethics one would point to community rather than specific individuals. In fact, the closest one would go is to attribute ethics to a particular culture. Additionally, Western ethics places emphasis on written literature. But African ethics is an oral tradition and further, is situated in community rather than in individual conduct.

While the separation between morality and religion is well pronounced in the West, this is not the case in African societies. Many scholars have found this to be the case when studying African cultures. In his work on the Nyakyusa of Tanzania, Godfrey Wilson argues that African morality and religion are one and the same. Having defined morality as "a right custom that is sanctioned by religion," Wilson maintains that African religion constitutes African morality. Among the Nyakyusa, he asserts, the cult of ancestors, the belief in witchcraft, and the use of medicines are three areas that control religion and morality.<sup>55</sup>

Although Wilson advocates the interdependence of religion and morality among the Nyakyusa, he nevertheless distinguishes between morality and social ideals. Unlike morality which is a religiously sanctioned custom, he argues, customs or values and manners are sanctioned by public approval, social institutions, and, loosely, by religion.

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<sup>55</sup> L. K. Grillo argues that among the Dogon of Mali, divination is the way of deciding what a person ought to do. See Robin W. Lovin and Frank E. Reynolds (eds), "Ethical Naturalism and Indigenous Cultures," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 20 (Fall 1992): 267-413.

However, even when certain customs are not religiously sanctioned, they usually have religious bearings. To Wilson, social values of generosity, hospitality, courtesy, affability, respect of seniors, and the care for the old, the sick, and the crippled carry spiritual sanctions. Any person who falls short of these ideals is guilty of sin.<sup>56</sup>

Wilson further asserts that Africans understand sin as a breach of a rule of morality. “Whenever a man or his wife, child, or beast falls sick or dies, when his crops fail, or his cows go dry, he usually goes at once to diviners (*ondagosi*) to confess all his remembered sins and to find out whether any of them is responsible for the misfortune or not.”<sup>57</sup> This is because the Nyakyusa believe that ancestors can punish people for trespassing social customs. From this perspective, Wilson maintains that any attempt to separate morality from religion among the Nyakyusa is for academic purposes only, since these divisions “are undistinguishable in life. There is at times, however, a conflict between them; and in any case to understand how they unite in life we must first see them each distinctly.”<sup>58</sup>

### **Non-Religious Basis of African Ethics**

The above analysis has led many non-theological scholars into accusing African theologians of forcing religion on morality. Kwame Gyekye, and J.N Kudadjie are

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<sup>56</sup> According to Wilson, “Custom is not only sanctioned by religion but also by public esteem and disapproval.” Godfrey Wilson, “An African Morality,” *Africa: Journal of the International Institute* 9, no.1 (Jan., 1936): 75- 76.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

representative of the many African voices that advocate society as the source of morality. In his book, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*, Gyekye argues that in Akan thought, the “right is not that which is commanded by God or any supreme being; what is right is not that which is pleasing to a spiritual being or in accordance with the will of such a being.”<sup>59</sup> Rather, the good is “decreed ... by human beings within the framework of their experiences in living in society.”<sup>60</sup>

Fundamental to his argument is his contention that “within the framework of Akan social and humanistic ethics, what is morally good is generally that which promotes social welfare, solidarity, and harmony in human relationships. Moral value in Akan system is determined in terms of its consequences for mankind and society. Good is thus used of actions that promote human interest. The good is identical with the welfare of society, which is expected to include the welfare of the individual.”<sup>61</sup> Likewise, “the evil is that which is considered detrimental to the well-being of humanity and society.”<sup>62</sup> Although he cites traditional proverbs that point to the divine origin of Akan ethics, Gyekye maintains that morality is “not determined by spiritual beings but by human beings.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*, Revised Ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 131.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 132-133.

Furthermore, he argues that moral taboos should be explained by reference to their social functions. Certain acts are prohibited not because they trespass the authority of supernatural beings but because of their undesirable consequences on human society. Therefore, the Akan hold morality to be logically independent of supernatural powers.

Ironically, Gyekye observes that in communal societies, the network of complex relationships such as parents, “heads of lineage” and “clan founders” powerfully influence the moral behavior of the individual.<sup>64</sup> Probably, Gyekye chose to employ the phrase “heads of lineages” as opposed to ancestors to avoid addressing the supernatural origin of African ethics.

Similarly, in his article, “Does Religion Determine Morality in African Societies?,” J.N Kudadjie argues that morality among the Akan can be traced to the community rather than to gods. He contends that while religion plays a vital role in African morality, ethical values do not stem from religion since not all norms are said to be religious. To him, the ethics of community solidarity and sharing (that Wilson associated with religion) have to do with customs and traditions. Thus, the “claim that morality in African societies is wholly dependent on religion is, therefore, unacceptable.”<sup>65</sup>

Kudadjie is careful to employ the phrase “wholly dependent on religion” in his argument. Like Gyekye, he argues that religion is among the many factors (such as

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 136-143.

<sup>65</sup>J.N. Kudadjie, “Does Religion Determine Morality in African Societies? A View Point,” in *Religion in a Pluralistic Society*, ed. John S. Pobee (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), 67.

customs, tradition, socialization, social structures, conscience, and the influence of climate) that influence morality. These factors consciously or unconsciously inform ethics and are equally sources of morality. Religion, he maintains, is not the only “cause or determinant” of African morality. In his words,

It is true and even necessary that religion issues moral [sanctions] in a certain way of life, for the phenomenon of religion is not complete without an ethical dimension. It is indisputable that religions have molded the moral life and attitudes of communities; this is especially so where a particular religion is dominant in the community. But even so, it is undeniable that it is not all the ethics which even a dominant religion teaches that is practiced; neither is it true that the entire body of the ethical concepts and norms of a society, however simple, is that of a particular religion or of all the religious traditions manifest in that society.<sup>66</sup>

On the modern Western front, the sources of morality have been equally debated for quite some time. In 1910, Charles A. Ellwood published an article in which he argued that human conduct is based upon social interactions. According to his analysis, morality should be understood sociologically rather than spiritually since ethical ideals reflect the values of specific communities. To him, the moral is simply the normative aspect of the social and therefore, moral virtues are concrete community values. In other words, “moral ideals must lie within the limits of social survival, social efficiency, and social harmony of humanity, and not outside of them....Ethical ideals are derived genetically from the social life and they must fall within certain limits which...human society

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 69.

imposes.”<sup>67</sup> By 1929, Walter Lippmann, who viewed morality as a trial of social living, had concluded that morality is based on societal interaction.<sup>68</sup>

Robert A. Hinde argues that in history, three major positions are advanced about the sources of morality. The first one is that morality is God-given (which we discussed under the *Euthyphro* dilemma). The second position argues that morality is handed down by culture (the position advanced by Bujo and other African scholars). The third argument, which Hinde supports, asserts that morality is derived from various human sources. Arguing from the biological and psychological perspective, he maintains that “Morality is a product of basic human psychological characteristics shaped over pre-historical and historical time by diachronic dialectical transactions between what individuals do or what they are supposed to do in the culture in which they live. That is, throughout human history, the behavior, values and attitudes of individuals have continuously influenced and been influenced by the culture in which they live.”<sup>69</sup>

Sociologically, morality points to group *distinctiveness* which, Hinde argues, is maintained by customs and moral precepts that distinguish one community from another. Accordingly, he posits that morality is not inborn or genetic but learnt through the

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<sup>67</sup> Charles A. Ellwood, “The Sociological Basis of Ethics,” *International Journal of Ethics* 20, no. 3 (Apr., 1910): 326.

<sup>68</sup> Lippmann contended that “in the world where no man desired what he could not have, there would be no need for morality.” Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Morality* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), 145. According to Shailer Mathews, the ultimate basis of morality is religion. Shailer Mathews, “The Religious Basis of Ethics,” *Journal of Religion* 10, no. 2 (April. 1930): 229.

<sup>69</sup> Robert A. Hinde, “Law and the Sources of Morality,” *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences* 359, no. 1451, Law and the Brain (Nov. 29, 2004):1685-1690. Hinde sees interplay between biological and cultural influences in moral development.

interaction of biological, psychological, social, and cultural forces upon an individual. From this perspective, he concludes that morality originates from the community.<sup>70</sup>

Hinde's argument has something in common with that of Dominique Zahan who contends that African ethics ought to be understood from the philosophy behind life. Presenting a philosophical case for African ethics, he observes that although much has been written on African ethics of fidelity, hospitality, sense of justice, love, and respect for relatives and traditions, these aspects of moral character have been analyzed from the Western perspective. As a result, the specificity of African ethics has been lost. Zahan further states that the ultimate scope of African ethics and morals is the mastery of self, which to some extent is the foundation of human conduct: "It is through the self that the human being arrives at the mastery of self; self-knowledge is as it were, the motive force behind the mastery of the self that is the foundation of ethics. – To know oneself means to be aware of one's humanity, of the favorable position which, as a man (sic), one occupies in the universe. Self-knowledge makes manifest the eminent character of the human being with regard to the rest of creation."<sup>71</sup>

Zahan goes on to say that human knowledge of self means that humanity is the master of its surroundings. "Man commands plants and animals, exercises his authority over the march of time, obliges the clouds to let rain fall and enjoins the thunder to recede. By his knowledge of himself the human being becomes a miracle worker, or

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 1691.

<sup>71</sup> Dominique Zahan, *The Religion, Spirituality, and Thought of Traditional Africa*, Translated by Kate Ezra Martin and Lawrence M. Martin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 110.

thinks of himself as such, since in knowing himself he knows others, tied to him by invisible links. He can also determine the value of everything which surrounds him. As the center of a universe of relations, man becomes its sovereign.”<sup>72</sup>

Although some African theologians have generally accepted this argument, African religion lacks the theological basis for human sovereignty. Unlike Christianity, where humanity is made in the image of God and in which some understand God to have appointed humanity to a superior position over the rest of creation, generally, African religions have no such view of humans or of a divine mandate. Human beings are part of the universe of life forces, and any claim to sovereignty must be understood as humanly imposed, not divinely inspired.

In terms of actions, however, humanity does play a central role. This is because humans are expected to act responsibly in order to maintain the harmony of the cosmos. Zahan is right to suggest that the value of human action is “gauged in terms of its positive or negative charge with regard to life. Only endeavors tending to affirm one’s essence are good and worthy of interests, that is, those which bring the human being back toward himself so he may affirm his everlastingness.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 111. Zahan argues that Africans value silence as a virtue, which he argues is “a source of life since it leads to the conservation of existence which it otherwise protects. Its adoption as a fundamental moral virtue allows us to detect the specific features of ethic.” Ibid., 119.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 120.

### **The Religious Basis of African Ethics**

In contrast, most pioneers of African theology promoted the idea that African ethics is dependent on religion. According to Bolaji Idowu, African ethics “is basically the fruit of religion and... it is dependent upon it. [The human] concept of the Deity has everything to do with what is taken to be the norm of morality. God made man; and it is He who implants in him the sense of right and wrong. This is a fact the validity of which does not depend upon whether man realizes and acknowledges it or not.”<sup>74</sup> Since ethics and religion are interconnected in Yoruba belief, Idowu maintains that separating ethics and religion will have negative consequences on society.

Unlike Gyekye above, J.B Danquah argues that God or *Nana* (the Great Ancestor) is the source of morality. In his book, *Akan Doctrine of God*, he argues that Akan values, ideals, and ethics are usually inclined towards their conception of the Great Ancestor.<sup>75</sup> Because of the pivotal role ancestors play in community, Danquah states that people are expected to live by certain rules set down by the Great Ancestor. Failure to do so would mean destroying life.

Like Idowu and Danquah, and as observed above, John Mbiti argues that for Africans, religion influences every aspect of life. In fact, it is religion that controls human understanding of the universe. Thus, “to be is to be religious in a religious universe. That is the philosophical understanding behind African myths, customs, traditions, beliefs,

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<sup>74</sup> Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare, God in Yoruba Belief* (London: Longmans, 1963), 145-146.

<sup>75</sup> J. B. Danquah, *Akan Doctrine of God* (London: Frank Cass, 1968).

actions and social relationships. Up to a point in history this traditional religious attitude maintained an almost absolute monopoly over African concepts and experiences of life.”<sup>76</sup> Mbiti further maintains that Africans experience modern developments as a religious phenomenon. They consider social order and peace as vital to and sacred to community life, and anything that threatens social harmony is highly discouraged.

Although an argument can be made that the good is not always decreed by supernatural forces, in Africa the secular world is surrounded and permeated by the spiritual forces. Hence, if the goal of African ethics is social welfare, harmony, and solidarity in the secular world, then the social rather than the religious origin of African morality can be defended. However, African religion permeates all aspects of African sociology in which God, ancestors, and the rest of creation are active moral agents.

Additionally, Vivigi L. Grottanelli, who conducted his field-study among the Akan (Nzema), concluded that religious beliefs are the basis for morality. He argues that the Nzema uphold gods as the owners and masters of nature, more specifically rocks, rivers, and forests. The gods have power over life and death hence they are staunch supporters of the fundamental social values. “Their actions enforce clan solidarity and respect for hierarchy, protect private property, and safeguard sexual morality; they provide penalties for infringement to these in cases where human justice might prove incapable of intervening efficiently.... They protect people who have suffered wrong by

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<sup>76</sup> Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 262.

unknown enemies and bear witness to God's supremacy, being his children and obeying his laws."<sup>77</sup>

Grottanelli's observations demonstrate the interconnectedness between religion and social life. Clan solidarity, respect for elders, sexual purity, and property rights are important to social order but they also have strong religious connotations. In short, although the divine origin is not literally pronounced, how one acts, can invite the wrath or blessing of the spiritual world.

As already observed, God is not only accepted as the Supreme force behind creation but also the supreme moral guardian, who desires the harmony of creation. According to Grottanelli, the Akan gods "take offense at persons who infringe taboos [and] they hate all sorts of dishonesty, uncleanness, and impurity, and they punish severely all persons guilty of all these faults or sins, either of their own initiative or at the request of people who have been harmed."<sup>78</sup> Grottanelli, in contrast to Gyekye, attributes the command to avoid adultery to the gods. He contends the Akan believe that because gods abhor sexual sins, certain diseases are commonly associated with adultery.<sup>79</sup>

While Gyekye and Kudadjie limit their application of moral taboos and customs to humanity, Grottanelli extends it nature. He notes that the Akan have taboos that protect *Earth* from human abuse because nature is viewed as the abode of gods and ancestors. As

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<sup>77</sup> Vinigi L. Grottanelli, "Gods and Morality in Nzema Polytheism," *Ethnology* 8, no.4 (Oct.,1969): 402.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 382

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 383.

expected, humanity must relate to nature with respect or else incur divine punishment. The common punishment for going against the rules of the gods is illness, in some circumstances death, can occur.<sup>80</sup>

Arguing from the Igbo perspective, Ogbu U. Kalu illustrates the positive role played by religion in maintaining social order. According to him, religion is an agency of social control. "Religion not only suffused the worldview and sacralized the agents of socialization, but was used to restrict or deter individuals from flouting salient values....Folk tales moralized how the spirits could punish offenders and reward honesty, frugality, respect for elders, temperance and humility."<sup>81</sup> Accordingly, religion directly or indirectly influenced morality. "Medicine, magic, divination, oath taking, cursing, and blood pacts were rather direct modes. Indirectly, the fear of witchcraft, sorcery and poisoning kept the populace alert to moral misdemeanors."<sup>82</sup> However, Kalu does not accept that fear of spiritual forces was the primary goal of African morality. On the contrary, he argues that certain acts were done out of community obligations. For instance, community solidarity and hospitality had more to do with social obligations than religious sanctions.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Kalu, "Religion and Social Control in Igboland," 119. Kalu does not address the roles of punishment and expectation of rewards in African morality. If action is based on fear of punishment or hope of reward, does this suggest that African ethics is purely eudemonistic? While this question is varied, African ethics had harmony of the universe as its goal.

Kalu's argument shows that morality exists within the religious sphere just as water exists in a waterfall. In many respects, religion is infused in all aspects of human life and any attempt to underplay this connection is denying the interconnected nature of African cosmologies.

The interconnectedness of African ontology raises the question of whether African traditional ethics should be treated as theological ethics. Humanity is expected to obey principles set by the spiritual world, or suffer the wrath of the underworld. In contrast to Christianity where violators can wait punishment in the afterworld, in African religion, the consequence comes in the *sasa*. As the *lwiindi* illustrated, all catastrophes are likely to be attributed to moral lapses among the living.

Although Africans understand morality as linked to abundant life, they do not think that morality is absolute to the point that it will never change. As discussion of population control will reveal in Chapter five, African values have changed over time. However, these values do not just change for the sake of progress or development. In African communities, moral progress takes time because it has to be negotiated with the spiritual world. As expressed in Newell S. Booth, Jr.'s analysis, the "focus of African religion is the community which is based on tradition. The ancestors are members of the community and provide models for contemporary behavior. But the community has not been static; the ancestors also met new challenges."<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Booth Jr, "Time and African Beliefs," 92.

### **Morality in the Face of Progress: Civilization, Christianity, and Commerce**

The mission theory of Civilization, Christianity, and Commerce (“the three Cs”) was behind the evangelization and colonization of Africa. It is argued that European missionaries sought to save Africans from hell through the gospel and education on one hand, while promoting imperial powers on the other.<sup>84</sup> David Livingstone’s missionary activities exemplify how some missionaries unwittingly and enthusiastically worked as colonial agents.<sup>85</sup> This unclear demarcation of missionary work from colonial responsibilities sometimes compromised missionary activities in Africa.<sup>86</sup>

Brian Stanley links Christian mission to the Enlightenment. He argues that Protestant missions in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries shared five distinct assumptions.<sup>87</sup> They assumed: first, that all non-Western people were heathens or pagans; second, that all other religions are false and one can hardly find any truth in them; third,

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<sup>84</sup> See Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion*, (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 41-51.

<sup>85</sup> The question of Christianity and commerce was highly expressed in Livingstone’s failed expedition of 1863. After the deaths of his wife Mary and Bishop Mackenzie, the leader of UMCA, the 1864 *Times Newspaper* declared: “We were promised cotton, sugar, and indigo and of course we got none. We were promised trade, and there is no trade. We were promised converts and not one has been made. In a word, the thousands subscribed by Universities and contributed by the Government have been productive only of the most fatal results.” Cited in Tim Jeal, *Livingstone* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1973), 269.

<sup>86</sup> To some Africanists, the term colonial regime meant more than just the government; but, as Reid observes, “Christianity and education [too] were part of the regime.” George W. Reid, “Missionaries and West African Nationalism,” *Phylon* 39, no.3 (3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr., 1978): 230.

<sup>87</sup> Brian Stanley posits that English Evangelicals believed “Christianity was God’s appointed engine of civilizing... Christianity thus brought commerce in its train, and the Christian nation was given a tangible reward for its obedience to the missionary imperative.” Brian Stanley, “‘Commerce and Christianity’: Providence Theory, the Missionary Movement, and the Imperialism of Free Trade, 1842-1860,” *The Historical Journal* 26, no.1 (Mar., 1983): 76.

that Western civilization was superior to any other form of civilization; fourth, that rational knowledge was necessary for proclaiming the gospel; and finally, there was an assumption that the Christian message was one of individual responsibility.<sup>88</sup> For missionaries, therefore, preaching Christ to Africans was part of their sacred duty.<sup>89</sup>

The Enlightenment-inspired assumption that rationality was necessary to evangelization was behind the emphasis placed on education. Educating Africans to read the Bible was considered essential to civilization. But while missionaries sought to educate Africans for the heavenly kingdom, colonial governments sought mission-educated or civilized Africans to aid their colonization agenda. Since to be “civilized” meant somehow rejecting traditional African culture and values, colonial governments (with the help of missionaries), prohibited certain rituals and customs, some of which were essential to African morality. African drums, taboos, names, customs, rituals, and even folk-stories often were termed “barbaric” or simply sinful.

To some extent, the rejection of religious and cultural values aided the process of decolonization across sub-Saharan Africa. Explaining the role of missionaries in the decolonization of Africa, George Reid notes that “European missionaries in Africa were a symbol of economic uplift, private enterprise, technology, Christian values, Western schools, hospitals and Churches. Nevertheless, the Christian missionary, one of the

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<sup>88</sup> Brian Stanley, *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment* (Surrey, Curzon Press: 2001), 8.

<sup>89</sup> William Carey’s views on the gospel as a means of civilization represented just one position of the established Evangelical mission theories. See Alexander Duff, *Missions as the Chief End of the Christian Church*, (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, 1840).

largest supporters of European rule, unwittingly began the process of decolonization. Specifically, the Christian missionaries attempted...to replace and supplement African traditional religion. The substitute was a universal religion (Christianity).”<sup>90</sup>

Jean Comaroff asserts that early missionaries represented what life could look like under the new order. They taught equality of all human races, but benefited from racial segregation.<sup>91</sup> Unfortunately, the disparity that existed between the colonial minority (missionaries included) and African Christians made the Christian teaching of equality before God somehow self-defeating.<sup>92</sup>

In line with Comaroff, Reid concludes that “the role of missionaries was that of paving the way for European governmental occupation and the introduction and perpetuation of unequal European Christianity. Consequently, the Church became a provocateur of African Nationalism, but unwittingly so. Because the Christian church permitted a paradox between what it preached and what it practiced, Africans began to regard missionaries as tricksters whose Christianity was a means to an end.”<sup>93</sup>

As expected, the marriage between the gospel and colonialism did not last. In fact, the paradoxical relationship between the “gospel” and “culture” made it possible for some missionaries to side with Africans in challenging colonialism. Likewise, the theory

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<sup>90</sup> Reid W. George, “Missionaries and West African Nationalism,” *Phylon* 39, no.3 (3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr. 1978): 225.

<sup>91</sup> Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: the Culture and History of a South African People* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985), 23-25.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Reid, “Missionaries and West African Nationalism,” 232.

of civilization worked against colonialism since it alerted Africans to some European democratic values which were in line with African cultures. In short, missionaries promoted the “civilizing” of Africans, but unknowingly opened themselves and their colonial counterparts to religious, social, economic, and cultural critique.<sup>94</sup>

### **Africa in the Eyes of early European Missionaries**

With an exception of very few Europeans like Rowley discussed in chapter two, many early missionaries viewed African culture as barbaric and in need of Western enlightenment. To some extent, civilization was directly linked to moral, economic and religious progress.<sup>95</sup> Jay Newman cites John Newman, who argued that the uncivilized cannot invent or progress since “Civilization has more to do with mental cultivation and social and political development. As expected, civilization spreads by the ways of peace, by moral persuasion, by means of literature, the arts, commerce, diplomacy, and institutions; and, though material power never can be superseded, it is subordinate to the influence of the mind.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, “Christianity and Colonialism in South Africa,” *American Ethnologist* 13, no. 1 (Feb., 1986): 1-22; James B. Wolf, “Commerce, Christianity, and the Creation of the Stevenson Road,” *African Historical Studies* 4, no. 2 (1971):363-371; Andrew Porter, “Commerce and Christianity’: The Rise and Fall of a Nineteenth-Century Missionary Slogan,” *The Historical Journal* 28, no. 3 (Sep., 1985): 597-621; Richard Gray, “Christianity, Colonialism, and Communications in Sub-Saharan Africa,” *Journal of Black Studies* 13, no. 1, Communication and Change in Sub-Saharan Africa (Sep., 1982): 59-72.

<sup>95</sup> Jay Newman cites John Newman as arguing that barbarism is a state of nature while civilization is a state of mental cultivation and discipline. Jay Newman, “Two Theories of Civilization,” *Philosophy* 54, no. 210 (Oct., 1979): 475-476.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 475-476.

John Newman asserted that civilization was a secular principle which needed some supernatural principle to be genuine.<sup>97</sup> It is this principle (gospel) which missionaries brought to Africa covered in Enlightenment assumptions. Consequently, Africans accepted some values of the Enlightenment as part of the Christian gospel. To many Africans, Western values such as “white weddings,” still define Christianity. That Western culture is now imbedded in African Christianity shows the extent to which evangelical mission theory was successful in Africa.<sup>98</sup>

Just as African traditional beliefs influenced the African moral outlook, Western traditional beliefs influenced Western values. To this effect, Okot p’Bitek argues that Western superstitions played a vital role in defining the relationship between non-Westerners and Westerners. To p’Bitek, the notion of *wild man* controlled how Europeans saw Africans for some time until explorers and anthropologists showed that Africans had norms, religion, and culture. Sadly, the “European intellectual tradition of ‘primitivism,’ which promoted the idea of *the noble savage* was behind their

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<sup>97</sup> R.G. Collingwood argued that there is a generic and specific meaning to civilization. Accepting that Europe has experienced the effects of civilization on one hand and the conflicts between the Nazis and the Allies which betrayed the dream of world civilization, Collingwood argued that “civilization could mean a process whereby a community undergoes a mental change from a condition of relative *barbarity* to one of relative *civility*.” Specifically, however, civilization should be understood at three levels. On a community level, it could mean coming to obey rules and civil intercourse. In relation to the world of nature, it could mean scientific or intelligent exploitation of the natural world while on the global level it implied “relative reluctance to use force.” Collingwood further differentiated barbarism of Europe to “savagery, which simply means not being civilized. *Ibid.*, 477-478.

<sup>98</sup> Okot p’Bitek argues that the concept of the devil, satyrs, fauns, legendary inhabitants of the Golden Age, and the noble savage of the Age of Enlightenment were creations of Westerners. These concepts are behind how Africans were viewed in history. They also explain why people did not see anything wrong with slavery and other exploitative attitudes of the time. Okot p’Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship* (Kampala: East African Literature Bureau, 1970), 34-38.

observations.”<sup>99</sup> p’Bitek explains: “Believers in this tradition searched for and found what they called the noble savage: Africans, American Indians, Australian Aborigines and etc., provided these creatures. The object of this primitive critique was to make western man live up to his supposed ‘civilized nature.’”<sup>100</sup> This understanding influenced how some missionaries conceived Africans upon contact. However, many missionaries soon realized that Africans were people with norms.

### **The Impact of Civilization on African Morality**

The emphasis that the Enlightenment-influenced missionaries placed on individual accountability displaced African morality from its community focus to individual responsibility. As already observed, in Africa, a wise and moral person understood community dynamics. Wisdom was valued over academic knowledge and education was a community event. Unfortunately, the civilized world argued that knowledge was more important than community wisdom. In fact, only those trained in Western thought were said to “know,” while the elders were said to be ignorant. The reversal of roles, whereby the young (who are traditionally ignorant in matters of life) became knowledgeable in modern issues, and the old (who are the holders of community

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<sup>99</sup> Robin W. Lovin and Frank E. Reynolds argue that the use of the word “primitive” to refer to indigenous people “suggests, falsely, that their beliefs and practices are either simple or lacking in historical development. Identifying these cultures as traditional implies, oddly, that they are shaped by tradition, while other cultures are not.” Although they opt to use the word indigenous, they realize that this word too is misleading. Robin W. Lovin and Frank E. Reynolds, “Ethical Naturalism and indigenous Cultures,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 20 (Fall, 1992): 268.

<sup>100</sup> p’Bitek *African Religions in Western Scholarship*, 38-39.

wisdom and knowledge) were demoted to ignorance, created social crisis in African communities. As a result, some families and communities revolted against Western education since they viewed it as corrupting African morals.

Aside from individualizing education, civilization brought about the new concept of time. As we discovered, throughout sub-Saharan Africa the interconnectedness of events and seasons is what constitutes time. To Africans, it matters less whether the rainy season begins in September or December. What is important is that the season comes and goes. Consequently, drought, floods, famine, and other natural calamities were usually interpreted as a result of moral failure. But the new cosmology explained these calamities differently.<sup>101</sup> This paradigm shift impacted African morality tremendously.

Moreover, missionaries not only worked to destroy African religion, but considered it evil. As Mutombo Mpanya's case study in the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) shows, the creation of mission stations and Christian villages promoted missionary activities and reduced the powers of traditional beliefs, which worked to protect the environment.<sup>102</sup> In most cases, to be a Christian meant giving up African identity and one's obligations to one's culture and family. Although converts

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<sup>101</sup> Some scholars argue that by considering Africans uncivilized, westerners condemned them as being in a state of barbarianism. Although there is some truth in this argument, such negativity is not unique to Africa. The perception of non-Christians as barbarians was the norm across Europe. Neither is the destruction of holy sites. Early Christian missionaries destroyed non-Christian temples, cut sacred trees and polluted sacred spaces. Richard Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity* (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1998).

<sup>102</sup> Mutombo Mpanya, "The Environmental Impacts of a Church Project," in *Missionary Earthkeeping*, ed. Calvin DeWitt and Ghilleen T. Prance, 91-109, (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1992), 102-106.

could have suffered community isolation, the new order provided support that made them (who were social misfits in the traditional societies) powerful individuals in the new social order.

Surprisingly, while missionaries and colonial governments outlawed ancestral practices, and encouraged foreign norms, Africans persisted in living between the world of ancestors and the new world. In *The Repression, Resistance, and Revival of the Ancestor Cult in the Shona Churches of Zimbabwe*, Gift Makwasha shows how the old world provided and continues to be the foundation for understanding the new world for many Africans.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, Karen Fields illustrates this reality in her book *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa*.<sup>104</sup> Bujo also captures this existential reality when he argues that despite Western advancements, “the African religious tradition continues to survive. In existentially critical situations, even the intellectual elite and the royal church-goers return to their forefathers practices. Apparently, to them the challenges to existential problems cannot be solved within the technologically oriented society or within the churches of foreign origin. Considering this, it seems right to admit that the ancestral tradition still influences the African down to his very roots.”<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Gift Makwasha, *The Repression, Resistance, and Revival of the Ancestor Cult in the Shona Churches of Zimbabwe: A Study in the Persistence of a Traditional Religious Belief* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010).

<sup>104</sup> Fields observes that the colonial government of Central Africa depended on two religious powerhouses for its indirect rule: missionary Christianity and African traditional cults of chiefs. Fields argues that Jehovah’s Witnesses rejected both powerhouses; thus posing a threat to colonial government and traditional authority in favor of God alone. Karen E. Fields, *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985).

<sup>105</sup> Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 15.

On an economic front, Western introduced commerce negatively affected African morality. Africans definitely knew trade long before the coming of missionaries. Trade around the Congo River, and the Sahara preceded the European invasion. C.S. Lancaster and A. Pohorilenko argue that even the interior of Southern Africa was open to some form of international trade long before 1549.<sup>106</sup> Apart from linking the *Ingombe Ilede* site to the culture of the Great Zimbabwe, they argue that its excavation shows that Africa traded with other continents long before the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>107</sup> In this regard, commerce was not new to Africans. What was new, however, was a Western-based theory that viewed commerce and trade as individual enterprises.

The Enlightenment theory of commerce promoted capitalism and profits. But in his book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber critiqued capitalism as an “iron cage” that crushes the soul of the modern person.<sup>108</sup> Weber’s major opposition to capitalism was that, unlike traditional trade, capitalism promoted competition and individualism. In an environment that viewed community solidarity as a virtue, modern commerce became a challenge to many Africans. Worse still, commerce

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<sup>106</sup> C.S. Lancaster and A. Pohorilenko, “Ingombe Ilede and the Zimbabwe Culture,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 10, no. 1 (1977): 1-30

<sup>107</sup> *Ingombe Ilede* (sleeping Cow) is believed to have been the trade center for the people who lived about thirty miles from Lake Kariba in today’s Zambia. The excavations of burial sites revealed glass beads, copper, a single cowry shell, gold, wire, cotton cloth, wire-drawing equipment, and vast quantities of glass beads. These foreign products point to foreign trade long before the coming of the Portuguese. W. Phillipson and Brian M. Fagan “The Date of the Ingombe Ilede Burials,” *Journal of African History* X 2 (1969): 204.

<sup>108</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons [originally published by New York: Scribner: 1958] (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003), 181.

brought with it money as a new form of doing business transactions. Whereas the barter system was the norm in traditional Africa, Africans were forced into a new economic order that dealt with individuals rather than the community. Those who made more money were considered powerful regardless of age, while those who made less (mostly elders) money were termed powerless.

Another consequence of the money-based economy was that it distanced people from Mother Earth. It was one thing for an individual to make money without being connected to his/her community, but it was another for that individual to do so without being connected to the land. Natural goods which worked to build community life were exploited for individual economic benefits. Since competition rather than cooperation was the norm of the new economic order, Africans were forced to abandon their community values for Western ones.

Abundant life was now understood differently, as people individually and deceptively worked their way up into this new economic system. Land, which was once considered a “commons” and a trust, was now understood as a commodity to be sold for personal gain. This shift not only affected the African ontology but also reduced the value Africans put on *Earth*. In short, the promotion of an ethic of individualism in commerce, religion, and civic life created a moral crisis in African communities.

### **African Morality and Corruption**

According to You Jong Sung and Sanjeev Khagram, and Morris Szeftel, corruption is the abuse or misuse of public office, public resources, or some public

obligation or duty for purposes of private (personal or group) gain.<sup>109</sup> This definition assumes that only public officials are guilty of corruption. In most countries, however, the private and public officials are both partakers of corrupt activities.<sup>110</sup>

The United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) has argued that corruption undermines Africa's social, political, and economic future. "Corruption attacks the foundation of democratic institutions by distorting electoral processes, perverting the rule of law, and creating bureaucratic quagmires whose only reason for existence is the soliciting of bribes. Economic development is stunted because outside direct investment is discouraged and small businesses within the country often find it impossible to overcome the 'start-up costs' required because of corruption."<sup>111</sup>

According to the 2002 African Union (AU) report on corruption, Africa loses about \$150 billion a year through corruption. These are the very funds intended to address Africa's poverty, the report argued.<sup>112</sup> For this reason, the AU advocated the

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<sup>109</sup> Morris Szeftel, "Between Governance and Underdevelopment: Accumulation and Africa's 'Catastrophic Corruption,'" *Review of African Political Economy* 27, no. 84 (Jun., 2002): 298; You Jong Sung and Sanjeev Khagram, "A Comparative Study of Inequality and Corruption," *American Sociological Review* 70, no. 1 (Feb., 2005): 153.

<sup>110</sup> You Jong Sung and Sanjeev Khagram, "A Comparative Study of Inequality and Corruption," 137-139; S. O. Osoba, "Corruption in Nigeria: Historical Perspectives," *Review of African Political Economy* 23, no. 69 (Sep., 1996): 371-386.

<sup>111</sup> The UNCAC observes that although a multitude of international anti-corruption agreements exist, "the implementation has been moderately successful." The establishing of the Global Program against Corruption (GPAC) was intended to "provide practical assistance and build technical capacity to implement the UNCAC and efforts will concentrate on supporting Member States in the development of anti-corruption policies and institutions." <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/corruption/index.html>. Accessed 01/29/2009.

<sup>112</sup> Elizabeth Brant, "Corruption 'costs Africa billions'," BBCNEWS, 18, September, 2002. Accessed 04/16/2009.

establishment of an anti-corruption commission and drug enforcement agencies which led to the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption, adopted in Maputo, July 11, 2003. Aside from the fact article 19 criminalizes “secret commissions and other forms of corrupt practices during international trade transactions,” these practices are still prevalent in many African countries.<sup>113</sup>

Furthermore, while article 10 advocates “transparency in the funding of political parties,” “ruling parties” continue to use illegal and corrupt means to keep themselves in power.<sup>114</sup> Indeed, most African countries have anti-corruption agencies in place but as S. O. Osoba contends, these structures are “controlled and operated by, and in the interest of, members of the ruling class who have a vested and entrenched interest in sustaining and even extending corrupt practices.”<sup>115</sup>

Proponents of the establishment of democratic structures in the fight against corruption are apt to link it to underdevelopment. However, Sung and Khagram point to income inequalities prevalent in Africa as the chief source of corruption.<sup>116</sup> Amidst extreme economic inequalities, the poor majority grows into relying “on petty corruption and bureaucratic extortion in their efforts to secure basic services.”<sup>117</sup> Arguing that

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<sup>113</sup> African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption, <http://www.africa-union.org/root/au/Documents/Treaties/Text/Convention%20on%20Combating%20Corruption.pdf>. Accessed 04/16/2009.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Osoba “Corruption in Nigeria: Historical Perspectives,” 385

<sup>116</sup> Sung and Khagram, “Between Governance and Underdevelopment,” 137-139.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 39-140.

inequalities undermine democratic institutions, they assert that the poor sell their votes in exchange for money, gifts, or other favors, whereas the rich and the powerful will buy votes to maintain the status quo of inequality.<sup>118</sup>

Of course, there are many roots of African corruption. Colonialism, commerce, failed states and dictatorship, underdevelopment, African traditional heritage, and religious affiliation have been suggested as some of these causes.<sup>119</sup> Yet those who follow African politics know that an African leader is an omnipotent god to be worshipped. Apart from rigging elections, he controls commerce and all aspects of modern life. Blaine Harden's description of an African leader in "*Africa: Dispatches from a Fragile Continent*," rings as true today as it did in 1990 and deserves a longer quotation. An African leader promotes his personality cult, and hence:

His photograph hangs in every office in his realm. His ministers wear... tiny photographs of Him on the lapels of their tailored pin-striped suits. He names streets, football stadiums, hospitals and universities after himself... He insists on being called "doctor" or "conqueror" or "teacher" or the "big elephant" ... or "the most popular leader in the world." His every pronouncement is reported on the front page....He shuffles ministers without warning, paralyzing policy decisions.... He scapegoats minorities to shore up support. He rigs elections. He emasculates the courts. He cows the Press. He stifles academia. He goes to church. His off-the-cuff remarks have the power of law....He awards competitive, overprized contracts to foreign companies which grant...his family and his associates large kickbacks....He affects a commitment to free-market economic reforms to secure multi-million dollar loans and grants from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.... He buys off rivals by passing out envelopes of cash or import licenses or government land. He questions the patriotism of those he cannot buy, accusing them of corruption or charging

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> S. O. Osoba, "Corruption in Nigeria," 371-386.

them of serving with foreign masters. His enemies are “harassed”...detained or exiled, humiliated or bankrupted, or tortured or killed. He uses the resources of the state to feed a cult of personality that defines him as incorruptible, all-knowing, physically strong, courageous in battle, sexually potent and kind to children. His cult equates his personal well-being with the well-being of the state. His rule has one overriding goal: to perpetuate his reign as Big man.<sup>120</sup>

Today, Harden’s description should include the following elements. An African president forces poor women and youths to wear T-shirts bearing his photographs. He prides in the ignorance and poverty of his people. He provides soap, beers and salt to his poverty stricken people in exchange for votes.

Despite this embarrassing description, however, no African leader accepts being called “corrupt.” In fact, all African leaders are happy to be signatories and parties to the Convention against Corruption.<sup>121</sup>

Harden’s point that African leaders are committed to free-market economic reforms in order to secure multi-million dollar loans and grants deserves emphasis. Because corruption is linked to undemocratic governance, many African countries have held “democratic” elections. Apart from allowing the ruling elite to accumulate more wealth, these elections increase corruption. Vote buying, intimidation, pre and post-election violence, and election rigging have characterized most African democracies. It

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<sup>120</sup> Blaine Harden, *Africa: Dispatches From a Fragile Continent* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1990), 217-218.

<sup>121</sup> United Nations Convention against Corruption:  
<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CAC/signatories.html>; Internet. Accessed 10/10/09.

cannot pass without saying that Western reforms seeking to address corruption increase “pressures for corruption.”<sup>122</sup>

### **Impact of Corruption on the Environment**

The growth of Christianity and Islam in Africa is contradicted by catastrophic levels of corruption. In many respects, corruption has become a norm in post-colonial Africa’s social-political and economic life and is now threatening the integrity of creation.

African political leaders have continuously abused natural goods to enhance corrupt leadership. Oil, coltan, gold, diamonds, land, and timber are some of the natural goods whose desirability stimulates Africa’s endless civil wars. Yet the impact of corruption on Africa’s environment is not widely studied. Arguing from the case of Kenya during the reign of Daniel Arap Moi, Colin H. Kahl argues that natural resources are playing a vital role in African politics today. Kahl contends that African leaders have exploited land scarcity and other natural goods to enhance their corrupt activities.<sup>123</sup>

Kahl’s findings are true in most African countries. In Zimbabwe for example, the leadership of Robert Mugabe exploited land scarcity to maintain its hold on power. While

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<sup>122</sup> Szeftel rightly argues that the Western Corruption Perception Index (CPI) misrepresents how corruption is perceived in Africa. “The values by which corruption and honesty are judged are those of the people who manage the globalisation process, who lend money, reschedule debts, and conduct business and diplomatic activities.” Szeftel “Between Governance and Underdevelopment,” 293. For a detailed discussion, see Szeftel, *Ibid.*, 302 - 303.

<sup>123</sup> Colin H. Kahl, “Population Growth, Environmental Degradation, and State-Sponsored Violence: The Case of Kenya, 1991-93,” *International Security* 23, no.2 (Autumn, 1998): 80-119.

the world appealed to the African Union and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to censor Mugabe, African politicians shielded his corrupt rule.<sup>124</sup>

Similarly to situations in Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Sudan, the ecological impact of Mugabe's corrupt rule is now starting to be seen.

Mugabe's followers destroyed wildlife, polluted rivers, and felled trees without remorse.

On an economic-justice front, post-independent Africa's political leadership has compromised ecological integrity in its business dealings with international companies. Mandy Turner's observations that international trade in diamonds, oil, coltan and many other natural goods has fostered civil wars, environmental degradation, poverty and corruption across Africa are true.<sup>125</sup> These companies are interested in profit; human wellbeing and the environment matter less.<sup>126</sup> For example, despite the unlimited exploitation of Africa's abundant natural goods, many people live on less than one dollar a day.

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<sup>124</sup> On February 28, 2008, Mwai Kibaki's Party of National Unity reached a deal with Raila Odinga's Orange Democratic Movement agreed to share power in Kenya following the post-election violence that led to many deaths. Under this arrangement Mwai Kibaki, despite losing the elections, became president, while Odinga became Prime Minister. Just as in the Kenyan situation, Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front refused to give up power to Morgan Tsvangirai's Movement for Democratic Change after losing elections on March 28, 2008. Rather than isolating Mugabe, African Union and SADC leaders called on the opposition to join a Mugabe-headed government and Tsvangirai was sworn in as Zimbabwe's Prime minister on February 13, 2009.

<sup>125</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2007>. Accessed 04/17/2009.

<sup>126</sup> In October 2002, a UN Expert Panel issued an exhaustive report on the exploitation of natural goods. The report alleged that natural goods in the Democratic Republic of Congo were behind the atrocities committed in that country. Five African governments and 85 businesses operating in Europe, Asia, and North America were said to have been involved. "Governance and Civil War" <http://www.nied.edu.na/divisions/projects>. Accessed 04/17/2009.

Further, while African countries have environmental monitoring bodies that ostensibly seek to protect the ecological wellbeing of land, these bodies are equally compromised. In most cases, they approve projects that undermine ecological integrity in order to satisfy political interests of the day. African wetlands in Uganda, Kenya, and Nigeria, parks and other ecologically sensitive areas in these and other countries have been corruptly converted to human settlements.

Likewise, little is done to control the mining of uranium, coal, lead, and other heavy metals. Since corporate interests bribe political leaders into relaxing environmental safety standards, the result is that land degradation, and water and air pollution, continue across Africa. In Zambia for example, scientific studies warn of the negative effects of lead and uranium on humans and the environment. Sadly, the government entered into trade contracts with international companies, without regulating the disposal of mining waste.<sup>127</sup>

In many respects, the ecological future of Africa depends on how the present generation confronts corruption. It is tempting to accept corruption as the norm for Africa today. But ethical responsibility to future generations demands that Africans address corruption as a matter of priority.

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<sup>127</sup> Kabwe “is Africa's most polluted city and ... the world's fourth most polluted site, according to a survey published by the Blacksmith Institute, a New York-based organization monitoring pollution in the developing world.” ZAMBIA: “Kabwe, Africa's most toxic city KABWE”, 9 November 2006 (IRIN) <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx? 04/16/09>. See also BBCNEWS, “Zambia's poisonous past.” Friday, 9 August, 2002. Accessed 04/16/09.

### **In African Cosmology, Everything holds Together**

One of the most compelling assumptions of the Enlightenment was that science was the primary arbiter of what is real and true. Anything that did not have scientific backing was then easily dismissed as metaphysical fantasy or superstition. In order to protect the value of religion, Christian scholars rushed into what I term the *scientification* of religion by developing scientific methods in the study of religion. African traditional religion and morality were judged as lacking any scientific basis because they lacked established literature, doctrines, and written histories.

However, the findings of anthropologists, oral historians, and missionaries on the ground challenged such assumptions. Long before colonialism and Christianity, Africans knew bad and evil. According to Mbiti, they believed some norms “to have been instituted by God or national leaders (ancestors). – This [belief] gives sanctity to the customs and regulations of the community. Any breach of this code of behavior is considered evil, wrong or bad, for it is an injury or destruction to the accepted social order and peace. The corporate community of both the living and the departed must punish it, and God may also inflict punishment and bring about justice.”<sup>128</sup>

Mbiti’s argument seems to follow Placide Tempels’s earlier observations about African ethics. Tempels argues that “Man is not the ultimate judge of his deeds. He does not find the justification of his acts and omissions in himself. Transcending the free will of man is a higher force that knows, assesses and judges human acts. Against the

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<sup>128</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 205.

decisions and acts of the supreme human power, appeal can always be made to the transcendental power, from whom man has received his power of judgment, with the obligation to give account of his use of it.”<sup>129</sup>

Tempels acknowledges the fact that Africans have a concept of good and evil, and states that the African ontology of interconnectedness suggests the divine origin of African ethics. To the Bantu, therefore, “evil is injustice towards God and the natural order.”<sup>130</sup> Any attempt to reverse or destroy the natural order is sinful.

One of the greatest evils against which Africans guard is the destruction of life. In contrast to the West where social order often entails conformity to conventionalized behavior rather than fixed beliefs, Tempels observes African ethics is held together by beliefs and convictions. “The Bantu turn to their philosophical concepts and no less towards their knowledge of God to draw out principles and norms of good and evil.”<sup>131</sup>

Tempels’s observation alerts us to the active interplay between reason and belief in African ethics. Africans can present rational explanations for their actions. For example, one taboo that is upheld by many African cultures is the prohibition of cutting trees at river sources. It is believed that cutting trees will upset the river spirits and cause the river to dry up. This explanation is humanistic and rational on the surface, but it expresses, too, an understanding of an unspoken spiritual reality that makes felling trees

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<sup>129</sup> Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, 75.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

at river sources a taboo. Sources of the river are believed to be homes to sacred spirits and ancestors. To fell trees around sacred homes is considered an attack on the spiritual world. Indeed, Africans are rational, but their rationalization is permeated by religion.

As already observed, vital forces cannot exist in isolation but are expected to work hand in hand in ontological harmony. When these forces are constantly disturbed, the entire moral fabric collapses. Perhaps Africa suffers from so many moral problems today due to the emphasis placed on only one of these aspects of life. One needs to understand that Africans fear the spiritual world more than the secular world. Unless morality is policed from the spiritual world, its enforcement will have little impact on Africans. Conversely, any moral theology that pays attention to African worldviews cannot ignore the reality of the interconnectedness of ecological, socio-political, economic and many other issues for Africans.

Africans were aware that abundant life was dependent, too, on other vital forces. Unfortunately, the coming of colonization and Christianity brought about a new and distorted understanding of life and *Earth* in general. While in the past people depended on Earth for their existence, the colonial order introduced life in towns. In the past, too, the chiefs, ancestors, diviners, and other spiritual forces were physical custodians of the land; the new order promoted a new understanding of land and authority.

Finally, early missionaries hoped that a civilized Africa would exist without the help of traditional understandings of life. However, many Africans have remained faithful to their traditional beliefs. The *Chimurenga* in Zimbabwe, the *Maji-Maji* in Tanzania, the Chilembwe Uprising in Malawi, and the *Mau-Mau* in Kenya, to mention

but a few historical uprisings, and now the concept of *ubuntu*, illustrate how traditional norms and Christianity conflict, interact, and inform each other in the new ontological order. Because African ontology promotes an interconnected appreciation of life, African Christian ecological ethics should build on this ontology. In addition to the latter consideration, for Africans, possessing *ubuntu* means accepting that “I am because I am vitally interconnected;” that subject we will explore in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR  
UBUNTU AS ECO-SOCIAL LIBERATION

**Even the Wise Make Mistakes**

Jomo Kenyatta once said, “When missionaries came to Africa, they had the Bible and we had the land. They said, ‘Let us pray.’ We closed our eyes. When we opened them, we had the Bible and they had the land.”<sup>1</sup> Kenyatta’s concern for the land was the chief focus of African liberation struggles. By grabbing land from Africans, colonialism reduced their humanity (*ubuntu*), thereby negatively impacting African life as a whole. To tackle this impact, some missionaries and African theologians were quick to develop theological insights that provided liberation movements with divine rationale for self-rule. Unlike missionaries, however, Africans sought the help of traditional religions on one hand while appealing to the positive aspects of Christianity on the other to demand political independence.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the hopes raised by self-rule, Kwame Bediako is right in arguing that new liberators subjected their people to extreme suffering, dictatorship, human rights abuses,

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Phillip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002), 40.

<sup>2</sup> Terence O. Ranger and John Weller (eds), *Themes in the Christian History of Central Africa* (London: Richard Clay, 1975).

and exploitation.<sup>3</sup> Faced with this scenario, theologians were forced to reinterpret the meaning of *ubuntu* in post-colonial Africa.

Most African-based theological responses that came after independence capitalized on addressing the positive role the Church and Christ can play in the face of abject poverty, civil wars, and sociopolitical and economic woes. But, as already discussed, the anthropocentric nature of African Christian theologies is due to how scholars understood the morality of abundant life. Consequently, these theologies failed to acknowledge the interconnectedness of the universe of which humanity is merely a part. By ignoring this existential reality, African theology did not respond adequately to post-colonial problems that confronted independent nations. Instead, it worked to undermine African cosmologies on which African morality and the ethos of liberation were built. As a result, the ecological crisis caught many African scholars unaware in their *self-ethicizing* and *self-theologizing*.

### **Sacramental Earth: African and Christian Perspectives**

African worldviews do not view humanity as the ruler of creation *per se* but rather as a part of interconnected forces of life. The interpretation of the Biblical doctrine of dominion which has influenced African theological ethics is based on the Western Christian heritage rather than on African cosmology. Based on the colonial patterns of exploitation of the poor and nature, the concept of dominion advances the hypothesis that

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<sup>3</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 234-249.

humans have a God-given mandate to exercise unlimited control over the natural world. In their interpretation of dominion, African scholars ignored, or overlooked, the fact that their own traditional philosophy understood humanity as part of Earth. Therefore, African theology remained human-centered and has by implication, if sometimes unwittingly, promoted the domination of nature.

African traditional thought did not accept the assumption that Earth's natural goods are mere instruments to human wellbeing. To some extent this is also true of Western Christianity. Paul Santmire and the late James Nash argue against faulting Christian traditions for the ecological crisis without paying attention to Christian traditions that show positive ecological insights.<sup>4</sup> They argue that reading Christian theology ecologically reveals that Western Christian theology holds ecological promise which can still be employed in our efforts to heal the wounded Earth. They do recognize that exploitation of the natural world had become a religious norm of Christian theology, and that critics of Christianity have examined and used this to fault Christianity for ecological degradation.

Blaming Western Christianity for the current crisis led theologians to re-examine Western theology for ecological insights. Pope John Paul II, for instance argued that the ecological crisis is, at its core, a deeply moral challenge. The Pope also noted that the widespread destruction of the environment is forcing people everywhere to come to terms

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<sup>4</sup> James, Nash, *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991); Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

with the fact that “we cannot continue to use the goods of Earth as we have in the past....A new ecological awareness is beginning to emerge [that]the ecological crisis is a moral issue.”<sup>5</sup>

Elizabeth Johnson, C.S.J., a Roman Catholic theologian adds that a new consciousness of Earth as a breathtaking and magnificent work of the Supreme Creator is taking hold of human beings around the globe.<sup>6</sup> The consciousness and experience of the cosmos and Earth community now under human threat leads into questioning God’s creative presence in this world. Against the long-held assumption that Earth is a reservoir of raw materials, the world is viewed now as a sacred place of divine mystery. “The life-giving Spirit of God, *Dominus et vivificantis*, encircles, pervades, and energizes the world, gifting it with its own intrinsic, self organizing powers that have led to magnificence beyond our imaginations, including our own human race.”<sup>7</sup> To Johnson,

The cultural context of this religious experience is contemporary consciousness of Earth, an understanding shaped by a unique dialectic of new knowledge about the world discovered and popularized by contemporary science in tension with the realization of how human predation is currently spoiling nature. On the one hand, perception and complexity of the universe, awareness of the cosmic processes that have created and continue to create it, appreciation of the infinitesimal reality of

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in *NMCCB Statement on the Environment: Partnership for the Future A Pastoral Statement of the Roman Catholic Bishops of New Mexico*.  
<http://www.archdiocesasantafe.org/ABSHeehan/Bishops/BishStatements/98.5.11.Environment.html>.  
 Accessed 10/01/2008.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, “Losing and Finding Creation in Christian Tradition,” in *Christianity and Ecology*, ed., D.T Hessel and Rosemary R. Ruether (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, “Heaven and Earth are Filled with Your Glory: Atheism and Ecological Spirituality,” in *Finding God in all Things*, ed., Michael J. Himes and Stephen J. Pope (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996),86.

matter at the atomic and quantum levels, realization of the marvelous complexity of biological evolution up to and including the human species, and understanding of the interconnectedness of all life – all of this knowledge gives rise to the sense that the world is a wonder.<sup>8</sup>

Johnson juxtaposes this excellent experience of wonder with our unwillingness to take off our shoes as we stand on sacred ground. Thus:

cognizance of the rapid depletion of all life-supporting planetary systems and habitats and of the concomitant killing off of other species through human practices of pollution, unbridled reproduction, and consumptive use of land and sea endangers a contrast experience whereby the treasure of nature is known to be under mortal threat. Wonder at the world in the face of wasting the world: for many religious persons today this experience provides a new entry into an ancient form of contemplation along with a fresh ethical consequence, namely, acts of prophetic witness and repair of the world.<sup>9</sup>

For Christians, Johnson observes, this ecological consciousness creates a foundation for ecological ethics based on the experience of the natural world rather than on philosophical inferences.<sup>10</sup> Experience of God in and through the natural world does not only give birth to moral passion to protect and love nature, but also reminds us that we are part of the web of life and kin to all creatures. Hence, wonder of the natural world amidst the occurring crisis demands prophetic witness from the Christian community.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, “Losing and Finding Creation in Christian Tradition,” 3. See also Elizabeth Johnson, C.S.J., “Heaven and Earth are Filled with Your Glory”, 84-101. Ecology has now become a trade mark of many fields: eco-theology, eco-anthropology, eco-economics, eco-engineering, eco-development, eco-politics, and so forth.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Johnson's argument, though insightful to African ecological ethics, cannot be accepted without clarifications. The experience of the world as a wonder has been part of the African spiritual heritage. Africans have always revered natural phenomena as instruments of divine mysteries. According to Charles Mather, the reverence Africans put on natural phenomena works to protect the environment through the ritual process by which "people establish intimate social connections with the essential forces of nature and thereby define the physical world in social terms."<sup>12</sup> As chapter three made clear, territorial cults have ecological implications.<sup>13</sup> For instance, the cults of the snake deities *Chikang'ombe* and *Tunga* among the Tumbuka and Chewa people of Malawi respectively control the rain and other Earth-related activities.<sup>14</sup> For this reason,

The rediscovery by scientists of ecosystem-like concepts among traditional peoples has been important in the appreciation of traditional ecological knowledge among ecologists, anthropologists, and interdisciplinary scholars. Two key characteristics of these systems are that (a) the unity of nature is often defined in terms of a geographical boundary, such as a watershed, and (b) abiotic components, plants, animals, and humans within this unit are considered to be interlinked. Many traditional ecological knowledge systems are compatible with the emerging view of ecosystems as unpredictable and uncontrollable, and of ecosystem processes as nonlinear, multi-equilibrium, and full of surprises. Traditional knowledge may complement scientific knowledge by

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<sup>12</sup> Charles Mather, "Shrines and the Domestication of Landscape," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 59, no. 1 (Spring, 2003): 23-45.

<sup>13</sup> J.M. Schoffeleers ed., *Guardians of the Land : Essays on Central African Territorial Cults* (Gwelo: Mambo Press, 1979).

<sup>14</sup> The association of the Supreme Being with snakes is prevalent among Africans. The Igbo of Nigeria have *Idemili* and the Ngonde people of Malawi have *Mbamba*. Terence Ranger, "Territorial Cults in the History of Central Africa," *The Journal of African History* 14, no. 4 (1973): 585; Owen J. M. Kalinga, "Trade, the Kyungus, and the Emergence of the Ngonde Kingdom of Malawi," *International Journal of African Studies* 12, no.1 (1979): 19; Schoffeleers, *Guardians of the Land*, 165.

providing practical experience in living within ecosystems and responding to ecosystem change. However, the “language” of traditional ecology is different from the scientific [language] and usually includes metaphorical imagery and spiritual expression, signifying differences in context, motive, and conceptual underpinnings.<sup>15</sup>

Concepts like bioregionalism, sustainable communities, topophilia, biophilia, and even the Gaia hypothesis can be found in African ecological motifs that suggest reciprocal ties between humanity and nature.<sup>16</sup> Johnson’s argument that such consciousness was discovered and popularized by contemporary science does not apply to Africa and other indigenous communities. To some extent, the arrival of science disturbed the peoples’ ecological consciousness.

In short, the Interdependence of creation has always been part of the African worldview. However, the African worldview was conquered by a Western-oriented education system and religion that underrated African traditional knowledge and over-promoted science. For Africans, therefore, conversion to ecological consciousness implies returning to a traditional cosmology of interconnectedness. As John Mbiti notes, Africans exist “in a religious universe, so that the natural phenomena and objects are intimately associated with God. They not only originate from him but also bear witness to him. -- Man sees in the universe not only the imprint but also the reflection of God; and

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<sup>15</sup> Frikret Berkes, Mina Kislalioglu, Carl Folke, and Madhav Gadgil, “Exploring the Basic Ecological Unit: Ecosystem-Like Concepts in Traditional Societies,” *Ecosystems* 1, no. 5 (Sept – Oct. 1998): 409.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 414.

whether that image is marred or clearly focused and defined, it is nevertheless an image of God, and the only image known in traditional African Societies.”<sup>17</sup>

### **Liberating the Sacramental Universe**

If the question of human liberation is dependent on the assumption that humanity is made in the image of God, it is fair to suggest that the liberation of the universe (which is the image of God in African thought) should be the goal of African liberation theology.

In their pastoral statement *Renewing the Earth*, the U.S. Catholic Bishops argued that:

The Christian vision of a sacramental universe – a world that discloses the Creator’s presence by visible and tangible signs – can contribute to the making of Earth as home for the human family once again. Reverence for the Creator present and active in nature, moreover, may serve as ground for environmental responsibility. For the very plants and animals, mountains and oceans, which in their loveliness and sublimity lift our minds to God, by their fragility and perishing likewise cry out, ‘We have not made ourselves.’ God brings them into being and sustains them in existence.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to demanding justice for creation, the Bishops observed that “The diversity of life manifests God’s glory. Every creature shares a bit of the divine beauty.”<sup>19</sup>

Further, the Bishops argued that each creature has intrinsic or independent value which must be respected and protected. While the worship of God has often been described in

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<sup>17</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 48.

<sup>18</sup> U.S Catholic Bishops, *Renewing the Earth: An invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in light of Catholic Social Teaching* (Nov. 14, 1991), 6.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

terms of following established dogmas and rituals, the Bishops argue that ecological responsibility is another way of reverencing the Creator.<sup>20</sup>

Other American Roman Catholic theologians have examined the ecological implications of a sacramental Earth. Johnson proposes sacramental concept based on her conviction that Earth is the sphere of divine glory (the image of God) and that the elusive presence of a transcendent God breaks into the fallen world to heal and liberate the ecosphere. When we declare that “Heaven and Earth are filled with the glory of God,” she argues, we sacralize nature. Accordingly, the phrase “‘glory of God’ signifies that the incomprehensible holy mystery of God indwells the natural and human world as source, sustaining power, and the goal of the universe, enlivening and loving it into liberating communion.”<sup>21</sup>

The glorification of God has much to do with the flourishing of the natural world. Spiritually, the contemplative encounter with the natural world gives a sense that Earth is both “revelation and sacrament: revelation, because the invisible grandeur of God can be glimpsed and known experientially in the splendor of the universe, its balance, complexity, creativity, diversity, fruitfulness; and sacrament, because the mystery of the divine, self-giving presence is really mediated through the richness of the heavens and

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>21</sup> Johnson, “Heaven and Earth are Filled with Your Glory,” 91.

Earth. Participating in the glory of God, our whole planet is a beautiful showing forth of divine goodness and generosity.”<sup>22</sup>

Creation, when viewed as a sacrament, reveals God’s invisible presence and grace to the Earth community. Thus, the contemplation of the Creator Spirit revealed in nature ought to lead us into appreciating the presence of God in the cosmos as well as alert us to the sins of biocide, ecocide, and genocide which are threatening Earth community.

The Catholic moral theologian and social ethicist John Hart explores the concept of sacramental universe further. In his book, *Sacramental Commons*, Hart argues that Earth is sacred since it discloses the Spirit’s presence that permeates creation and makes all space sacred. The universe is sacramental in that “it is a revelation of the Spirit’s ongoing creativity and is a place of interaction and relationship between the human and the divine....The cosmos as an integrated whole and in each of its parts can be a sign and experience of divine creativity and a revelation of the Spirit’s presence; an occasion of grace and a conveyor of blessing; and a bearer of sacred creatures, all called ‘very good’ by their Creator.”<sup>23</sup>

Advocating “a creation-centered consciousness,” Hart argues that “all creatures emerge from the dynamic cosmic processes and the evolutionary biological process set in motion at the origins of the universe.”<sup>24</sup> Creation-centered consciousness, he argues,

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>23</sup> John, Hart *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 12.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 17; Cf. xviii.

“includes Earth awareness and engagement” whereby people “recognize their responsibilities not only to the Creator, but to each other, to all life and to Earth. They take note of the inherent elegance, goodness, value, and dignity of creation.”<sup>25</sup> In addition, Hart asserts that since humans are connected to all creatures, they “are an integral part of the biotic community, and provide cosmic self-consciousness...within the vast universe.”<sup>26</sup>

Pristine places are sacramental aspects of Earth, Hart suggests, because they “reveal the Spirit’s loving creativity in their biodiversity, textured topography, and provision of food, water, and shelter” for the Earth community.<sup>27</sup> From this understanding, he argues that Earth’s goods are part of a community “commons” which must be equally shared by all creatures. Conceiving Earth as a commons means that Earth is a shared space and the source of life-providing goods for all creatures. The Earth commons, then, is not intended solely for humans’ use and enjoyment, although as part of the biotic community they share in its benefits.<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, the sacramental commons is the locus of interconnected engagement of Earth communities and the Creator. In this sacramental commons, every creature’s needs

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 61-64.

should be met and respected for “Earth provides for all creatures as they live related to and dependent on each other in integrated bioregions.”<sup>29</sup> He adds,

A sacramental place is naturally a commons: a home shared by all the members of the community of life in which their food and habitat needs are integrated, their competitive needs are balanced, their relationships are interdependent, and their associations are consciously or unconsciously collaborative. It is “naturally” a commons because the eternal numinous presence immanent in the universe creates freely from love, sharing that most essential aspect of intrinsic divine communion with intrinsic creation. The divine spiritual commons of love is imaged in the cosmic natural commons, which concretizes divine creativity and sustains commons residents with commons goods.<sup>30</sup>

In contrast to Johnson who limits the sacramental aspect to the natural world, Hart’s notion of the sacramental commons addresses justice for the poor and the oppressed. Following Pope Paul VI’s argument that the poor are a “sacrament of Christ,” Hart argues that ecological justice advocates the rights of the poor of the Earth and denounces consumerism and unequal distribution of Earth’s natural goods. As Jesus calls on us to meet the needs of our neighbors in an environment where the poor and the whole of creation make up the sacramental universe, every creature has a moral claim to existence. It is from this sacramental consciousness that generational and intergenerational responsibilities are fostered, the limits on Earth’s livable space,

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 62-63.

productive places, and available goods are respected, and space, places and goods are shared equitably.<sup>31</sup>

Arguing that caring for Creation is intrinsic to Christian identity and faith, Hart notes that the terms “sacramental universe” and “sacramental commons” point to the divine immanence in, and divine engagement with, creation and creatures, and articulate the special ongoing relationship of the Creator with creation.<sup>32</sup> Hart advocates an inter-relational mode of existence or a “creatio-centric consciousness.” This mode “integrates creation spirituality and creation ecology in that it allows people to accept their responsibilities to God, to each other, to all life and to the Earth.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, in the current context of “ecological devastation, political domination, wartime destruction, and economic deprivation, the understanding of sacramental commons stimulates exploration of revelatory, prophetic dimensions of Christianity (and of other faith traditions).”<sup>34</sup>

The revelatory and prophetic dimensions of Christianity guided St. Francis of Assisi, who loved and related to nature from this sacramental perspective. Hart compares Francis’s sacramental consciousness to that of Native Americans such as Phillip Deere and Black Elk, who equally had “a sense of creature kinship” and “recognized the unity of being”:

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<sup>31</sup> Hart observes that living in the sacramental commons demands a sacramental consciousness that cares about and for creation as a whole. *Ibid.*, xviii; see also pages, 63-66.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

For Francis, it was a familial creature kinship: others were 'sister' and 'brother.' For Black Elk and Phillip Deere, creature kinship was both familial ('all my relatives') and communal ('winged people,' 'finned people' and 'rooted people,' among other living peoples). Francis extended sibling relationships to abiotic nature such as 'Brother Sky,' although he viewed Earth as both 'mother' and 'sister'; Black Elk and Phillip believed that abiotic nature, including stones, was alive, but they reserved familial terms to parental designations, such as 'Mother Earth' or 'Grandfather Sky.' All three holy men engaged the Creator and all creatures as related beings.<sup>35</sup>

Hart's observation about Native Americans equally applies to other indigenous peoples, whose spirituality is planted in the sacredness of Earth. Apart from being centers of cultic observations, mountains such as *Kilimanjaro* in Tanzania, sacred sights such as *Ngombe Ilede* in Chief Chipepo's area, Zambia, waterfalls like *Mosi-oa-tunya* (popularly known as Victoria Falls), and snakes like *Omueri* among the Luo of Kenya, are visible signs of divine presence among different cultures in Africa.

The realization that Earth's natural goods are part of a sacramental commons complements the concept of *ubuntu*, with its virtues of solidarity, hospitality, and sharing. In African traditional understanding, Earth's natural goods are commons, hence how they are shared is a moral issue. Unfortunately, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund-driven capitalistic ethos, on which the African economy is now built, has taught Africans to undervalue Earth and the poor alike.

Further, the belief that Earth is a commons was behind the power of territorial cults in African societies. Matthew Schoffeleers, Wim van Binsbergen, and Terence

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<sup>35</sup> Hart concludes that "People with a relational consciousness and community commitment respond to the Spirit's call to renew Earth and to explore the wonders of the wider cosmos. They have a spirit of appreciation for the laws of the Creator and are conscious of their responsibility to conserve the integrity of creation." *Ibid.*, 56.

Ranger argue that cultic observances are critical to the sacralization of the land.<sup>36</sup> As manifestations of the ecological aspects of African religion, territorial cults long influenced communal modes of production and distribution of natural goods, and worked against ecological degradation.<sup>37</sup> Droughts, floods, famines, and many other natural disasters were and are still understood ecologically. Among the Tonga people, persistent droughts in the Gwembe area are attributed to the annoyance of their God and ancestors over the forced resettlement.<sup>38</sup> Among the Goba people of the same region, such misfortunes are due to the Tonga people's failure to respect the Goba *malende* (sacred groves) when they were resettled.<sup>39</sup>

### **Theology in Africa and Liberation**

Doing ecological ethics involves wrestling with the dialectic that while African cosmology insists that Earth is a sacramental universe of interconnected spiritual forces, by contrast current economic policies express the ideology that Earth is a repository of endless raw materials. This dialectic is further complicated by the fact that African

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<sup>36</sup> According to Stanlake Samkange and Tommie M. Samkange, the Shona consider land as sacred (*zvinoyera*) and "the real owner of the land [to be] the tutelary spirit, *Mwari* and, to a lesser extent, the various tribal spirits." Stanlake Samkange and Tommie Marie Samkange, *Hunhuism or Ubuntuism: A Zimbabwe Indigenous Political Philosophy* (Salisbury [Harare]: Graham Publishing, 1980), 55.

<sup>37</sup> Terence Ranger, "Religious Studies and political Economy: The Mwari Cult and Peasant Experience in Southern Rhodesia," in *Theoretical exploration of African Religion*, ed., Matthew Schoffeleers and Wim van Binsbergen (London: KPI, 1985): 288; Terence Ranger, "Territorial Cults in the History of Central Africa," *The Journal of African History* 14, no. 4 (1973): 581-597.

<sup>38</sup> Elisabeth Thomson, *Our Gods never Helped us Again --The Tonga People Describe Resettlement and its Aftermath* (Lusaka; Panos Southern Africa, 2005).

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Mr. Patrick Makukisi by the author, November 2006, Lusitu, Zambia.

traditional religion is an eco-religion that places Earth in the hands of the Creator Spirit and ancestors. Current economic policies, however, place natural goods at the mercy of the wealthy and multi-national companies. Sadly Africans would agree with Johnson that

Human beings are woven into the planetary fabric of life; there is no human community without the earth, soil, air, water, and other living species. We evolve amid this radiance of abundant life and are interdependent with it for our own flourishing. So wasting the world has dire consequences for well-being of present and future human generations as well and is, in fact, a practice of intergenerational irresponsibility. Degradation of the earth is also interwoven with social injustices among human beings, for it is poor people, people of color, and colonized nations that bear the brunt of exploitation of land, resources, and their own labor for the benefit of the wealthy, industrialized nations. In fact, structures of social domination are chief among the ways that exploitation of the earth is accomplished.<sup>40</sup>

African theologians have addressed issues of justice from the perspective of political liberation. The late David J. Bosch, one of the leading African missiologists and theologians, argued that liberation theologies are a multifaceted phenomenon with many names.<sup>41</sup> Liberation theologies, Bosch argues, utilize people's experiences to challenge some forms of injustices. For this reason, theologies of liberation and, to some extent, inculturation sought to protest against systemic oppression and injustices locally and globally. On the local front, those who were oppressed because of their skin color,

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<sup>40</sup> Johnson, "Heaven and Earth are Filled with Your Glory," 95.

<sup>41</sup> According to Bosch, liberation theology has many branches: "black theology, Hispanic and Amerindian theologies in the United States; liberation theology in Latin America, feminist theology, South African Black theology, and many other brands of theologies across Africa, Asia, and the South Pacific." David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis books, 1999), 432.

protested against second class treatment by established powers. On the international stage, they objected to unjust treatment by the First World.<sup>42</sup>

Bosch objects to Ester Boserup's argument (to be addressed in chapter five) that development or technological advancements would solve Third World problems. This argument "assumed one way traffic without any reciprocity – development aid and skills moved from Western 'donors' to Third-World 'recipients' who had often not even been consulted; and it operated on the assumption that nothing in the rich North needed to change."<sup>43</sup> From this perspective, liberation theologies challenged the status quo and asked for changes in human and world affairs in order to bring about a just world. Although some African scholars treated matters of social justice as different from theological questions of salvation, Bosch argues that we cannot have African theology without social ethics since "ethics is the hands and feet and face of theology while theology is the vital organs, the soul of ethics."<sup>44</sup>

### **Social Justice and Ecological Justice**

Separation of social justice from theology was responsible, in part, for the sidelining of nature in African theological discourse. Since the concept of humans as the

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 432-438.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 434.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 437.

“image of God” was used as the fundamental basis for challenging oppression, African theologians failed to link human exploitation to Earth degradation.

Nonetheless, traditional Africa saw a direct link between the two since it placed enormous value on the land and on Earth’s natural goods. As a result, when scholars analyzed the distribution of natural goods in modern Africa without paying attention to how Western economics negated Earth, they did not just contradict African cosmology but also created a cognitive dissonance among Africans who viewed the new religion as heavenly bound. Unlike ancestors and the Supreme Being who were guardians of Earth, the Christian God appeared to be unconcerned about the natural world.

Since the abuse of nature has direct impact on the poor and vice-versa, it can be argued that the liberation of humanity cannot be disassociated from redemption of nature. In fact, until humanity accepts responsibility for the ecological crisis and its impact on the poor of Earth, life on Earth is short-lived.

The quest for ecological liberation is incomplete without addressing how natural goods are shared among the world’s population. Contrary to the long-held assumption that natural goods are limitless, today we are learning that they are very limited. According to Paul Hawken, “The global economy has already exceeded carrying capacity-that point beyond which further growth will decay and effectively destroy its host. If our planet – its land and sky and oceans – were growing 2 percent a year, we could posit sustainable economic growth of a similar rate. But the earth is stable. It does

not grow.”<sup>45</sup> Gary Gardner adds that “nature is the boundary setter; economic growth will be limited by the availability of forest area, farmland or oil, and by the capacity of the atmosphere, rivers, oceans and landfills to absorb our wastes.”<sup>46</sup> Therefore, the desire for socioeconomic justice should be discussed through eco-justice lenses.

### Natural Rights and Rights of Nature

According to Nicholas Wolterstorff, justice is based on the belief that human beings have natural entitlements or rights to certain goods. A “society is just insofar as its members – both individual members and its institutional and communal members – enjoy those goods to which they have a right. To fail to enjoy one’s right is to be wronged.”<sup>47</sup> Here justice is inherent in natural rights and to be denied these rights is to be wronged.

While philosophers have viewed natural rights as a product of the Enlightenment, Wolterstorff contends otherwise. The fact that the 12<sup>th</sup> Century canon lawyers appealed to “natural human rights” suggests the Bible as the source of our conception of these rights.<sup>48</sup> To him, human rights can hardly be defended from a secular position since

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<sup>45</sup>Paul Hawken, *The Ecology of Commerce: A Declaration of Sustainability* (New York: Harper Business, 1993), 32. See also Gary T. Gardner, *Inspiring Progress: Religions’ Contributions to Sustainable Development* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006), 28ff.

<sup>46</sup> Gary T. Gardner, *Inspiring Progress*, 62.

<sup>47</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, “How Social Justice Got Me and Why It Never Left,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76, no. 3 (September 2008): 669.

<sup>48</sup> He asks, “And where did the recognition by the Church Fathers of the phenomenon of natural rights come from, or was it original with them? The conclusion to which I found myself was that it comes not from the eudemonistic moral theorists of the pagan antiquity but from the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.” *Ibid.*, 672.

“there is no adequate secular grounding for human rights, and unlikely there ever will be one; the only adequate grounding is the theistic grounding which holds that each and every human being bears the image of God and is equally loved by God.”<sup>49</sup> Thus, we seek social justice because we believe that “each and every human being, no matter what she has done, no matter what capacities she has or lacks, possesses a dignity that must never be violated.”<sup>50</sup> Defending the wronged is therefore paramount to Christian ethics and spirituality.

Wolterstorff is right in planting natural human rights in God but unlike Hart, he fails to extend these natural rights to Earth. The Christian doctrine of creation makes it clear that every creature is the reflection of God; hence the current crisis is a result of sinful actions that wrong Mother Earth. Of course, the cry of Earth for liberation is ever before us. Siltation, polluted rivers that are destroying marine species, desertification, and species extinction are harms to biota whose wronged voices we can hardly ignore. Justice as an attempt to speak up for the wronged applies equally to the entire created order.

### **Roots and Expressions of African Liberation**

Wolterstorff's contention that natural rights are a product of the Bible aids an argument that African liberation theologies should be traced to the Bible and African traditional religion rather than to the Americas. In many respects, Africans read the Bible

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 673.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 679.

as the wronged of Earth, whose natural and ancestral rights were violated. They also read the Bible to inform themselves of the liberative aspects of the Christian God.

Consequently, they reject those aspects of Christianity which seem to contradict their respect for and relatedness to all life and Earth, values expressed long before the missionaries arrived. Thus, they might still affirm that their prior Christian and African roots are sufficient, focus more on their ancient, indigenous traditions, and note that incorporation of perspectives from the Americas is unnecessary.

In this vein, mission historians have argued that an African theology of liberation was conceived as early as 1700; long before it was developed in the Americas. Pointing to a Congolese girl, Kimpa Vita (baptized as Beatrice), for example, Bosch argues that as early as 1700 Beatrice protested against oppressive structures of the Roman Catholic Church. Although Bosch is right in locating African liberation theology in the continent, he nevertheless neglects to point to the African religious roots of Beatrice's theology. That Beatrice taught that Christ appeared as a black man in Sao Salvador; that all his apostles were black; that only a black Christ would identify himself with Africans by casting his lot with the suffering masses and that the black Christ would restore the old Congolese kingdom and establish paradise on earth<sup>51</sup> suggests the African traditional

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<sup>51</sup> Elizabeth Isichei argues that Beatrice absorbed her idea of spirit possession from traditional religion. Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 63-66. As expected, Beatrice's ministry attracted political and religious attention, and in 1706 she was arrested and burnt at the stake for heresy; she died chanting the name of Jesus. David J. Bosch, "Currents and Crosscurrents in South African Theology," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 6. Fasc. 1 (1974): 1. Similarly, Phillip Jenkins notes that African Christianity has always carried a liberation aspect. In addition to discussing Vita Kimpa, Jenkins analyzes how Harris of Nigeria, John Chilembwe of Malawi, Alice Lenshina Mulenga of Zambia, and other African charismatic individuals developed theologies that sought to empower their followers to oppose oppression from both colonial and ecclesiastical domination. Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 48-51.

heritage of her protest Christology. Of course Beatrice did not use the term Black Theology but her theology shares much with liberation theologies that remonstrate against the injustices that trod on the rights of the oppressed.

Arguments that trace African liberation theology to Latin America and the United States of America ignore African mission history. African liberation theologies definitely share much with the Americas, but they also have their own contextual history. Kenyatta's observation that missionaries gave Africans the Bible in exchange for their land is right. But Kenyatta did not realize that when Africans read the Bible, they made the most of their ancestors and the biblical God in demanding their land back. In this case, protest movements mushroomed across the continent as the result of missionary endeavors that showed Africans the contradictions of a colonial system that preached justice while practicing injustice.

Most of these protests were highly religious, but some of them were highly political and used established missionary Churches to wrest power from colonialists. In line with Wolterstorff, the biblical sense of natural rights as a divine gift allowed Africans to see that they were the wronged.<sup>52</sup> As such they confronted the oppressor with the just demands of the biblical God who called for nothing less than a radical *metanoia* from the oppressor while upholding their ancestral birthright to the land.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Bosch, however, argues that South Africa Black Theology should be discussed within a wider framework of many theological influences, including African theology/ies, American Black Theology, African Traditional Religions, African Independent Churches, and a combination of American Black and African Theology. Bosch, "Currents and Crosscurrents in South African Theology," 5-14.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

Robert I. Rotberg, a leading historian on Sub-Saharan Africa, affirms this argument when he contends that “the tenets of Christianity and Western civilization were ones that prescribed equality between men (sic) and of opportunity. By denying Africans such equality, by assisting in the conquest of Central Africa, and by generally condoning the discriminatory policies of government officials and settlers, the missionaries set in motion a rethinking of this ambivalence between precept and practice that, in time, contributed to the growth of indigenous discontent and the rise of nationalism.”<sup>54</sup>

Rotberg further argues that religious expression provided the only means by which aggrieved Africans could reject foreign domination, voice aspirations displeasing to their rulers, and achieve prominence outside the colonial context.<sup>55</sup> He notes that “the religious rejection took many forms, and many sects represented a seemingly infinite variety of possible responses to colonial, spiritual and temporal stimuli. Africans accepted the prophets, seceded from orthodox white-run mission churches and, in endless ways, followed the particular paths first illuminated by Chilembwe [and many other prophets].”<sup>56</sup>

Counting by the number of religious and political protest movements that arose from missionary founded Churches during the colonial and post-colonial eras, we can

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<sup>54</sup> Robert I. Rotberg, *Rise of Nationalism in Central Africa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 11.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

conclude that despite employing traditional beliefs as its main hermeneutic tool, theology in Africa somehow carried some protest elements. As Janheinz Jahn rightly notes:

Far from throwing off their own philosophy and religion and subjecting themselves to the foreign view, the Africans have again and again assimilated the foreign religion to their thought. The missionaries, in their effort to bring God as close as possible to the ‘childish Africans,’ have always stressed his presence, his fatherly relations to suffering humanity who need his help, and have thus put him in his place among [African gods].... It ...[is] worth emphasizing that ... the system of African philosophy remains intact and where hybrid forms arise, Christian belief is adapted to African religion rather than the other way round.<sup>57</sup>

Colonial regimes’ failure to acknowledge the revolutionary power of the African traditional religions when integrated with Biblical witness was definitely a factor behind the liberation of Africa, as instances from the southern region of the continent make clear. Desmond Tutu, for example, scolds the apartheid government of South Africa for banning Black theological literature while placing the Bible in the hands of Africans. In Zimbabwe, Marthinus L. Daneel shows how the *Mwari* cult was instrumental in liberation struggles.<sup>58</sup> According to Daneel, the authority to wage the war of liberation was founded on the authority of the Shona High God, Mwari. He observes that the cult blamed the white settlers for both drought and the pests that afflicted peasant society. For this reason, the cult provided “religious sanctions for the revolt and advice to the rebels.”

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<sup>57</sup> Janheinz Jahn, *Muntu: An Outline of the New African Culture*, translated by Marjorie Greene (New York: Grove Press Inc. 1961), 117-118.

<sup>58</sup> Marthinus Daneel shows how the relationship between the ancestors’ war council of spirit mediums and *Mwari* (God) was behind the war of liberation (*chimurenga*) that led to Africans regaining their land. Marthinus Daneel, *The God of the Matopos* (London and The Hague: Mouton, 1970). In other works, however, Daneel also shows how Christianity and African traditional religions worked hand in hand to aid freedom fighters. See Mafuranhunzi Gumbo, *Guerrilla Snuff* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1995).

<sup>59</sup> In this regard, the “cult played a significant role in ritually approving, supporting, and coordinating a large-scale liberation struggle.”<sup>60</sup>

Sadly, however, post-independence African theology took a major paradigm shift. Rather than engaging issues of oppression, it focused on classical ecclesiology and salvation. In so doing, it ignored the power issues in churches and new independent states.

One explanation for this shift can be attributed to what Amina Mama calls nationalistic and pan-Africanist ethic.<sup>61</sup> According to Mama, the African intellectual culture emerged out of a politics of liberation. As a result, she argues, “the first generation intellectuals were all involved in the anticolonial and nationalistic movements, and there was no middle ground, as any thinking person who identified as African was expected to join up and work in support of national and continental liberation. – The nationalistic ethic was not separable from the broader pan-Africanist philosophy.”<sup>62</sup>

The liberation ethic was, however, undisciplined, Mama argues, since it sought change at all levels of social reality.<sup>63</sup> In most cases, this ethic influenced how African intellectuals viewed “post-colonial states, even when they defined development to suit

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<sup>59</sup> Daneel, *African Earthkeepers*, 19.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Amina Mama, “Is it Ethical to Study Africa? Preliminary Thoughts on Scholarship and Freedom,” *African Studies Review, The African Studies Association* 50, no. 1 (April 2007): 7-9.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

themselves, ceased to serve the people that brought them to power and became increasingly dictatorial.”<sup>64</sup>

Because African theologians sought to work within the framework of colonial theological and Church structures which were mostly imported from the North, African mission Churches faced further protests that led to the formation of new indigenous initiated churches. While officially sidelined as lacking theological grounding, today these Churches have millions of adherents across sub-Saharan Africa.

Marthinus Daneel, a leading scholar on African Independent Churches (AICs), asserts that although African Independent Churches are not generally credited with having a liberation theology *per se*, they “developed their own unique brand of religio-cultural liberation.”<sup>65</sup> In similar fashion to Rotberg who views the formation of religious protest movements as a form of liberation, Daneel argues that

Their exodus from the religious white house of slavery was evidence of their emancipation from imperialist structures which the mission churches had maintained by means of funding and staffing. By ridding themselves of trusteeship of Western Churches, the Independents managed to shed austere, rational, and dogmatically ‘correct’ forms of worship and find their own religious identity in dramatic, emotionally uninhibited religious practices. Organizational emancipation led to liturgical innovation and transformation.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.,10. Mama argues that to some extent, the liberatory ethic influences African scholarship. She nevertheless notes that today, for “every book justifying a dictatorship, there have been also a dozen of critical texts. And for every academic hired by the dictators, there have been also dozens who refused appointments, who were hired only to be fired when they did not toe the line, or who resigned once the writing was on the wall.” Ibid., 11.

<sup>65</sup> Daneel, *African Earthkeepers*, 21.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 21.

Interestingly, while mainline Churches protested against oppression using Western theological tools, AICs used the Bible and African traditions as instruments of political and ecclesiological liberation. Their theology of liberation is, however, lived rather than academically thought out. As Daneel rightly observes:

Unlike Black Theology where one finds a combination of academically sophisticated sociopolitical analysis and theological reflection...the AICs *enact* their own brand of liberation, unobtrusively yet forcefully at the grassroots of African society. Here, liberation belongs to the very being of the church: every form of ecclesiastic articulation expresses some form of independence from Western encroachment or control...They espouse an unwritten, heterogeneous theology in which liberation is often a more intuitively lived reality than explicit theme of sermons or planned programs of actions.<sup>67</sup>

Daneel also points out that much of the liberative aspect of the AIC's enacted theology is expressed through song, dance, sermons, and the adaptation and re-evaluation of indigenous culture and religion, "the process that led to numerous church rites informed by local African worldviews."<sup>68</sup> For AICs therefore, the Bible and African traditions show that God and ancestors are always on the side of the wronged.

The above realities have led African theologians to acknowledge the liberative role of Jesus *vis-a-vis sociopolitical and spiritual oppression*.<sup>69</sup> Thus, apart from arguing

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<sup>67</sup> Marthinus Daneel, "African Initiated Churches in Southern Africa: Protest Movements or Mission Churches?," Boston University, A.H. no. 33 (2000), 16.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> According to Priscilla Pope-Levison and John R. Levison, African theology must be liberation theology. Theology in Africa should address issues of excessive wealth amidst dehumanizing poverty, exploitation of Africans and Africa's natural goods by internal and external forces, monopoly of power by the presidents, lack of freedom among many social issues. Priscilla Pope-Levison and John R. Levison, *Jesus in the Global Context* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 100-101.

that the Church must side with the oppressed and work for their liberation from colonial forces, today African theology is emphasizing liberation from post-independence political and economic oppression. But as already observed, human redemption is directly linked to that of the environmental; hence African theologians ought to analyze the doctrine of redemption from an eco-justice standpoint. In doing so, African theology will work to liberate life in its fullness.

### **Abundant Life in a Capitalistic World**

Robert J. Schreiter argues that the collapse of the Soviet Union did not only affect political and economic forces but theological forces as well. According to Schreiter, the collapse of socialism and the end of apartheid in South Africa inaugurated a new global world, signaling the end of a bipolar world that reigned for many decades. Whereas the collapse of the Soviet Union damaged the reputation of socialism as a form of world economy, it also promoted democratic capitalism as the only viable economic order. He argues that this situation has led the world into concluding that we do not have any other economic alternative to capitalism with the exception of isolated cases.<sup>70</sup> As a result, democratic capitalism has become the most favored political ideology across the globe. Even in Latin America, Schreiter argues, where liberation theology influenced political developments, the democratic ideology has now become the only alternative.

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<sup>70</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 101.

Against the established argument that liberation theologians were pro-socialists, Schreiter argues that they were “more anticapitalist than pro-socialist; their principal concern was to identify and denounce the oppressive consequences of capitalism rather than to prescribe economic alternatives. Many chose not to make such prescriptions because they did not see that as the task of theologians – and there is some justification for such a stance. Their concern was for the dehumanizing consequences of capitalism as seen through the prism of the Gospel and Jesus’ own way of life.”<sup>71</sup>

He nevertheless notes that the collapse of socialism had a negative impact on liberation theology’s utopia and prophecy. Without this horizon, it “becomes very difficult to focus, mobilize, and sustain a struggle for a different kind of world.”<sup>72</sup> This conclusion does not mean that the era of liberation theology ended with socialism. Rather, liberation theology should redirect its energy to other issues such as the liberation of “women, the indigenous, and those of African descent.”<sup>73</sup> One would add ecology as another subject that liberation theology ought to address.

Accordingly, Schreiter suggests that the new task of liberation theology should also include resisting and denouncing oppressive structures, and critiquing, advocating, reconstructing, and transforming social and economic structures in general. For example, Gary Gardner argues that despite the world getting richer than it was in the 1800s,

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

“income inequality – relative and absolute, international and global – increased tremendously.”<sup>74</sup> That globalization does little to address world poverty is a reason to argue that liberation theology still has a vital role to play in denouncing forces that promote and encourage the exploitation of the poor.

A similar point is made by Jonathan Bonk who quotes the World Bank’s World Development Report 2006 observation that while global absolute poverty rates declined between 1981 and 2001, the number of poor people in Sub-Saharan Africa almost doubled during the same period, “from approximately 160 million to 313 million.”<sup>75</sup> So, although the theological focus of liberation theology has changed, “its time has by no means passed; there is still much for it to do. Still, adjustments have to be made as it refocuses its efforts. Its proponents are correct: the issues surrounding poverty and oppression are still very much with us. But our mode of response must be commensurate with the changed conditions under which the world now operates.”<sup>76</sup>

Not all scholars attribute the collapse of the Soviet Union to socialism. Leonardo Boff, for example, attributes its collapse to the dictatorial leadership that characterized socialist States. While the Marxist political ideal had people’s participation in decision-making as its goal, Boff notes that socialist leaders closed themselves off from the very

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<sup>74</sup> Gardner, *Inspiring Progress*, 34-36. See also Jonathan J. Bonk, *Missions and Money*, Revised and Expanded (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 3-10.

<sup>75</sup> Bonk, *Missions and Money*, 5ff.

<sup>76</sup> Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 114.

people they sought to represent. This arrogance cost socialism its political and economic power in Eastern Europe and forced people to revolt against it.

Rejecting the argument that socialism failed the world, Boff maintains that it actually banished famine if viewed from the Third World perspective. Pointing to China and Cuba in the 1990s, he argues that these countries have created more egalitarian relationships among people than most First World countries. Despite the fact that one-sixth of the world's population resides in China, the communist government manages to feed its people three meals a day and educate all its children. This is in contrast to Brazil which, at approximately the same time, had millions of people on the streets while half the population was barely literate.<sup>77</sup> Based on this comparison, Boff asserts that it is misleading to argue that the collapse of socialism means the triumph of capitalism.

As for the role of Marxist tools in the development of liberation theology, Boff responds that liberation theology was rooted in the political and theological experiences of the poor. From the political point of view, "it saw that the poor were a social and epistemological locus; that is, that their cause, their specific interests, their resistance and liberation struggle, and their dreams, allowed a particular and specific reading of history and society."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 94-5. Boff wrote these statistics and social analysis prior to the election of Ignacio Lula Da Silva, the socialist labor organizer who has effected social change in Brazil since his landslide election as its president in 2002, and was inaugurated on 1 January 2003 as Brazil's thirty fifth President. His campaign had the support of Boff and other liberation theologians, and of Christian base communities.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

Arguing from an African perspective, Desmond Tutu agrees with Boff when he counters critics of African liberation theologies who have linked it to Marxist thought. To him, African liberation theology is based on the African understanding of *ubuntu* and the biblical prophetic literature that empowers the oppressed to oppose all sorts of injustices. Tutu maintains that his religion is “what Marx castigated as the opiate of the people.”<sup>79</sup> As with other African liberation theologians, Tutu adds that the Church cannot be neutral when it comes to injustice and oppression. If one claims to be neutral, s/he has taken sides with the oppressor, for God shares in the sufferings of the world.

In eco-theological terms, God and our ancestors are fellow sufferers not only with humanity but with nature. As Boff observes,

Liberation theology and ecological discourse have something in common: they stem from two wounds that are bleeding. The first, the wound of poverty and wretchedness, tears the social fabric of millions and millions of poor people the world over. The second, systematic aggression against the earth, destroys the equilibrium of the planet, threatened by the depredation made by a type of development undertaken by contemporary societies, now spread throughout the world. Both lines of reflection stem from a cry: the cry of the poor for life, liberty and beauty (see Exod. 3.7) in the case of liberation; the cry of the earth groaning under oppression (see Rom. 8.22-3) in that of ecology. Both seek liberation: one of the poor by themselves, as organized historical agents, conscientized and linked to other allies who take up their cause and their struggle; the other of the earth through a new alliance between it and human beings, in a brotherly/sisterly relationship and with a type of sustainable development that will respect the different ecosystems and guarantee future generations a good quality of life.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Desmond Tutu, *God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time*. (New York: Doubleday Religion, 2004), 65.

<sup>80</sup> Leonardo Boff, “Liberation Theology and Ecology: Alternative, Confrontation or Complementarities,” in *Ecology and Poverty* ed. Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo (Maryknoll: Orbis books, Concilium, 1995), 67.

In his book, *Earth in Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit*, then Senator and now former Vice President, Al Gore attributes the failure of socialism to suppression of political freedom. Unlike Boff, however, Gore accepts the idea that the collapse of socialism in Europe meant victory for democratic capitalism in theory and practice. Instead of celebrating the victory of capitalism, Gore argues that unless the shortfalls of democratic capitalism are addressed, its establishment as the world's economy will result in major ecological disasters. This is because capitalism puts value on what human hands have made and does little to consider the poor or “measure the full value of major parts of our world.”<sup>81</sup> A car depreciates in value after some years of use, but capitalism does not consider the depreciation of Earth despite countless years of exploitation.<sup>82</sup>

Gore's observations have critical ecological implications for Africa. The uncontrolled exploitation of Africa's environment amidst the call for economic development demands proactive ethical-theological responses. Unfortunately, whereas theologians are prophetically demanding justice for oppressed humanity, Africa and her natural goods remains hostage to global democratic capitalism.

Most theologians agree that the concept of justice should be extended to the rest of creation. While traditional theology taught us to view nature from the perspective of dominion, as evidenced in Genesis and taught in Christian catechisms, Tutu argues that

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<sup>81</sup> Senator Al Gore, *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit* (New York: Plume, 1993), 183.

<sup>82</sup> Like Gore, David Korten, an economist and international development expert argues that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) does not take into account resource depletion. David Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2001).

African theology should be above creedal formulations. This is because creedal formulations are helpful only to the extent that they assist humanity to come “closer to God and to truth.”<sup>83</sup>

Tutu insists that the first chapters of Genesis should be understood as myths rather than scientific truths since they “were not intended to tell the how, but much more the why and by whom of creation. Those chapters are more like poetry than prose, replete with religious and not scientific truths, conveying profound truths about us, about God, and about the universe we inhabit.”<sup>84</sup> Tutu’s observation challenges not only African theology, but also our interpretation of the book of Genesis on which the doctrine of dominion is primarily based. The first chapters of Genesis are not definitive of human–nature relationship. Today’s scientific knowledge and African traditional wisdom paint the universe as profoundly interconnected; our reading of Genesis should reflect this current understanding. Failure to do so will result in Africa’s failure to conserve the continent for future generations. In short, Africa’s attitude towards nature will determine whether future generations will experience abundant life.

### **Christ the Liberator of Earth**

African cosmologies played an important role in organizing Africans to stand up against exploitation. The *Mau Mau* uprising in Kenya, the *Chimurenga* in Zimbabwe, the *Maji-Maji* uprising in Tanzania, the Sudanese *Mahdiya*, the Zulu disturbances in Natal,

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<sup>83</sup> Tutu, *God Has a Dream*, 105.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

the *Nyabingi* cult of Uganda, and the case of Beatrice (discussed above) all show how Africans incorporated their religious worldviews in addressing political and social crises.

Robert I. Rotberg, who has followed and documented these movements across Africa, argues that they resulted from a perennial quest for freedom from the externally imposed restraints of colonial and postcolonial societies.<sup>85</sup> Writing about the role Christianity and African traditional religion played in these uprisings, Rotberg notes that “Each [movement] used the cement of religion and ritual to fashion a following and sanctify violence.”<sup>86</sup> African theologians have also acknowledged the cementing role the two religious cosmologies played in diverse struggles. For instance, Salathiel K. Madziyire narrates how Africans appealed to both Christianity and African traditional religion during the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (U.D.I) by the White Rhodesians. He argues that during the time of crisis, Africans tend to hide their Christian faith and return to ancestor worship, “offering sacrifices to their ancestors, renewing the old religion which really has no place in this Christian, civilized world.... It appears that political change in Rhodesia affects the faith of the whole people and of the whole Church.”<sup>87</sup> Indeed, Christian missionaries could have taught Africans to ignore taboos, traditional wisdom, and the traditional concept of God, but in times of crisis Africans

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<sup>85</sup> Robert I. Rotberg, *The Rise of Nationalism in Central Africa: The Making of Malawi and Zambia 1873-1964* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 10-11.

<sup>86</sup> Robert I. Rotberg (ed.), *Rebellion in Black Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), xiii.

<sup>87</sup> Salathiel K. Madziyire, “Heathen Practices in the Urban and Rural Parts of Marandellas Area and their Effects upon Christianity,” in *Themes in the Christian History of Central Africa*, ed., T. O. Ranger and John Weller (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 81-82.

looked (and still look) to their traditional religions for solutions. In this regard, both religions provided the tools for the sacralization of the violence of liberation.

Ecologically, just as social, economic and political oppression attracted theological and ethical reflections in postcolonial States, the oppression of Earth ought to attract similar responses. Samson Gitau, for example, argues that African cosmologies are vital in developing African ecological ethics. While Gitau takes note of the ecological sensitivity of African cosmologies revealed in many myths and beliefs, it is the “doctrine of dominion” that controls his analysis of human – nature relations.<sup>88</sup> Following Aristotelian and traditional Christian concepts of nature, he asserts that humans have “unique dominion” over the earth “due to their unique relationship with God. He set human beings midway between himself as a creator and the rest of creation, animate an (sic) inanimate.”<sup>89</sup> Nonetheless, Gitau argues that dominion should be characterized with love and care since, “our dominion over the earth has been delegated to us by God, with the view that [we] co-operat[e] with him and shar[e] its produce with others.... ‘Dominion’ is not a synonym for ‘destruction.’ Since we hold it in trust, we have to manage it responsibly and productively not only for our own sake but also for subsequent generations.”<sup>90</sup> As already observed, however, some theologians have moved from this traditional position and have attached intrinsic value to creation.

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<sup>88</sup> Samson K. Gitau, *Environmental Crisis: A Challenge for African Christianity* (Nairobi: Acton Publishing, 2000), 147.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 144-146.

Furthermore, Gitau does not address the link between human poverty and environmental degradation. Neither does he pay attention to the link between human liberation and ecological liberation. Unlike other ecologists who advocate extending the concept of biblical justice to the rest of nature, his theology operates within the framework of traditional anthropocentric ideologies. The African worldview or *cosmovision*, by contrast, views humanity as part of nature rather than the crown of creation. Therefore, advancing a theology that puts humanity over nature in Africa is bad ecological theological ethics.

### **Ecological Liberation: African Earthkeepers**

Building on the Zimbabwean liberation struggle of *Chimurenga* that led to the political liberation of Zimbabwe, Martinus Daneel develops an applied ethic of Earthkeeping. Unlike the old liberation war, the soldiers in the new *Chimurenga* are Christians and traditionalists who are dedicated to healing the Earth through tree-planting. It is worth pointing out that by choosing the metaphor of “war of liberation” (*hondo yamiti*) to define their Earth-healing ministry, Earthkeepers planted their ecological struggle within the Shona worldview while pointing to the seriousness of deforestation on Earth community.

Just as liberation movements relied on African cosmology and Christianity for their struggles, Daneel argues, the ecological movement should do the same. In the case of Zimbabwe, appealing to both religious heritages has resulted in planting over three million trees. Known for his extensive study of the Shona people of Zimbabwe, Daneel is

the first African theologian to link political liberation struggles with environmental responsibility and action.

Just as the authority of Mwari and the Christian God brought together freedom fighter during the liberation war, the two religious heritages united African traditionalists and Christians in the ministry of tree-planting. Arguably, the legitimacy of the Earthkeepers's tree planting ministry is centered on the ecological understanding of Mwari's activities as the god of Earth. Just as traditionalist Earthkeepers' consulted Mwari of the Matopo because they understood him as the god of fertility, Christian Earthkeepers viewed Jesus Christ as the Earth-healer. In other words, for Christian Earthkeepers, human redemption and Earth liberation are of critical importance to the Creator God.

Until recently, African Christology (which is the most examined theme of African Christian theology) has been subject to a dominance of anthropocentric interpretations, but Earthkeepers challenge these interpretations. For Earthkeepers, the quest for ecological liberation is addressed within the framework of Christology. African theologians have typically limited the suffering Christ to sociopolitical dilemmas of colonial and post-colonial Africa.<sup>91</sup> To African Earthkeepers, however, the suffering Christ identifies with the entire Earth Community. For instance, Earthkeepers celebrate Holy Communion while holding seedlings in their hands. According to Daneel, "The seedlings in Earthkeeper's hands at the communion table and the seedling addressed as

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 171.

brother or sister are a clear recognition of the entire earth community as partakers or recipients of Holy Communion, a way of extending the hope of reconciliation and new life, emanating from the cross, to all creation.”<sup>92</sup> In this way, Earthkeepers relate Christian Christology to the environmental crisis.<sup>93</sup>

This understanding suggests a wholistic Christology. Just as the suffering Christ is involved in all structures that cause Earth to bleed from ecological injustice, he is involved in the plight of widows, women, ethnic minorities and gays and lesbians. In the African context, Christ suffered at hands of his own people and foreign powers, and he can equally sympathize with the suffering of the masses in post-independence Africa in the face of globalization.

On the conceptual level, the linking of *Chimurenga* (war of liberation) to ecological emancipation in Zimbabwe further highlights the exigency of the ecological crisis. Apart from inserting the concept of interconnectedness as vital to African eco-theology, Earthkeepers frame ecological emancipation in the context of “sanctified violence” for the liberation of Earth. Just as colonialism undermined abundant life for African communities and was defeated using African religious tools, environmental degradation demands no less. Earthkeepers further suggest that ecological responsibility is a battle that needs consolidated community efforts. In communities where religion encompasses every aspect of life, paying attention to Mwari, ancestors, and Jesus’s

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<sup>92</sup> Daneel, *African Earthkeepers*, 215.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

teaching becomes imperative. On a continent where family relationships and belonging are paramount, calling trees “brothers” and “sisters” points to the kinship of creation as well as to our own understanding of *ubuntu*.

African Earthkeepers were the first to ritualize nature both theologically and eucharistically, but Paul Santmire recently has addressed this subject in his new book, *Ritualizing Nature: Renewing Christian Liturgy in a Time of Crisis*. Santmire maintains that the traditional understanding of Christian liturgy shows some ecological awareness that must be revisited in this time of ecological crisis. As in many other Western Christian-focused books, Santmire’s work advocates planting Earth-healing spirituality in St. Francis of Assisi’s voluntary poverty or frugality.<sup>94</sup> Unlike Daneel who applies the Eucharistic “ritual” through a tree planting ministry, Santmire develops his theology by illustrating the ecological value of Western Christian Eucharistic liturgy. He argues that the Christian Eucharistic liturgy can be instrumental in addressing the ecological crisis of our time. Although he does not mention Daneel’s Earthkeepers’ Eucharist, Santmire does argue that Christians encounter the cosmic Christ through the Eucharist ritual.

Santmire’s failure to be aware of or recognize such practices as African Earthkeepers’ Eucharist, illustrates the unwillingness of some Western scholars to learn from non-Western theological and ethical traditions. If his definition of ritualizing nature means “standing within the cultural world of Christian worship and seeing what one can see as one contemplates the world of nature from that stand point” is right, then African

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<sup>94</sup> Paul H. Santmire, *Ritualizing Nature: Renewing Christian Liturgy in a Time of Crisis* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 209.

Earthkeepers have done exactly that.<sup>95</sup> Rather than defending the ecological bankruptcy of Western Christianity and Christianity in general, African Earthkeepers contemplate the Cosmic Christ from the Christian liturgy of tree planting Eucharist.

It is through the spirituality of Earthhealing that African Earthkeepers address trees as “brothers,” “sisters,” and “friends”: “You are my brother...my sister. Today I plant you in this soil. I will give you water for your growth.”<sup>96</sup> While the motif shares much with St. Francis or Western Christian mystics, the correlation is somewhat incidental. Their motif is entirely based on Earthkeepers’ sense of communion with creation, through which they learn to view “trees and plants not only as an exploitative resource but as brothers and sisters whose sanctity requires respect.”<sup>97</sup> Their Earthhealing spirituality reminds them of the fact that in the Lord’s presence, humans and trees acquire the same status as brothers and sisters.<sup>98</sup>

Like many African community cultures, Earthkeepers share understandings and practices based on myths that viewed nonhuman creatures as brothers and sisters. Among these traditions is that of treating all creatures within the vicinity of the sacred groves as part of the Sacred. As observed in chapter two, the Tonga and Goba people of the Kariba believe that within the vicinity of the *malende*, creatures cannot be killed without dire

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>96</sup> Daneel, *African Earthkeepers*, 171.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 95

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 168

consequences from the spirit world. Accordingly, the Shona believe that all large trees (*miti-mikuru*) belong to *samarombo* – ancestors who reside in their branches. Felling such trees needed the approval of chiefs and spirit mediums. Failure to do so “meant fighting the *samarombo*, thus disturbing the equilibrium between the living and the deceased in the local community.”<sup>99</sup> After outlining the ways in which this evil act could be averted, Daneel observes that ecological offenders were sometimes ostracized when ancestors rejected the conciliatory ritual. Hence “the protection of *miti mikuru* was a distinct feature of traditional ancestor veneration.”<sup>100</sup> In contrast, the association that African Earthkeepers express in Holy Communion is founded on a traditional understanding of *ubuntu* that associated the divine and ancestors with nature.

Most theologians put much emphasis on the social aspects of *ubuntu*, but African Earthkeepers point to its ecological aspect. In fact, *ubuntu* implies identifying and respecting the intrinsic value of God’s creation. Any person who demeans this inherent value cannot be said to possess *ubuntu* at all. For this reason, what it means to be truly human (*ubuntu*) cannot be understood without addressing the kinship of all creation. It is to this reality that the incarnation of Christ points. Christ’s incarnation does not just announce God’s kinship with humanity; rather it announces that God can be found in creation even as creation is found in God. It is to this theological conviction that the ethics of *ubuntu* ought to be analyzed.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 92-93.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 93.

### **Understanding *Ubuntu***

Early works of missionaries and anthropologists are usually accused of generalizations in their presentation of Africa. This is true, bearing in mind that Africa is too big and too complex to be studied as one. That each community culture has its own heritage and customs means that one needs to be careful not to be caught in this colonial consolidation of cultures. Reflecting on whether advocates of the African Renaissance are justified, bearing in mind that we have so many differences among cultures, Elias K. Bongmba argues that there is a need to consider broad themes that African States confront while articulating local and particular ideas. He notes that those who are enthusiastic about broader themes usually err on the side of generalization, while particularists risk ignoring the common themes which Africans share. “A balanced approach that emphasizes local ideas, as well as universal principles, is necessary because an essentialist perspective of Africa will not work. Such a perspective might reject the common themes and issues shared by African communities, which scholars turn to when making broad generalizations about the nature of African societies.”<sup>101</sup>

One of these broad themes among the Bantu people of Sub-Saharan Africa involves linguistic similarities. Writing in *Inside Africa*, John Gunther posits that “most Bantu languages have similar qualities, and the roots of many words are the same, or approximately the same, all the way from Kenya to the Cape. The word for [person] is umu-ntu in Zulu, um-tu in Xhosa, oma-ntu in Luganda, and m-tu in Swahili. The plural

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<sup>101</sup> Elias K. Bongmba, “Reflections on Thabo Mbeki’s African Renaissance,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30, no. 2 (June 2004): 294.

form, *aba-ntu* is the same in a number of languages, and from this comes the word “Bantu” itself, meaning “Human Being.” [African] languages on the other flank of Africa are totally dissimilar. They differ from Bantu almost as much as English does from Japanese.”<sup>102</sup>

Although Gunther bases his linguistic analysis on *umuntu*, the Bantu have similar words for non-humans: *icintu* in Bemba, *cinhu* in Shona, and *Kinto* in Tswana. Rather than following the daily usage of these words in the Bantu context, translators imposed a Western juxtaposition of “thing” versus “man,” and rendered *Kinto* or *icintu* as “thing” while *umuntu* became “man.” Unfortunately, this Western imposition has become the lens through which Bantu philosophy has been discussed and analyzed. However, a closer look at the word *umuntu* reveals that *mu* refers to human, while *Ntu* points to “being” hence human being. Likewise, *icintu*, though translated as “thing,” can be broken into two parts; *ici* points to non-human while *ntu* refers to “being;” thus nonhuman being.

Consequently, it is a linguistic fact that *umuntu* and *icintu* confirm the interconnectedness of humanity and the natural world. What *umuntu* and *icintu* have in common is *ntu*. Thus, humans and nonhumans are intrinsically bound: interdependent. This linguistic phrasing indicates that humans and nonhumans are not just connected by *ntu*, but have intrinsic value to be defended and protected. Apart from the medicinal value

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<sup>102</sup> John Gunther, *Inside Africa* (New York: Harper, 1953), 287. A later theory says that the forest and southern savannah languages of West Africa form a large group called Niger-Congo along with the Bantu languages, but that the Nilo-Saharan languages are different.

of the natural world in African cosmology, most of the remedies for human fragility are found in nature.

### *Ubuntu* and the Power in Nature

Africans deem that the power resident in nature can be tapped to influence or determine one's destiny in life, for better or for worse. Such power can increase or decrease one's physical vitality when used properly. Among the Bembas, for example, specific potions used to empower or disempower somebody are called *ifishimba* (power enhancers). Potions of leopards, dangerous snakes, lions, certain parts of specific animals, and many rare creatures are considered important in trapping the power of the universe. Kings, diviners, and hunters receive the help of the natural world by using *ifishimba* in all their endeavors.

In fact, certain animals are known to enhance luck, wisdom, and, more popularly, marriage stability. In some cases, it is believed that carrying certain roots would make dangerous snakes run away from a person. Others believe that eating some portions of a python can make one live longer. Such beliefs are so pervasive that they have found themselves noted in popular culture and music. A group named "Glorious Band" became famous in Zambia for their hit entitled *Bana Mayo Mufyupo* (Married Women) which goes as follows:

<i>Banamayo mufyupo lelo kamwebe</i>	Married women today, expose your actions
<i>Mwacilamo ukulisha abalume pa mayanda</i>	You give love potions to your husbands
<i>Banamayo mufyupo lelo kanande</i>	Married women, let me expose your actions
<i>Mwacilamo ukulisha abalume pa mayanda</i>	You give love potions to your husbands
<i>Bamalinso mumishi imicila mwaliputula</i>	You cut tails of lizards

*Emiti yakuteka abalume pamayanda* And give them to your husbands  
*Ifimuti mumpanga fyalipwa nokuma* Medicinal plants are now drying up  
*Emiti yakuteka balume pamayanda* You give them as love potions to your husbands

The artist goes on to accuse women of extirpating *fikolyo-kolyo* (blueheads, another species of lizards), chameleons (*fulunyemba*), and different types of trees. Even non-edible species such as praying-mantis (*ifikonkote*) and ants (*utunyelele*), the group argues, are killed and given to men as love potions. The song ends with a theological statement that Jesus is the only true love-potion for marriage (*Umuti wacuupo ni Yesu*).<sup>103</sup>

The insertion of Jesus at the end of what appears to be a purely traditional song is not accidental. As already established, Africans turn to their traditional religions for solutions first, before turning to Christ. This is as true with marriage as it is with soccer or even employment. The invocation of the traditional worldview does not mean the rejection of Christianity. Rather it points to the fact that for Africans, natural forces and creatures possess powers that can alter human situations for better or worse. Thus, the attribution to human overuse of extinctions of blueheads and chameleons, and the drying of trees (deforestation), simply suggests how African traditional worldviews control people's understanding of life.

The African dependence on the world of plant, insect and animal species for remedies to social and psychological problems seems to confirm the unity and involvement of all living species in human life. Humanity may claim to be the crown of creation, yet without the power resident in the natural world, humanity is highly

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<sup>103</sup> Glorious Band, *Bana Mayo Mufyupo*, Isambo Lya Mfwa, Lusaka, 2000.

vulnerable. From an African traditional perspective, *ifishimba* or the power potions resident in the natural world become another reason for protecting biodiversity in the world where human relationships are ecologically sustained.

### **Creation as the Offspring of Supreme *Ntu***

The reduction of nonhumans to “things” has influenced how African theologians have understood the role of humanity in African thought. Nonetheless, this understanding is contrary to Bantu cosmic conceptuality. The Bembas regard every non-human creature as *icana cakwa Lesa* (a creature of God) or *icana cabene* (someone’s child).<sup>104</sup> This is in contrast to Western philosophy where nonhumans are viewed as belonging to humanity.

The understanding that nonhumans are equally children of God is common in Africa. Among the Lamba of Zambia, *ifilengwa na Leza* (creatures of God) is the phrase used to express the intrinsic value of every creature. Such phrases were used to caution people against destroying non-human creatures as well as to remind them of their common origin. In traditional Africa, rules existed that protected nonhumans from human abuse. For instance, only a specified number of animals needed for community consumption were killed. The motive for this was not just for what modern ecologists have called “sustainable” use. Rather it was due to the belief that Earth belonged to the Original Being, who is also the origin of life and, by extension, the origin of ancestors.

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<sup>104</sup> The Masai and Kikuyu studied by Samson Gitau share this perspective as well. Gitau argues that among them, no word can be found for nature since “people lived in a religious universe where human beings and nature were partners – to Africans, environment implies totality of life.” Gitau, *Environmental Crisis*, 33.

Tempels identified this Original Being as *Ntu*, which he argued was the vital force that holds the universe together. This observation was further elaborated on by Janheinz Jahn who divided Bantu philosophy into four categories based purely on the linguistic stem *ntu*. Jahn argued that *ntu* is the universal force manifested in *Muntu* (human being), *Kintu* (thing), *Hantu* (place and time), and *Kuntu* (modality).

Accordingly, Jahn insists that *Ntu* expresses the being of forces, and hence “*NTU* is what *Muntu*, *Kintu*, *Hantu* and *Kuntu* all equally are. Force and matter are not being united in this conception; on the contrary, they have never been apart”<sup>105</sup> Jahn goes on to say that *Ntu* is what upholds the interconnectedness of *Muntu*, *Kintu*, *Hantu* and *Kuntu*, making them all related to one another.<sup>106</sup> In his words,

Muntu includes God, spirits, the departed, human beings and certain trees. These constitute a force endowed with intelligence. Kintu includes all the forces, which do not act on their own but only under the command of Muntu, such as plants, animals, minerals and the like. Hantu is the category of time and space. Kuntu is ... ‘modality,’ and covers items like beauty, laughter, etc. Ntu is being itself, and cosmic universal force which only modern rationalization thought can abstract from its manifestations. NTU is that force in which Being and beings coalesce .... ‘NTU is that point from which creation flows, where I suspect there is a formula for man, beast, plant, earth, fire, water, air and all circling forces at once.’ NTU expresses, not the effect of these forces, but their being. But forces act continually, and are constantly effective. Only if one could call a halt to the whole universe, if suddenly life stood still, would NTU be revealed.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Jahn, *Muntu*, 101. Gabriel Setilone argues that *Motho* (*muntu*) “is that Energy or Force, that is Modimo – Divinity. The word used to describe the human person in this saying is the same as employed to describe the mysterious, all pervasive Energy-Force which is in fact the source of life.” Gabriel M. Setilone, *African Theology: An Introduction* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1986), 13.

<sup>106</sup> Jahn, *Muntu*, 100.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 101. Although John Mbiti refers to the above quote in *African Religion and Philosophy* (11), he leaves out the following statement: “NTU is that point from which creation

Jahn's observation shows that the Bantu have their own philosophy that differs substantially from Western philosophy. Whereas Western philosophy puts humanity at the top of creation, in Bantu philosophy humanity, God, and certain trees can equally be on the top. Nevertheless, Jahn's argument that *kintu* includes all beings that act under human command is influenced by Western philosophy rather than Bantu philosophy. The Bantu did not differentiate between humans and nonhumans based solely on intelligence. If this were the case, power enhancers would not have any important role. In fact, this contradiction is apparent in Jahn's analysis that certain trees can be called *muntu*.

Consequently, Jahn's argument, though informative to Bantu philosophical thought, neglected relating *Ntu* to every creature but demotes nonhumans to things, which is in opposition to African thought. This understanding reduces the inherent value of non-human beings to "things" to be exploited for human advancement.

Despite the fact that linguistically *ntu* is shared by both human and non-human beings, some African theologians put emphasis on what it means to be truly human (*umuntu*). They argue that God is only represented in humanity and associate the image of God with humanity based on their interpretations of *Ntu*. According to M. Mnyandu, "[u]muntu is regarded as the center of the world and the main concern of the Creator (Tixo) in all creation. Umuntu is not the only representative of God in creation, but also shares in the divine being (NTU). This special kinship between Umuntu and Tixo

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flows, where I suspect there is a formula for man, beast, plant, earth, fire, water, air and all circling forces at once." One would add that NTU is the force that connects the web of life. Since every creature shares NTU, the exploitation of non-humans is an attack on the Supreme Ntu.

(God/Creator) is demonstrated in the fact that Umuntu participates in Tixo's divine intelligence and skill of creativity."<sup>108</sup>

Following Thomas Aquinas (a fact he does not even acknowledge), Mnyandu argues that humanity is God's special creature based on reason. Of course, *ubuntu* should advocate the respect of humanity but like Jahn, Mnyandu fails to connect *Ntu* to non-humans, which as he rightly argues "is divine being." Etymologically, every creature shares this divine Being, *NTU*.

#### *Ntu* as "Being": Ecological Interconnectedness

The understanding of *ntu* as "being" is similar to Paul Santmire's *Ens* (from Latin for "being") cosmic conceptuality whereby nonhumans are viewed as "beings" as opposed to "things."<sup>109</sup> To him, the reduction of non-humans to things is responsible for current moral irresponsibility towards Earth. According to Santmire, personalism, the "view that the universe is a society of interacting and intercommunicating selves and persons with God at the center," should extend to respecting nonhumans as "beings" capable of relationships.<sup>110</sup> Following Paul Tillich's hyper-personalism, an argument that

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<sup>108</sup> Dr. [M]. Mnyandu, "Umuntu as the Basis of Authentic Humanity," in *Perspective on Ubuntu: A Tribute to Fedsem*, ed. M.G. Khabela and Z.C. Mzoneli (Alice: Lovedale Press, 1998), 68.

<sup>109</sup> Paul Santmire, *Nature Reborn: The Ecological and Cosmic Promise of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 64.

<sup>110</sup> According to Rufus Burrow Jr., "Personalism is the view that reality is personal and persons are the highest – not the only! – intrinsic values. It is a type of idealism which maintains that PERSON is the supreme philosophical principle – that principle without which no other principle can be made intelligible." Cited in John Kaoma, "Are Prophets Born or Made: Reflecting and Respecting the Academic

the personal is rooted in God but God is beyond the personal, Santmire concludes that the concept gives equal voice to nature since

both nature and humanity...have their ontological ground in Being itself, in their own ways undoubtedly, but neither one has what might readily be thought of otherwise as a privileged relationship to God. That is to say, according to the perspective of hyper-personalism, no longer are God and humanity in the same ontic class, while nature is in another, lesser class. According to hyper-personalistic way of thinking, both nature and humanity are in the same ontic class, while God is in another. God is the “Ground Being”...of every finite creature.”<sup>111</sup>

Santmire posits that we need to move beyond the “I-It” cosmic conceptuality that assumes human-nature relations to be distant, manipulative, instrumental and to some extent exploitative. Building on Buber’s “I-Thou” cosmic conceptuality that valued cooperation and mutuality with nature, Santmire proposes a third alternative, which he calls the “I-*Ens* cosmic relation from the Latin participle for being.”<sup>112</sup> The *Ens* places moral accountability on humans since the *Ens* is no longer an it (thing), but a being. Most important, an I-*Ens* relationship ought to characterize how humanity relates to other biokind, *for the Ens has ethical claims on I*. In terms of economics, Santmire adds that the *Ens* can never be human property but “the Creator’s and the Creator’s alone.”<sup>113</sup> Of course, the cosmic conceptuality that Santmire proposes is in line with I-*Ntu* conceptuality. The interplay between *ici -Ntu* and *umu-Ntu* reminds us that a *ntu* (being)

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Legacy of Boston University,” *Focus*, Boston University School of Theology (Spring 2008): 28; Rufus Burrow Jr., *Personalism: A Critical Introduction* (St. Louis, Mo: Chalice Press, 1999).

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 68-69.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 71.

cannot be reduced to a “thing” since every being is a reflection of *Ntu*. In addition, a *Ntu* does not belong to humanity but to the larger universe of the Ground of Being. In this regard, creation remains a true witness of the Creator Spirit.

Generally, the Bemba would speak of *icintu candi*, “my personal thing,” when referring to a computer or a car but not to domestic animals or plants. The reason behind this distinction is that, unlike cars that are made by humans, animals are creatures of God and share God’s being. Equally, the Tonga believe that creation shares God’s being and for this reason, it cannot be reduced to things.<sup>114</sup> This is because nonhumans are complete “beings” that bring about ecological completeness. Neither can Africans accept the reduction of animals to automata, as Descartes did. Nonhuman *ntus* are not moved by mechanical power like clocks but share the same divine character with humanity. Frikret Berkes and others are correct in arguing that

Traditional wisdom ... warns us to be wary of dichotomies such as nature-culture and mind-matter, inventions of positivist science tradition and enlightenment philosophy dating back to Newton and Descartes...and seen by some to be the root of our environmental crisis. – The dynamic response of natural systems was simplified and made deterministic, consistent with physical theory. The ecosystem was conceived as a machine and represented as a computer model... Even the more graphically, major ecosystem processes...were depicted in ecology texts as gears and clockwork mechanisms ... clearly stamping ecosystems with Newtonian mechanistic thinking. [In contrast, traditional wisdom depicted] ecosystems not as lifeless, mechanical, and distinct from people, but as fully alive and encompassing humans.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Interview, Tonga woman on Tape, October 2006.

<sup>115</sup> Frikret Berkes, Mina Kislalioglu, Carl Folke, and Madhav Gadgil, “Exploring the Basic Ecological Unit: Ecosystem-Like Concepts in Traditional Societies,” *Ecosystems* 1, no. 5 (Sept – Oct. 1998): 412.

This observation is in line with African cosmology where nature and humanity form the sacred web of life. This is because nature, like humanity, possesses the vital force by virtue of being interdependently connected to the world of ancestors and the Supreme Being. For Africans, a nation is assessed as healthy, prosperous, and peaceful based on how the land and other beings are related. Among the Bembas, it is said *icalo bapata abantu, ba mwena kunkoko* (The way chickens are treated in a community tells much about that community's treatment of each other).

Nature has ontological and intrinsic value in African cosmovisions. Jacob Olupona argues that indigenous people have always related with nature on a spiritual level. No Africanist, he argues, can dispute the fact that “nature is sacred in African traditional religious thought and ritual” and “wild animals are the most pure expression of God’s power.”<sup>116</sup> For this very reason, Christian ethics ought to promote relationships of *ubuntu* in an interconnected universe of beings. *Ubuntu* respects other creatures as independent beings with moral demands on human community. The killing of animals for meat is only justifiable if such slaughtering meets the demands of *ubuntu*. A person with *ubuntu* cannot mistreat animals, fell trees for personal gain, pollute rivers, or even shoot animals for pleasure no matter how attractive these actions might be. That said, ethics of *ubuntu* encourages community responsibility towards Earth and future generations.

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<sup>116</sup> Jacob Olupona, “Comments on the Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77, no. 1 ( March, 2009 ): 63.

### **Disintegration of Eco-Social *Ubuntu***

African scholars advocate *ubuntu* as fundamental to developing an African ideology of good governance. Thabo Mbeki, Nhlanhla P. Maake, S. Samkange and T.M Samkange , Desmond Tutu , and Elias K. Bongmba are among many scholars who have advanced this view. In this regard, Malegapuru William Makgoba’s argument (cited by Penny Enslin and Kai Horsthemke in their article, “Can ubuntu provide a Model for Citizenship Education in African Democracies?”) that *ubuntu* is the best political ideology for Africa and by extension the whole world, represents many voices across the continent.<sup>117</sup> For instance, the 2009 Episcopal Convention in Anaheim, California, had *ubuntu* as its theme.<sup>118</sup>

Makgoba argues that Western democracy does not address the central values of African communities. Aside from its foreignness, the European context in which Western democracies developed was nationalistic and closed to outside cultures. Ideologically therefore, Western democracy found it hard to negotiate racial and cultural differences in non-Western contexts. In addition to oppression of the majority, in its early days, Western democracy has promoted individualism, uncontrolled competition, corruption, and exploitation of Earth. From this analysis, he concludes that Southern Africa’s political ideology should be built on the philosophy of *ubuntu*, which he argues

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<sup>117</sup> Penny Enslin and Kai Horsthemke, “Can Ubuntu provide a Model for Citizenship Education in African Democracies?” *Comparative Education* 40, no. 4, Special Issue (29): Philosophy, Education and Comparative Education (Nov.2004): 547ff.

<sup>118</sup> Ubuntu: 76th General Convention Theme. <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/gc2009.html>. Accessed August 17, 2009.

“emphasizes respect and harmony of the non-material order that exists in us and among us; it fosters man’s respect for himself, for others, and for the environment; it has spirituality; it has remained non-racial; it accommodates other cultures and it is invisible force uniting Africans worldwide. Therefore, unlike Confucian or European philosophies, it transcends both race and culture. – It must deliver freedom with opportunities while addressing values and cultural systems.”<sup>119</sup>

Responding to Makgoba, Penny Enslin and Kai Horsthemke suggest that *ubuntu* should be understood within the context of communalism, which they contend is superior to the individualism promoted in Western liberal democracies. Yet they also point out that Makgoba’s analysis of *ubuntu* fails to accept that the ethical values encompassed in *ubuntu* are not unique to African cultures. Rather,

*ubuntu* as a philosophical approach to social relationships must stand alongside other approaches and be judged on the value it can add to better human relations in our complex society. ... The refusal to acknowledge the similarity between *ubuntu* and other humanistic philosophical approaches is in part a reflection of the parochialism of ... Africans and a refusal to learn from others.... We [need] the humility to acknowledge that we are not inventing unique problems in this [continent], nor are we likely to invent entirely new solutions.<sup>120</sup>

Furthermore, they question how *ubuntu* fosters respect for the environment, when it does not acknowledge the intrinsic value of nature. In focusing exclusively on human beings, *ubuntu* is by definition speciesist. Finally, they contend that the presence of

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<sup>119</sup> Penny Enslin and Kai Horsthemke, “Can Ubuntu provide a Model for Citizenship Education in African Democracies?,” 547.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 548.

genocides, sexism, corruption, xenophobia, homophobia and environmental degradation on the continent contradict *ubuntu*.

While these criticisms are warranted, it is important to realize that *ubuntu* is an ethical ideal to which every African community strives. To deny *ubuntu*'s usefulness based solely on past negative experiences is akin to rejecting the usefulness of democracy because of its failure in Hitler's Germany.

Whereas Enslin and Horsthemke view genocides, sexism, corruption, xenophobia, and homophobia as contracting the values of *ubuntu*, Nhlanhla P. Maake suggests otherwise. Maake attributes the culture of "black on black" violence that has locked South Africa to the disintegration of the values of *ubuntu* and the introduction of half-backed Marxism. To Maake, these developments resulted into "a downtrodden people oppressing each other with hardly any moral compunction."<sup>121</sup>

However, Elias K. Bongmba follows Van Binsbergen in arguing that

the problem with using *ubuntu* as the *deus ex machina*, lies in the fact that *ubuntu* can erase other possibilities in the region, become a pacifier where genuine conflicts exist, and may serve those who have moved into privileged positions after the collapse of colonialism in Zimbabwe and South Africa. These people may claim that they speak for the entire community and might be tempted to wonder why some dare question their ideas. In light of the high crime rate in South Africa, there should be a new analysis of class and gender to deal with urban problems in South Africa today rather than depending on the idea of *ubuntu* alone.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup>Nhlanhla P. Maake, "Multi-Cultural Relations in a Post-Apartheid South Africa," *African Affairs* 91, no. 365 (October 1992): 295.

<sup>122</sup> Elias K. Bongmba, "Reflections on Thabo Mbeki's African Renaissance," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30, no. 2 (June 2004): 300.

Bongmba cites Van Binsbergen who argues that “the discourse of ubuntu revolves around textual violence, but scholars must realise that ‘the concept of ubuntu is historically determined to constitute a bone of contention, to remind us of past violence and to lead us into new violence, until we realise that above all ubuntu is the invitation to confront this determination and, together, rise above such violence.’”<sup>123</sup>

Makgoba is not the only scholar to advocate *ubuntu* as a political ideology. In 1980, Stanlake Samkange and Tommie Marie Samkange asserted that *ubuntu* or *hunhu* was the indigenous political philosophy of Zimbabwe. *Hunhu*, they argue, respects and accepts the interdependence of human beings. In contrast with the philosophy of “democratic” capitalism that values wealth over people, *hunhu* emphasizes sacredness of human life.<sup>124</sup> The Samkanges maintain that *hunhu* is the basis of African morality; hence the moral virtues of sharing and community solidarity are characteristics of *hunhu*. *Hunhu* demands upholding community norms and values to the highest standard. Since individualism is highly denounced, an individual’s identity remains part of the larger whole. In this way, it is *hunhu* that linked one’s being to the family, clan, villages, districts, provinces, and wider universe. Every individual was expected to practice *hunhu* for the sake of community harmony.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Samkange and Samkange, *Hunhuism or Ubuntuism*, 51-54.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 72-79.

A person with *hunhu* cannot allow another person to be homeless, starve to death, or be treated as less than human. Consequently, possessing *hunhu* involves accepting one's cultural and social roles; sidetracking from these traditional roles was unethical. While this aspect could have led to the oppression of women and young people in community (as Enslin and Honshemke maintained), the Samkanges maintain that *ubuntu* philosophy should be understood within communal expectations.<sup>126</sup>

The role of *ubuntu* in the rebuilding of Africa has been explored by Thabo Mbeki, the former South African president. While Mbeki has written much on the African Renaissance, it is his 1998 speech entitled "The African Renaissance, South Africa and the World," presented to the United Nations University, that is closely associated with the *ubuntu* concept. Although Mbeki did not mention *ubuntu* in that speech, it was in the background. For example, on the African Renaissance and globalization, he asserted that

The process of globalization emphasizes the fact that no person is an island, sufficient to himself or herself. Rather, all humanity is an interdependent whole in which none can be truly free unless all are free, in which none can be truly prosperous unless none elsewhere in the world goes hungry, and in which none of us can be guaranteed a good quality of life unless we act together to protect the environment. By so saying, we are trying to convey the message that African underdevelopment must be a matter of concern to everybody else.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 61-63. The Samkanges argue that *hunhuism* constitutes the African traditional political, economic and religious philosophy of governance. Under this system, crimes are not committed by one individual but by the entire family and the entire family bears responsibility for an individual crime. When somebody kills a person, the entire family can suffer the consequences of *ngozi* (avenging spirit). *Hunhu* jurisprudence therefore supports remedies and punishments that bring communities together. On the political front, a leader who has *hunhu* is humble, and seeks the interests of his/her subjects. It is on this ethic that post-independence Zimbabwe should be governed. Ibid., 103.

<sup>127</sup> Thabo Mbeki, "The African Renaissance, South Africa and the World," 9 April 1998, *United Nations University*. <http://www.unu.edu/unupress/mbeki.html>. Accessed 11/27/08.

Elsewhere, Mbeki regretted that while the value system of *ubuntu* has influenced many Africans, Africans have not done enough to articulate and elaborate on what *ubuntu* means in defining their identity. Utilizing the many positive attributes of *ubuntu* can lead to the building of a non-racial, non-sexist, and a united nation. To Mbeki, the basic tenet of *ubuntu* is “aptly captured by the saying: *motho ke motho ka batho*, which translates as “a person is a person through other persons.”<sup>128</sup>

Unlike Makgoba who limits *ubuntu* to black Africans, Mbeki asserts that “a close examination of the central tenets of the values that drive the behaviour and approach of the Afrikaner, Indian and Jewish communities reveal that there are many elements that are consistent with the value-system of *ubuntu*. This obviously excludes the misguided racist views that informed the apartheid system which, for a long period of time was used to divide our country and oppress the majority of the population.”<sup>129</sup> For this reason, the elements of *ubuntu* are vital to the African Renaissance. Likewise, Elias K. Bongmba adds that *ubuntu* stresses community identity and consensus in conflict resolution efforts. Apart from the emphasis on humanness, the ethic of *ubuntu* “is important because people share a common humanity. As a philosophy, it upholds individuality and community together. It also promotes the exercise of individual responsibility for the good of the person and the rest of the members of the community. Central to the concept is the idea

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<sup>128</sup> Thabo Mbeki, “Address of the President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, on the occasion of the Heritage Day celebrations, Taung, North West Province, 24 September 2005,” *South African Government Information*, <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2005/05092612151004.htm>. Accessed 11/27/08.

<sup>129</sup> Thabo Mbeki “The African Renaissance, South Africa and the World,” 9 April 1998, *United Nations University*. <http://www.unu.edu/unupress/mbeki.html>. Accessed 11/27/08.

that relations and transactions that take place among people should be taken humanely, in light of values that people share in a given community.”<sup>130</sup>

The emphasis *ubuntu* places on rights and responsibilities of every person in advancing individual and community wellbeing makes the concept attractive to Christian theologians. Despite the difference in emphasis, Africanists in Southern Africa are agreed that *ubuntu* ought to become a conceptual tool for redressing current economic and social developments in Southern Africa, thereby leading to the Renaissance. As a conceptual tool, *ubuntu* can hold Africans accountable to each other and to the global community.<sup>131</sup> Surprisingly, these scholars fail to connect *ubuntu* with Placide Tempels’ and J. Jahn’s Bantu philosophy. That Makgoba calls *ubuntu* “an invisible force” suggests that he is aware of Tempels “vital force.”<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Elias K. Bongmba, “Reflections on Thabo Mbeki’s African Renaissance,” 298. Bongmba argues that the concept of Ubuntu means humanity or humanness. Constitutional court judge Yvonne Mokgoro cited by Lyn S. Graybill, argues that “Ubuntu principles such as collectivity, unity and group solidarity could promote harmony between society’s members rather than the desire for retribution, embodied in the adversarial approach in litigation. In a society founded on Ubuntu, individual duty trumps individual rights.” In Lyn S. Graybill, “Pardon, Punishment and Amnesia: Three African Post-Conflict Methods,” *Third World Quarterly* 25, no. 6 (2004): 1119.

<sup>131</sup> African theology today needs to present a sustained critique of the social conditions of the day and challenge the liberal economic assumptions that ground calls such as the African Renaissance. African theology can do this in conversation with black theology, which takes socio-economic realities seriously. Bongmba, “Reflections on Thabo Mbeki’s African Renaissance,” 307.

<sup>132</sup> As already indicated in the first Chapter, Placide Tempels argued that the universe is interconnected through the principle of vital force, which is present in every Being. Gabriel Setiloane calls this force *seriti*, which he defines as the magnet that hold all things together. Gabriel Setiloane, *The Image of God among the Sotho-Tswana* (Rotterdam: A.A. Balkema, 1976). Battle adds that “Both concepts assume that a person is intelligible only by being connected to social and natural environments.” Michael Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1997), 51.

### **Towards the Ecological Ethics of *Ubuntu***

According to Lyn S. Graybill, *ubuntu* “conveys the view that an environment of right relationships is one in which people are able to recognize their humanity as inextricably bound up with other’s humanity.”<sup>133</sup> Such an atmosphere, Graybill asserts, can address corruption, genocide and other social evils in Africa since it “resonates well with African culture especially among non-metropolitan poor.”<sup>134</sup> She attributes the success of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in post-apartheid South Africa to the values of *ubuntu*. Although Graybill only pays attention to *ubuntu*, it is important to note that the TRC was also based on Christian beliefs. Both traditions promote forgiveness and reconciliation; and restorative over retributive justice.

While Graybill limits *ubuntu* to South Africa, Desmond Tutu promotes its global ethical implications. In his book, *God Has a Dream*, Tutu argues that *ubuntu* has the potential to transform global relations. Tutu avers that while *ubuntu* cannot be easily defined, it is foundational to family relations. *Ubuntu* protects children, the elderly, and other vulnerable members of the community.

Accepting the ethics of *ubuntu* implies accepting personal vulnerability and allowing others to exist so that together we can be said to be powerful. Although *ubuntu* favors community, it also recognizes the humanity of each individual. Yet the distinctiveness of each person depends on her or his connection with other forces. All

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<sup>133</sup> Graybill argues that there is no precise definition for *ubuntu* though the idea connotes “humanness, caring and community.” Graybill, “Pardon, Punishment and Amnesia,” 1118.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 1119.

humans are born with the potential of *ubuntu* but this potential is only realized through relationships with others.<sup>135</sup> Thus to possess *ubuntu* is to be “welcoming, hospitable and is to know that one belongs to the greater whole, and that one is diminished when another is humiliated, is diminished, is tortured, is oppressed or treated as if they were less than who they are. The quality of *ubuntu* gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanize them.”<sup>136</sup> Accordingly, *ubuntu* can be present or absent in an individual; thus, “we tell when *ubuntu* is there and when it is absent. It has to do with what it means to be truly human, to know that you are bound up with others in the bundle of life.”<sup>137</sup>

Tutu extends *ubuntu* to international trade when he observes that human systems that encourage competitiveness rather than cooperation work in conflict with God’s will. According to Tutu, even the global economy can hardly exist in isolation and “to share prosperity of affluent countries with indigent ones is not really altruism. It is ultimately the best kind of self-interest, for if the poor countries become prosperous in their turn, then they provide vigorous markets for the consumer goods produced elsewhere. The debt burden is a bomb that could shatter the economy of the globe to smithereens. And so a new and just economic order would benefit both the rich and poor nations.”<sup>138</sup> Battle

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<sup>135</sup> Battle, *Reconciliation*, 44.

<sup>136</sup> Tutu, *God Has a Dream*, 26. See also Battle, *Reconciliation*, 36.

<sup>137</sup> Tutu, *God Has a Dream*, 26.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

adds that in *ubuntu* theology, true human identity is discovered through absolute dependence on God and neighbor. “Indeed, such human interdependence is built into our very creation by our being created in God’s image, our common *imago Dei*.”<sup>139</sup> For this reason, *ubuntu* theology can overthrow all forms of exploitation and, in the context of South Africa, apartheid.<sup>140</sup>

Battle does not, however, address the ecological aspect of Tutu’s *ubuntu* theology. Tutu notes that Africa has a gift that the world needs desperately; a reminder that we are made for harmonious interdependence with other members of the cosmos:

When Africans said, “Oh, don’t treat that tree like that, it feels pain” others used to say, “Ah, they are pre-scientific; they’re primitive.” It is wonderful now how we are beginning to discover that it is true – that that tree does hurt, and if you hurt the tree, in an extraordinary way, you hurt yourself. [Furthermore, he adds that human relationship with the Earth should be that of] “viceroys, caring as God would – caringly, gently and not harshly and exploitatively, with a deep reverence, for all is ultimately holy ground and we should figuratively take off our shoes for it all has the potential to be “theophanic” – to reveal the divine. Every shrub and by extension every creature has the ability to be a burning bush and to offer us an encounter with the transcendent.”<sup>141</sup>

What comes out of Tutu’s *ubuntu* theology is that the exploitation of nature hurts Earth and dims divine glory. As such, *ubuntu* theology and ethics should encourage ecological responsibility and action as part of Christian responsibility. Because *ubuntu*

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<sup>139</sup> Battle, *Reconciliation*, 40.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Tutu, *God Has a Dream*, 29.

understands creation as interconnected in the sacred web of life, any *ubuntu* theology or ethics that ignores this interdependence does not do justice to Bantu philosophy.<sup>142</sup>

Africans further understand social life as interlinked through daily greetings. When Africans ask, “How are you?” they are not inquiring about an individual but the entire family. In real life, one would respond in the plural since an individual can be well while a relative might be sick. Tutu maintains that a “solitary” or totally self-sufficient person is subhuman. For Africans therefore, “The first law of our being is that we are set in a delicate network of interdependence with our fellow human beings and the rest of God’s creation. In Africa, recognition of our interdependence is called *ubuntu*... which is difficult to translate into English. It is the essence of being human. It speaks of the fact that my humanity is caught up and inextricably bound up in yours. I am because I belong. It speaks about wholeness: it speaks about compassion.”<sup>143</sup>

In order for *ubuntu* to influence global relations, Tutu proposes the model of a *family of God* as another way of conceiving the cosmos. Understanding the world as a family of God means that we are all insiders.<sup>144</sup> By embracing the family model,

Perhaps we could address the injustices that cause a small percentage of our world to consume the vast majority of its resources – not unlike what happened in apartheid South Africa – while the vast majority lives in poverty, with over a billion people living on less than a dollar a day. Would you let your brother’s or sister’s family, your relatives, eke out a

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<sup>142</sup> Michael Jesse Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1997), 41. While many scholars have explored the concept of *Ubuntu* as an ethical and political ideology, Desmond Tutu is most associated with its theology.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>144</sup> Tutu, *God Has a Dream*, 21.

miserable existence in poverty? – And every 3.6 seconds someone dies of hunger and three quarters of these are children under five. If we realized that we are a family, we could not let this happen to our brothers and sisters.<sup>145</sup>

The model of God’s family has implications for how we treat each other in the cosmos. Asserting that our destinies are interlinked means that caring and compassion are *ubuntu* ideals to which global communities ought to aspire. As Tutu observes:

Members of a family have a gentle caring and compassion for one another. – If we could but recognize our common humanity, that we do belong together, that our destinies are bound up in one another’s, that we can be free only together, that we can survive only together, that we can only be human together, then a glorious world would come into being where all of us lived harmoniously together as members of one family, the human family, [ecological family], God’s family. In truth a transfiguration would take place. God’s dream would become a reality.<sup>146</sup>

God’s dream demands that we honor our family relationships with each other.

“We are made for companionship and relationship. It is not good for us to be alone, in our African idiom we say: A person is a person through other persons.”<sup>147</sup> (The African idiom Tutu refers to is *umuntu ngubantu ngabantu*). *Ubuntu* puts cooperation above aggressive competition simply because it does not say, “I think, therefore I am,’ rather it proudly says ‘I am human because I belong. I participate. I share.’ Harmony, friendliness, and community are great goods. Social harmony is for us [Africans] the summum bonum – the greatest good. Anything that subverts, that undermines this sought after good is to

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 25.

be avoided like the plague. Anger, resentment... even success through aggressive competitiveness, are corrosive of this good.”<sup>148</sup>

Tutu did not extend the family model to Earth community, but it makes sense to do so. This is because an African family is an interdependent structure of the living, the ancestors, the living to come, the Supreme Being, and the natural world represented in totems or *mukowa*. In addition, since the scientific, traditional, and biblical worldviews are agreed on the interconnectedness of the universe, the family of God metaphor places ecological ethical obligations and responsibility on every individual. African and scientific-ecological wisdom suggest that creation is a family of interconnected beings with a common ancestor or origin; a family model is essential to loving relationships.

Viewing creation as the family of God puts moral responsibilities on human beings and especially on faith communities. Since the living members of an African family do not constitute the entire family, intergenerational responsibility becomes imperative to how we relate to other members of the Earth family. Conversely, since humanity is related to the natural world through the history of creation and evolution, the exploitation of one part of the family has direct implications on all relationships.

The conception of the Earth community as a family of God has implications on how humanity relates to the natural world and to one another. As noted above, this model is in conformity with Paul Santmire’s extended family model. Santmire argues that human beings were expected to uphold relationships of “mutuality and cooperation

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<sup>148</sup> Tutu, *God Has a Dream*, 27; *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 31-32.

between persons and other creatures of nature.”<sup>149</sup> Following St. Francis, he argues that humanity ought to view nature as *Ens* and members of one’s “extended family.”<sup>150</sup>

A “family of God” model can equally be derived from Sallie McFague’s *Body of God*. According to McFague, the exploitation of Earth is highly due to how humanity views the natural world. McFague asserts the current ecological crisis demands a paradigm shift in how we conceive nature. Proposing the model of Earth as “the Body of God,” McFague argues that conceiving the cosmos as the body of God is a way of seeing both the immanence and the transcendence of God. It is another way of viewing God as “the inspirited body of the entire universe, the animating, living spirit that produces, guides, and saves all that is.”<sup>151</sup>

The richness of this model is that God’s body unites the immanence and transcendence of the divine and makes everybody and everything a Sacrament of God and an image of divine transcendence.<sup>152</sup> Since humans are part of the body of God, they have a moral responsibility to the fragile Earth, including the suffering and oppressed. For McFague, our unwillingness to stay in our place, to accept our proper limits so that other individuals of our species as well as other species can also have needed space, is sinful. She defines sin as denying our interconnectedness and the rights of others to

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<sup>149</sup> Santmire, *Nature Reborn*, 73; Compare with Samkange and Samkange, *Hunhuism or Ubuntuism*, 73ff.

<sup>150</sup> Santmire, *Nature Reborn*, 73.

<sup>151</sup> Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 20.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

exist.<sup>153</sup> In many respects, McFague's model seeks to challenge dominant theological metaphors that disconnect humanity from Earth.

Despite the fact that the above models present a challenge to our anthropocentric conception of creation, these three models are quite different. To begin, Santmire and McFague's metaphors are planted in Western mysticism and Western theology respectively, while Tutu's is built on the Bantu understanding of family. In addition to these contextual differences, the emphasis of Santmire and McFague's models differs from that of Tutu whose emphasis is on family obligations. While Santmire promotes the extended family structure which is somehow lost in the West, and McFague proposes a positive view of the body in Western philosophy, Tutu bases his model on the positive aspect of the family among the Bantu.

### **Revisiting *Umntu Ngubuntu Ngabantu***

The Xhosa like many Africans, understand life as interconnected. This is expressed in a maxim *umntu ngubuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person through other people). Although the Xhosa proverb is the one which is widely known, other cultures have similar sayings. Among the Shona of Zimbabwe, we find *munhu munhu nekuda kwevanhu* (a human being is only human through other people). As already observed, the Sotho say *motho ke motho ka batho* (a person is a person through other persons). While the anthropocentric focus of these proverbs is clear, Africans have certain proverbs that

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

plant humanity in nature. For example, the Bemba proverb *Icalo bantu* (literally “Earth is people”) on the surface appears to suggest that the value of Earth is dependent on people. However, *icalo* can be rendered as the world, country, land, ecosystems or simply Earth. In short, African peoples view themselves as interconnected to Earth.<sup>154</sup> Unfortunately, it is the anthropocentric interpretation of this adage that influence Southern Africa and to some extent Sub-Saharan Africa’s socio-political analysis.

Africa should accept that some of the wisdom it received had some flaws and the ecological age demands that we right them. If *ubuntu* encouraged caring and compassion for others, then the proverb *umuntu ngubuntu ngabantu* points at the interdependence of human life. In this regard, Bantu cosmology can be said to be environmentally bankrupt. Yet, the African ontology of “I am because I am interconnected” seems to point to the interrelatedness of forces in an African community. Since an African community includes the natural world, limiting *ubuntu* to human relations is definitely misleading. Unfortunately, some African theologians and scholars interpreted *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* without questioning its application to the African traditional life style. By itself, the proverb does not meet the requirements of *ubuntu*.

Furthermore, the current understanding of the adage of *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* fails to address the ecological nature of African communities. It follows that a person is a person when in loving and just relationships with other *ntus* (*ens*). In fact,

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<sup>154</sup> Berkes and others observe that indigenous words usually translated as land often encompasses the living environment, including humans. Mostly, this idea is based on the concept that “everything in the environment has life and spirit.” Berkes and Others, 410.

*ubuntu* should address fully the existential reality of life. Moreover, African traditional wisdom is not environmentally bankrupt, rather its interpreters are. The Bantu knew that humanity and nature are deeply interconnected; to destroy one is to destroy the other.

Following the traditional African spiritual ecological consciousness therefore, it is vital that humanity act ecologically rather than “humanely” in the sense of the proverb *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*. As Leonardo Boff rightly puts it, “Human beings live ethically when they decide to stop placing themselves above all others and decide instead to stand together with others. To be truly ethical, humankind has to be able to understand the urgent need for ecological balance, of being human together with nature, and of being human together with other human beings.”<sup>155</sup>

Boff does not note the concept of *ubuntu* in his works, yet his observation about living ethically has much in common with the ideals expressed in the proverb *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*. *Ubuntu* is based on the concept of interconnectedness with one another and the world of nature. In a world where the exploitation of nature shows no sign of slowing down, the ethics of *ubuntu* can inform us to live ecologically on Earth.

Robert C. Mitchell makes a similar argument when he likens Africans to Albert Schweitzer and Francis of Assisi. Among the Africans, Mitchell argues:

Nature is involved in the primal spiritual ecology. This is in striking contrast to the modern technological view of nature. To Africans, nature is ‘alive’ in an important sense. Not only do animals have life forces, but many African peoples worship a god or goddess of the Earth and/or the sky and believe that spirits are associated with certain trees, hills, lakes

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<sup>155</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 31.

and so on. As a result, the proper situation of humans in relation to nature is not exploitation or even conservation but relationship. This relationship is not passive reverence for life wherein humans treat all living things with an equal loving-kindness, as did Francis of Assisi and the famous missionary doctor Albert Schweitzer.<sup>156</sup>

The emphasis that Africans place on relationship rather than conservation can partially explain why they have not responded positively to the concept of conservation.

Theo Sundermeier quotes E. Breur, who rightly noted that to an African, “the ox is part of himself.”<sup>157</sup> As such, “an interdependent, participatory relationship exists between the world of animals and the world of humans. It includes every part of human and animal life; animals are not merely soulless physical beings. They have lives in the same way as people do. They participate in the spirit world.”<sup>158</sup> This belief is responsible for the Tonga’s refusal to kill their animals even in the time of severe drought.<sup>159</sup>

The Bantu see themselves as spiritually connected to the world of nature. Since religious beliefs are imperative to the formation of ecological moral codes, many Africans are still to find the rationale for respecting government-protected game reserves. While the reasons for such reserves are ecologically and economically sound, Africa

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<sup>156</sup> Robert C. Mitchell, *African Primal Religions* (Niles, Argus Communications, 1977), 55.

<sup>157</sup> Theo Sundermeier, *The Individual and Community in African Traditional Religions*, (Hamburg: LIT, 1998), 109.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>159</sup> Lisa Gliggett, *Grains from Grass: Aging, Gender, and Famine in Rural Africa* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 60. Cliggett’s conclusion that the Tonga consider animals as a form of saving is just one of the many reasons they resist slaughtering their animals for meat. Tonga relate to domestic animals as part of the bigger extended family.

seems to lack a spiritual basis for game reserves. Unless game reserves are accorded spiritual significance, the poaching of wildlife will continue across Africa.

Scholars have insisted that “all traditional societies that have succeeded in managing resources well, over time have done it in part through religious or ritual representation of resource management. The key point is not religion per se, but the use of emotionally powerful cultural symbols to sell particular moral codes and management systems.”<sup>160</sup> Until environmental policies have capitalized on the African spirituality of nature, natural goods conservation or management will always be met with resistance.

Here, the ethical model of *ubuntu* can definitely redirect Africans into being part of nature. To possess *ubuntu* is to accept that *abantu* (people) are on Earth as well as part of Earth. It entails accepting moral responsibility for Earth on behalf of future generations. Believing that *icalo bantu* enforces the idea that humans are “earth that thinks, hopes, loves and has entered into the no longer instinctive but conscious phase of decision making.”<sup>161</sup> In fact, “We are because we are interconnected” to the web of life and holistic *ubuntu* should treat every species as part of the whole.

The etymological link between things (*ici-ntu*) and humans (*umu-ntu*) should not deceive us into believing that our species is safe simply because we think. “We are because we are linked” to the sacred universe of life. We should not underestimate the consequences of destroying Earth. As Charles J. Puccia observes, the battle for the

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<sup>160</sup> In Berkes and others, 413.

<sup>161</sup> Boff and Elizondo, *Ecology and Poverty*, 69; Also with slight variation in Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 106.

environment is not just “about wildlife, species survival, and greenhouse gases. Beyond impacts to nature, they are effects on people.”<sup>162</sup> As the following chapter will illustrate the ecological crisis “causes poverty, hunger, disease, social unrest, and violence.”<sup>163</sup> Unfortunately, these effects are not felt equally across the globe since the poor are the most affected. For example, “Toxic waste will reach some children more than others, depending on which side of the tracks we live on and the color of our neighborhood.”<sup>164</sup> From this perspective, demanding justice for Earth is critical to the ethics of *ubuntu*.

Yet, if one hoped that the end of colonialism would signal a return to the ethics of *ubuntu*, experience shows that post-independence Africa lacks *ubuntu* at many levels. Gauging the level of ecological destruction that has taken place after independence, an argument can be made that some white Africans (farmers in Zimbabwe, for example) exercised *ubuntu* towards nature more than most political leadership in post-independence Africa. African political leadership should accept that *ubuntu* demands accountability at all levels. As the following chapter will illustrate, the occurring eco-social crisis demands that we address the impact of Africa’s population growth on *ubuntu*.

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<sup>162</sup> Charles J. Puccia, “The Earth at Risk: Encountering Environmental Limits,” in *Earth at Risk: An Environmental Dialogue between Religion and Science*, (67-88), ed. Donald B. Conroy and Rodney L. Petersen (New York: Humanity Books.2000), 84.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY, POPULATION GROWTH, AND POVERTY

#### **Conservation of Africa's Natural Goods**

Africa's Independent States called for the protection and conservation of the continent's natural goods in July 1968 during the fifth summit of Organization of African Unity (now known as African Union) in Algiers, Algeria. Independent African states jointly adopted the "African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources" (ACCNNR) out of the conviction that natural goods were "capital of vital importance to mankind."<sup>1</sup> Despite viewing natural goods from a purely instrumental perspective, the leaders acknowledged that most of Africa's natural goods were "irreplaceable" and that "the utilization of the natural resources must aim at satisfying the needs of man according to the carrying capacity of the environment."<sup>2</sup>

The ACCNNR was later revised and modified in Maputo, Mozambique in 2003 in order to take into consideration the concept of sustainable development. Although the Convention did not shift from its anthropocentric and instrumental focus with regard to human attitude towards nature, it nevertheless provided a very strong moral reason for conserving nature. The revised ACCNNR admonished States to employ "the

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<sup>1</sup> African Convention on the Conservation of Natural and Natural Resources.[http://www.africa-union.org/root/au/Documents/Treaties/Text/Convention\\_Nature%20&%20Natural\\_Resources.pdf](http://www.africa-union.org/root/au/Documents/Treaties/Text/Convention_Nature%20&%20Natural_Resources.pdf). Accessed 02/03/2009.

<sup>2</sup>The Convention entered into force 9 October 1969.

precautionary principle, and with due regard to ethical and traditional values as well as scientific knowledge in the interest of present and future generations” in their exploitation of natural goods.<sup>3</sup> The expanded convention also argued that all Africans have the moral responsibility to conserve and protect nature. For this reason, African states were expected to protect both plant and animals species which were threatened with extinction. For this reason, the convention is important in the quest for ecological ethics in Africa.

Just as important is the *Earth Charter*, which was launched in 2000. Unlike the ACCNRR, the Charter places humanity in nature when it declares that humanity is part of a vast evolving universe, and that “Earth, our home is alive with a unique community of life.”<sup>4</sup> Warning of the dire future which confronts us if we do not change our attitudes, the Charter states:

We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Article IV. African Convention on the Conservation of Natural and Natural Resources 2003.. [http://www.africa-union.org/official\\_documents/Treaties\\_%20Conventions\\_%20Protocols/nature%20and%20natural%20recesource.pdf](http://www.africa-union.org/official_documents/Treaties_%20Conventions_%20Protocols/nature%20and%20natural%20recesource.pdf). Accessed 08/10/2009.

<sup>4</sup> *Earth Charter Preamble*, 2000. <http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/pages/Read-the-Charter.html>. Accessed 02/03/2009.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Consequently, human wellbeing is “dependent on preserving a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems, a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure waters and clean air.”<sup>6</sup> The *Earth Charter* was completed and launched in The Hague in 2000. It has been endorsed by tens of thousands of individuals, and publicly supported by numerous heads of States. But African theologians paid little attention to the *Charter* in their theologizing. While the December 10, 1948 United Nations *Human Rights Charter* and the June, 1981 *African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights* have been incorporated into African moral discourse, the *Earth Charter* and the ACCNRR are yet to find space in African theology as a whole.<sup>7</sup> Ironically, African ecological worldviews such as *ubuntu* predate and anticipate most of these documents’ values.

### **When Growth Means Disaster**

Although the ACCNRR challenged African states to conserve natural goods, it did not address the question of population growth as a threat to ecological integrity. Ecologists are generally agreed that uncontrolled population growth has negative impact on eco-social relationships. Missiologists can celebrate the fact that over 633 million people in Africa will be Christians by 2025. But what missiologists are not mentioning is

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights. [www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/](http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/); The African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights. [www.achrpr.org/english/\\_info/charter/\\_en.html](http://www.achrpr.org/english/_info/charter/_en.html). Accessed 01/19/2010.

the fact that Africa's population will be above 1.2 billion by that same year.<sup>8</sup> That the continent's natural systems will not be the same as in 1900, and the global economy will continue to favor the global North over the Global South generally and Africa particularly, means that the continent should prepare for more conflicts. Nations and religions increasingly can be expected to seek control over limited resources.

Western-driven economic policies are not answers to Africa's economic woes since they are tailored to maximize competitive exploitation of natural goods at the expense of ecological integrity. Since colonial times, Africa has hoped for economic development but has received soil erosion, land degradation, species extinction, forced migration, desertification and deforestation. Although much of these problems are self-inflicted, Western exploitation is equally to blame.<sup>9</sup> As Chapter four illustrates, then, Africa's future depends not on Western-based policies but on how well her people can revisit the ethics of *ubuntu* through which humanity lives sustainably in nature. Among other things, this will entail Africans working to address their growing numbers collectively and responsibly. While some proposals have been made (ranging from

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<sup>8</sup> See Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2003); Phillip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Hugh McCullum, "Environment and Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa," in *Restoring the Land*, ed., Mamphela Ramphele, (London: Panos, 1991), 167. McCullum argues the dissonance exists in Africans when it comes to taking care of the environment. Usually, Western nations and donors demand that Africans engage in "sustainable development," but in reality, the protection "of the environment has never ranked high in the industrialized world." Ibid.

mirroring China's one child policy to forced family planning), the current crisis demands that every individual on planet Earth live ecologically in an interconnected universe.

The ecological crisis can be addressed by reducing fertility rates and addressing global consumption rates. Equally important is the fact that African leaders should also share the wealth of their nations with their people. As long as Africa's natural goods are at the mercy of power hungry dictators such as Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, the ecological crisis will worsen. In this regard, Africa and the rest of the world should work together to solve the problem. This is especially the case because it is of little importance to reduce population growth in Africa while Western countries and African leaders continue with their ecologically destructive life-styles as evidenced especially in consumerism. Scholars might project that the world population will level off by 2050, but this estimate does not include a leveling off of natural goods consumption, which equally threatens Earth. Consumption can be expected to increase as long as global economic policies are predicated on growth, and are the current means by which GDP is figured.<sup>10</sup>

Africa's rapid population growth is worsened by the extreme poverty that threatens the interconnectedness of communities. Oxfam researchers predict that about 60 million more Africans will be at risk of hunger by the year 2080 due to global warming,

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<sup>10</sup> Severine Deneulin and Masooda Bano, *Religion in Development: Rewriting the Secular Script* (London: ZED Books, 2009). See also Jeffrey Haynes, *Religion and Development: Conflict or Cooperation* (Palgrave: Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> but overpopulation will play a major role. The doctrine of uncontrolled procreation could arguably have been sanctioned in the past by Sacred Scripture and African traditional religions, but Mother Earth has a limited capacity to sustain life.

In line with the ACCNNR and *Earth Charter*, ecological harmony can only be attained through the exercise of common responsibility. In other words, it needs to be understood that an average person in the U.S. contributes to the destruction of rain forests in Brazil. Oil spills are a problem created not just by owners of oil companies, but also by consumers throughout the world who use fuel for far too many activities. Therefore, the solutions to our ecological problem lie in all humanity fighting to make a difference: in nations through policies and laws, in communities by collaborative actions, and by each individual in his or her small way. Widespread destruction of the environment should not be ignored nor should humanity continue to treat nature carelessly. African Christians together with their political leaders should be concerned about the crisis and employ the knowledge and wisdom of experts and indigenous peoples on the subject.

Moreover, a new African ecological awareness should be emerging from the “notorious” religiosity of Africans. Rather than being downplayed in developing ecological policies, this religious worldview ought to be integrated with Christianity and the sciences in developing concrete programs and initiatives for ecological actions in

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<sup>11</sup> Mwala Kalalika, “60 Million more Africans to Starve by 2080 – report.” *The Post Newspaper*, Zambia, Tuesday, August 01, 2006.

Africa.<sup>12</sup> Scholars such as Severine Deneulin and Masooda Bano, Jeffrey Haynes, and Jeremiah Dibia have observed that the socio-cultural and religious environment of the people is crucial to development. Speaking about the crisis of industrialization in Africa, Jeremiah Dibia states that the

interaction between technology and culture is the basis for the development of technology among different societies in the world. It thus follows that indigenous knowledge and practice should constitute the basis of technological development and innovation in Nigeria and other African countries. Indigenous knowledge, which is the product of indigenous peoples' direct experience of the workings of nature and its relationship with the social world, includes the cultural traditions, values, belief systems and worldviews of local peoples. Indigenous knowledge therefore constitutes the basis for the development of appropriate technology that is adaptable to the culture and ecology of the society while promoting sustainable technological development and industrialization.<sup>13</sup>

To him, "the crisis of industrialization confronting African countries is largely a product of the denigration of indigenous technological knowledge and culture in favor of Western technology under the misguided belief that the associated technology transfer would promote African industrialization."<sup>14</sup>

The ecological crisis facing Africa is largely due to misguided economic principles on which the continent's economic development policies are built. In fact, the

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<sup>12</sup> Severine Deneulin and Masooda Bano advocate the importance of religion in development. Just as Islam and Christianity have influenced development, in Africa, the traditional religions and Christianity can do the same. Deneulin and Bano, *Religion in Development: Rewriting the Secular Script*, 2009. Haynes, *Religion and Development*, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Jeremiah Dibia, *Modernization and the Crisis of Development in Africa: The Nigerian Experience* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 164-165.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

sidelining of indigenous knowledge in the formulation of Africa's economic development programs and policies simply worsens the ecological crisis. Unless policies take into consideration the African traditional heritage, Africans will continue exploiting natural goods without remorse for Earth. Africa is our "motherland" and it is our responsibility to guard her from both domestic and foreign exploitation. *Our children and future generations are more likely to forgive foreign colonialists for exploiting Africa's natural goods than to forgive us for destroying our motherland.*

### **Population Growth: Ancestral Blessing or Curse?**

According to the United Nations Economic and Social Council, population growth is a developmental issue that calls for a long and holistic approach. Despite global measures to reduce population growth, world demography has continued to grow at a very alarming rate: from 1.6 billion in 1900 to 6.1 billion in 2000, and 85% of this growth has been registered in developing nations.<sup>15</sup> Demographic studies further project that by the year 2050, the world population is likely to be between 7.9 and 10.9 billion. Africa alone will account for 40% of this growth.<sup>16</sup> Sadly, the continent's natural goods will

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<sup>15</sup> ECA/FSSDD/POP/CSD/01/6. United Nations Economic and Social Council (27 August 2001), 2-9. See also A. W. Clausen, *Population Growth and Economic and Social Development: Addresses by A.W. Clausen President, The World Bank and International Finance Corporation* (Washington, D C: The World Bank, 1984), 7.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. According to Clausen, the second half of the twentieth century stands out in history as period of remarkable population growth. Through most of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, population growth was at the historical rate of 1 percent. But then it accelerated 100%. Between 1950 and 1984, the world's population nearly doubled from 2.5 billion to almost 4.8 billion. This growth was not matched by economic growth. Clausen, *Population Growth and Economic and Social Development*, 5.

have been degraded far beyond what they used to be in 1900 and poverty will have increased beyond what it is today. Worse still, desertification, global warming, shrinking cropland area, species extinction, and deforestation will continue to threaten Africa.

In 1974, the Bucharest Population Conference argued that adequate development would bring about the required solution to the population problem. It argued that with required development and education, fertility would be brought down and the impacts of demographic explosion mitigated.<sup>17</sup> Today, however, population growth in Africa has remained the world's biggest developmental challenge at a time when the continent lags behind the rest of the world in nearly every indicator of human well-being.

Delfin S. Go and John Page observe that Sub-Saharan Africa's average income per person was unchanged between independence and the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, Africa has experienced accelerated economic growth which has raised income and potential for human development since the mid 1990s. In line with their thesis that the 21<sup>st</sup> Century may mark a turning point in Africa's economic performance

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<sup>17</sup> According to G. Letamo and O. Totolo, "the population- environment nexus has generated heated debates. Some link population growth to environmental degradation while others view demographic growth as "an advantage that generates wealth and therefore needs to be tapped." The first school of thought is often referred to as "Alarmists or Pessimists" and the latter as "Non-Alarmists or Optimists." G. Letamo and O. Totolo, "Population-Environmental Interface in Botswana," in *Human Impact on Environment and Sustainable Development in Africa*, ed., Michael Darkor and Apollo Rwowire (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003), 102.

<sup>18</sup> Jorger Arbache, Delfin S. Go and John Page, "Is Africa's Economy at Turning Point?" in *Is Africa's Economy at Turning Point? Growth, AID, and External Shocks*, ed., Delfin S. Go and John Page (Washington DC: The World Bank, 2008), 76.

due to good economic policies and management, they contend that Africa needs to develop institutional bases for sustaining this growth.

Africa's good economic performance can be deceptive, nonetheless. In reality, the continent's GDP per capita is still 50% of the level of East Asia and the growth rate is far short of the 7% per year needed if poverty is to be halved by 2015.<sup>19</sup> Worst still, the continent's mean income/expenditure is much lower than in East and South Asia. Thus, "Africa is far behind all other regions in terms of the UN human development index. It will also lag behind in most MDGs [Millennium Development Goals]. If current trends continue, Africa will not meet the 2015 target of reducing poverty. In 1990, 47% of Africans lived in poverty. In 2004, 41% did, and at the present trend, 37% will in 2015."<sup>20</sup> With less than five years to 2015, the MDGs may well come and go like many other Western ideological policies developed to address poverty on the continent.

Moreover, Africa's economy is registering economic growth at the expense of environmental degradation. From an ecological perspective, however, the question whether Africa's economy is at the turning point is definitely irrelevant to environmentalists given the fact that economists gauge economic growth based on GDPs without addressing the ecological economy of Earth. In fact, optimism brought about by

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<sup>19</sup> Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are the two regions not expected to meet the MDGs. However, Mauritius has already met four, Botswana has met three and will possibly meet another one, and South Africa has met three. Other nine countries will meet two each. 23 will meet one. Ibid., 76.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 76. Ecological sustainability is fundamental in the achieving of the MDGs. Environmental degradation has the potential to undermine economic and social development; the consequence of which is further poverty and conflicts.. See also John Hart, *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006).

current economic growth in Africa is based on the fallacy that the continent's natural goods are renewable and therefore can be exploited endlessly without damaging the economy of Earth. Since African economists such as Go and Page share the assumption of limitless economic growth, their analyses of Africa's economic growth ignore ecological integrity as an economic issue. Neither do they pay attention to the role of international markets in exploiting Africa's natural goods.

It is one thing to speak about a "global village"; it is another to live in "a global metropolitan area," with an extremely rich minority and extremely poor majority. The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) picked up this issue when it concluded that "Earth is one but the world is not. We all depend on one biosphere for sustaining our lives. Yet each community, each country, strives for survival and prosperity with little regard for its impact on others. Some consume Earth's resources at a rate that would leave little for future generations. Others, many more in number, consume far too little and live with the prospect of hunger, squalor, disease, and early death."<sup>21</sup>

The exploitation of natural goods without any consideration for ecological integrity raises ethical questions about human responsibility to God's creation and future generations. The intellectual and cultural dimensions of current economic theories that value natural goods for their instrumental worth continue to influence Africa's economic policies. But can such an economic model provide answers to this moral question?

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<sup>21</sup> United Nations, *Our Common Future*. <http://www.un-documents.net/ocf-01.htm>. Accessed 07/05, 2008.

The introduction of the concept of “sustainable development” as the viable economic path was an attempt to address the above question. Proponents of sustainable development argue that development should attempt to improve the livelihoods of the majority of the world’s population while maintaining human responsibility to future generations. They also realized that in order to be sensitive to the justifiable demands of future generations and the natural world, we need an economic path that would provide both economic growth and ecological integrity.

Although the Club of Rome challenged the belief in endless growth with the document “Limits of Growth” in 1972, it was WCED that defined sustainable development in 1983 as development that “meets the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future.”<sup>22</sup> Whereas development as originally conceived implied endless economic progress and growth without concomitant moral obligations to humanity,<sup>23</sup> the WCED defined development from a social justice and moral perspective. “Sustainable development is the way in which economic growth must be fashioned and organized, not only taking into account the long term considerations but also the modulations in the Market economy, with limits, that make it

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<sup>22</sup>The Commission also noted that “Far from requiring the cessation of economic growth, it recognizes that the problems of poverty and underdevelopment cannot be solved unless we have a new era of growth in which developing countries play a large role and reap large benefits.” [G. Brundtland, ed.] *Our Common Future: The World Commission on Environment and Development* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 43.

<sup>23</sup> See Gilbert Rist, *History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith*, Third Edition (London: ZED Books, 2002); Hawken, *The Ecology of Commerce*, 105ff.

socially and ethically acceptable.”<sup>24</sup> The WCED noted that “sustainable development results from a unit of public or private actions which aim to satisfy the essential needs of populations and organize an economic growth which benefits the greater welfare of individuals and ensure social cohesions; which takes into account the challenges of good governance and cultural diversity whilst ensuring that the capacity of future generations to respond to their needs is not compromised.”<sup>25</sup>

The above understanding has influenced all Earth-related “summits,” and today most African governments use “sustainable development” as a “tag” word in their economic development policies. Ironically, the environment has continued to suffer amid so-called sustainable development.<sup>26</sup> The problem is that sustainable development seems to promote human responsibility to future generations on one hand, while advocating the instrumental value of natural goods on the other. It is a contradiction to expect humanity to be mindful of future generations while it exploits natural goods. Additionally, the current definition does not acknowledge the fact that nature has intrinsic or inherent

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<sup>24</sup> The entire WCED document is reproduced in Rhazaoui Ahmed Grégoire and Luc-Joël Soraya Mellali (eds), *Africa and the Millennium Development Goals* (Paris : Economica, 2005), 182.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> The Rio Earth Summit accepted the notion of sustainable development and proposed for the action plan called Agenda 21. The Kyoto Protocol of 1997 set some objectives for the reduction of greenhouse gases to protect the Earth. The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg concluded that despite the fact that certain achievements have been registered, greater efforts were needed to realize Agenda 21. The WSSD plan of implementation incorporated the MDGs and recommended actions that promoted their realization. The United Nations Secretary General identified five key priority areas for action, water, energy, health, agriculture and biodiversity. Havet and Gregoire, *Africa and the Millennium Development Goals*, 180.

value. It also ignores the role of Africa's corrupt leadership in the exploitation and distribution of natural goods. Equally, the definition does not address the role of international forces in today's development.

Consequently, Africa's economic growth is dependent on the exploitation of natural goods for global markets as opposed to localized needs.<sup>27</sup> In this case, any discussion of sustainable development should deal with the role the Global North and now China are playing in African "economic" growth. There is a danger in ignoring the fact that for development to be realized across the globe, the global North and China should slow down their development rates and change their consumption patterns.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, sustainable development ought to address massive corruption in many African states, where political leaders accumulate wealth at the expense of their people.

Indeed, Nigeria, Zambia and Zimbabwe boast of many natural goods. Yet, the majority of the population lives in extreme poverty while politicians continue to pocket

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<sup>27</sup> Susan George, "How the Poor Develop the Rich," in *The Post-Development Reader*, ed., Majid Rahnema and Victoria Bawtree (London: Zed Books, 1997), 207-213.

<sup>28</sup> According to WCED, "The concept of sustainable development provides a framework for the integration of environment policies and development strategies - the term 'development' being used here in its broadest sense. The word is often taken to refer to the processes of economic and social change in the Third World. But the integration of environment and development is required in all countries, rich and poor. The pursuit of sustainable development requires changes in the domestic and international policies of every nation." United Nations, *Our Common Future*. <http://www.un-documents.net/ocf-01.htm>. Accessed 07/05/2008.

much of the country's wealth.<sup>29</sup> In this regard, addressing the occurring environmental crisis will demand more than what the above definition offers. Since colonial times, sub-Saharan Africa has been valued for its instrumental significance to the world economy, while to the global North and China, the continent remains the "world bank" of raw materials. Unfortunately, the deposits in this bank are not renewable. In addition, since the income from these natural goods is mismanaged and unevenly distributed, Africa's sustainable development is postponed to the distant future. Therefore, Africa's economic growth is short-lived.

Christian ecologists have equally debated the meaning of sustainable development in the globalized world. Many of them maintain that the concept does not go far enough to address the problem at hand. Leonardo Boff from Latin America and Larry Rasmussen from North America exemplify this sort of opposition. Independently, they argue that the concept of sustainable development is an extension of the ideology of 'limitless growth' which is putting our planet in danger. They further claim that sustainable development treats Earth as an endless bank of raw materials to be exploited. According to Boff, the desire for unlimited growth means invention of destructive forces, and the death of Earth and Earth's species.

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<sup>29</sup> Most local peoples benefit little from the Earth's natural goods. For example, the Tonga of Zambia have not benefited from the wealth created from the Kariba dam. Likewise, the oil-rich Niger/Delta region of Nigeria produces about 80 percent of Nigeria's national wealth, but the Ogoni people have benefited very little from it. World Council of Churches Press Release, Geneva. <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/news/press/00/37pu.html>. Accessed, 01/21/2009.

Although the concept of sustainable development is gaining grounds in many circles, Boff contends that the idea never gets away from its economic origins of ever-increasing productivity, accumulation, and technological innovation in the world.<sup>30</sup> He concludes, “Sustainable development is an oxymoron since it is built on the economic system that believes in limitless growth.”<sup>31</sup> Boff’s skepticism is varied. The WCED, for instance links sustainable development to great “rapid economic growth in both industrial and developing countries.” But it also advocates “A five- to ten-fold increase in the world industrial output ...by the time the world population stabilizes sometime in the next century.”<sup>32</sup> Between these two statements, the oxymoron of sustainable development becomes apparent.

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<sup>30</sup> Starting in 1987 with the Brundtland United Nations Report (also called “Our Common Future”) based on the research carried out from 1983-1987 on the ecological state of the Earth, the idea of sustainable development gained ground. Sustainable development was defined as a “process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the orientation of investments, the paths of technological development and institutional change are in accordance with the current and future needs.” United Nations, *Our Common Future*. However, Boff contends that the notion “still remains captive to the growth paradigm.... No matter which terms are tagged onto such development, whether self-sustaining or self-generating, it never gets away from its economic origins, namely, rising productivity, accumulation, and technological innovation.” Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), 66.

<sup>31</sup> Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 67.

<sup>32</sup> Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, 117. Clausen argues the world population “will stabilize at over 11 billion in 2150, the population of India would be 1.8 billion, making it the most populous nation on Earth. And Kenya’s population would have risen from 19.7 million to 160 million.” A. W. Clausen, *Population Growth and Economic and Social Development: Addresses by A.W. Clausen President, The World Bank and International Finance Corporation* (Washington D.C: The World Bank, 1984), 4.

Larry Rasmussen also accuses the current economic systems of what he terms the “Big economy,” which neglects the working of the ecosphere, “the Great economy.” He notes that every human economy depends on the economy of Earth:

Just as there can be no post-agricultural society, there can be no economic order that is not totally dependent upon the planet’s ecosystems and the biosphere and geosphere as a whole.... Human economics dare not exceed tolerable environmental margins or violate requirements for renewing and replenishing nature. Economic production and consumption, as well as human reproduction, are unsustainable when they no longer fall within the borders of nature’s regeneration. So the Bottom line below the Bottom line is that if we don’t recognize that the laws of economics and the laws of ecology are finally the same laws, we are in doo-doo. Eco/nomics is the only way possible.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, an argument can be made that while the concept of sustainable development has been in play for some time now, it has done little to reduce the ecological crisis in Africa.

The over-exploitation of natural goods is based on a fallacy that Earth goods are meant to last forever. Even Africa’s own economic development plans reflect this global assumption. As O.B. Smith and S. Koala observe, amidst the stress of poverty, poor people would exploit their limited natural goods “to meet immediate and pressing needs even if such short term exploitation would compromise the long term stability and viability of such resources.”<sup>34</sup> In addition to poverty, over-population, poor

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<sup>33</sup> Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 112.

<sup>34</sup> O.B. Smith and S. Koala, “Desertification: Myths and Realities,” in *Human Impact on Environment and Sustainable Development in Africa*, ed., Michael Darkoh and Apollo Rwomire (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing 2003), 192.

environmental policies, and international trade continue to compromise Africa's environment.<sup>35</sup>

Africa continues to boast of economic growth measured in terms of endless exploitation of natural goods while the impact of the same on the environment has been ignored. Ironically, most African countries are parties to treaties or agreements such as the ACCNRR regarding biodiversity, climate change, desertification, endangered species, hazardous wastes, ozone layer protection, and wetlands protection. Yet, these countries, while pledging to uphold ecological sensitivity, continue to exploit natural goods without any moral consideration for the poor or for ecosystems. Being aware of the dangers of ecological degradation and at the same time being unable to act fully to address them has been the experience of many African countries.

Furthermore, Rasmussen asserts that the current economic system "doesn't care where resources come from and what 'niche' roles they play in and for the community of life in home locales. Thus it not only contributes to destruction of social-environmental ecologies but generates one of the great periods of species extinction in history (and the first at human hands)."<sup>36</sup> Amidst such hopelessness, an African identification "of the divine spirit in nature and the community spirit between human beings, other living creatures and natural phenomena could reinforce the Christian doctrine of Creation as

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<sup>35</sup> Michael Darkoh and Apollo Rwomire, *Human Impact on Environment and Sustainable Development in Africa* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), 4.

<sup>36</sup> Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, 114.

well as contribute to Christian reflection on ecological problems.”<sup>37</sup> Although Mercy Amba Oduyoye is right in arguing that Africans have traditional resources for ecological reflection and action, the dilemma that Boff points out should be noted. Africans like other “human beings, especially with the advent of the industrial revolution, have proved that they are exterminating angels, veritable demons of Earth. But human beings could also become guardian angels, intent upon saving Earth, which is their fatherland and motherland.”<sup>38</sup>

The paradigm on which Africa’s economic development is founded does not value the ecosystem. As a result, the operative concept of sustainable development values Earth only for natural goods. These natural goods must be preserved or conserved so that future human generations can have something to use as well. Such reasoning does not consider the fact that humanity is connected to other species through the web of life. It is for this reason that an argument can be made that an ethic of “sustainable living” rather than “sustainable development” makes sense.<sup>39</sup> An ethic of sustainable living demands that humans examine their attitudes towards Earth’s goods. Sustainable living seeks to meet the needs and not wants of human beings. Sustainable living demands that we

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<sup>37</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “African Religious Beliefs,” in *African Theology En Route, Pan African Conference of Third World Theologians (1977 : Accra, Ghana)*, ed., Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll, NY : Orbis Books, 1979),110.

<sup>38</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 19.

<sup>39</sup> According to Boff, the term should not be “development” but “growth,” which he argues is sought for its own sake with a single quantitative and linear model. *Ibid.*, 67.

respect our ecological community and act to defend Earth's integrity. Any action that seeks to destroy life will be opposed and that which encourages the enhancement of life will be encouraged. Indigenous peoples practiced this ethic and enjoyed interconnected lives with each other and the rest of creation.

### **Economic Development amid Extreme Population Growth**

Because of its fast growing population, Africa is being forced to exploit natural goods regardless of the impact on the natural world. In fact, the notion of sustainable development is not helping to heal the bleeding continent. Uncontrolled population growth is not just affecting Earth but the poor majority whose livelihoods are dependent on the land. According to Boff, the poor are the most vulnerable and threatened of Earth's creatures since they make up more than 80% of the world population that lives in the poor South. Boff further notes that more than 1 billion people live in absolute poverty while more than 3 billion do not have enough to eat. Worse still, more than 60 million die from starvation each year.

Amid such alarming data, rich nations show little solidarity for poor countries. For example, the U.S. devotes only 0.15% of its GNP to addressing poverty in the world.<sup>40</sup> To Boff, this illustrates the level of disconnectedness in the world today: "we are pushed back to an ultimate basis for the current ecological impasse: the ongoing disruption of the basis of connectedness with the whole of the universe and with its

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<sup>40</sup>Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 1.

Creator that the human being has introduced, fueled, and perpetuated.”<sup>41</sup> This disruption he calls original sin, or the sin of the world which has always dominated and abused Earth. In order to address this problem, Boff suggests returning to the spirit of connectedness to Earth, in which we find God in all and all in God. This is expressed in the concept of “panentheism;” the belief that the Creator Spirit “is present in the cosmos and the cosmos is present in God.”<sup>42</sup>

The understanding that God is present in the cosmos and the cosmos exists in God suggests that human population growth should be understood theologically. Religious foundations for human procreation should be revisited. Admittedly, some groups within African Christianity, African Traditional Religions, and Islam are opposed to family planning when contraception is the method. Yet the current crisis demands that African Christians confront the reality that endless multiplication is impossible on a limited Earth. Likewise, abundant life is impossible on a limited piece of land. It is one thing to argue for abundant life in the world with 10.5 million people and it is another to make a similar argument when faced with 10 billion. For this reason, Christian ecological ethics in Africa should address population growth from an African Christian eco-ethical perspective.

It has been argued that in African morality, anything that threatens to destroy life is considered evil. That population growth threatens life is a given, since human beings

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 152.

cannot multiply beyond what Earth can carry. Of course, the interconnected nature of the universe allows Africans to accept the possibility that even good forces have the potential to destroy life. For instance, Spirits can be good or evil depending on how they act. Likewise, human beings can be good or evil depending on their actions. It is here that the ancestors play a vital role. Ancestors are expected to protect their descendants from evil spirits. But just as the ancestors and other good spirits protect life from such malignant forces, they also protect life from human abuse.

The question, however, remains as to how the ancestors will respond to the problem of population growth. To some people, Africa has enough room for more people and the question of overpopulation can easily be solved through land redistribution.<sup>43</sup> Yet such an argument fails to address the fact that land redistribution is only a temporary solution. As human population grows, so does the need for more land. The need for more land creates another crisis for both humanity and other biokind. As people clear more land for agriculture, more species lose their habitat.

In African religion, prosperity and abundant life meant many children, animals, and abundant land and other natural goods. In fact, when elders spoke about abundant life, they had in mind quantitative growth. To them, abundant life meant having many animals, unlimited fertile lands, plentiful fruit forests, vast water resources, and, above all, numberless children. On the human level, they expected as many people as possible

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<sup>43</sup> In most cases, land redistribution has benefited the rich over the poor. In Zimbabwe, land redistribution has led to severe land degradation, wildlife exploitation and has threatened food security.

to live in the land free of famine and wars. The biblical command to “multiply and fill the Earth” (Gen 1:28) worsened such expectations. Unfortunately, uncontrolled growth has negative impacts on biota, on human life, and on the land.<sup>44</sup>

### **Neo-Malthusian and neo-Böserupian arguments on Population Growth**

Neo-Malthusian and neo-Böserupian arguments have dominated the debates on the relationship between population growth and the environment. According to Thomas Robert Malthus, human demographics if unchecked could outstrip food production and in the end lead to death from starvation.<sup>45</sup> Ecologists add that while Malthus emphasized how overpopulation would affect humanity, human population growth impacts negatively also on Earth and biokind. It is necessary to recognize that death and starvation will be extended to other forms of life as well.

If Malthus was alarmed by population growth, Ester Böserup argued that demographic growth leads to new agricultural innovations. Whereas Malthus argued that

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<sup>44</sup> Ruether puts population growth among the “four horsemen of world destruction”. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 101.

<sup>45</sup> To Malthus, death is the end result of the population catastrophe. Hence, “The power of population is so superior to the power of the earth to produce subsistence for man, which premature death must in some shape or other visit the human race. The vices of mankind are active and able ministers of depopulation. They are the precursors in the great army of destruction, and often finish the dreadful work themselves. But should they fail in this war of extermination, sickly seasons, epidemics, pestilence, and plague advance in terrific array, and sweep off their thousands and tens of thousands. Should success be still incomplete, gigantic inevitable famine stalks in the rear, and with one mighty blow levels the population with the food of the world.” Thomas R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population: A View of its Past and Present Effects on Human Happiness; with an Inquiry into Our Prospects Respecting the Future Removal or Mitigation of the Evils which It Occasions*. <http://www.econlib.org/library/Malthus/malPlong.html>. Accessed 08/09/2008.

population growth will lead to starvation and wars, Böserup objected that increases in numbers will force people into developing new machinery, fertilizers, and many other means of production to solve the demographic crisis. To Böserup, advances in technology will address the challenges of population growth and therefore avoid the Malthus catastrophe.<sup>46</sup>

Building on Böserup, Valentina Mazzucato and David Niemeijer argue that in Africa, population growth has forced African traditional institutions to adjust to better farming methods and enabled an environmentally sustainable land use within the context of a rising population and growing scarcity of natural resources.<sup>47</sup> What neo-Böserupians like Mazzucato and Niemeijer do not address, however, is the life of the land and other natural goods. Technological changes do not happen in the blue but on Earth, the very Earth being threatened by the forces of technology. As already observed, Böserup's hypothesis follows the economic assumption that Earth has unlimited goods to be exploited endlessly, which is ecologically false.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> According to Böserup, "necessity is the mother of invention" hence "agricultural intensification" is one way in which human population growth will lead to "agricultural growth." Ester Boserup, *The Conditions of Agricultural Growth: The Economics of Agrarian Change under Population Pressure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1965).

<sup>47</sup> Valentina Mazzucato and David Niemeijer, "Population Growth and the Environment in Africa: Local Institutions, the Missing Link," *Economic Geography* 78, no.2 (Apr., 2002): 171-193.

<sup>48</sup> Drucilla K. Barker and Susan F. Feiner, *Liberating Economics, Feminist Perspective on Families, Work, and Globalization* (Michigan: University of Michigan, 2006), 95-117; Paul Hawken, *The Ecology of Commerce*, 33-35.

Sharing the neo-Malthusian assumption, however, Rosemary R. Ruether argues that “the exponential growth of human population on Earth in shorter and shorter periods of time is one of the major factors threatening the carrying capacity of Earth.”<sup>49</sup> Ruether observes that population growth should therefore be linked to other ecological issues such as food production, energy consumption, climate change, pollution, extinction, militarism, and war. Unless we accept that Earth is our home, and the destruction of Earth as annihilation of ourselves, we will continue to be agents of self-destruction.<sup>50</sup>

In *Earth Follies*, Joni Seager makes a similar point, albeit artistically; “in 1989, one of the most ambitious exhibits in the aquarium was a recreation of a tropical rainforest. As visitors entered the exhibit, they were presented with two digital counters displaying rapidly changing numbers on a screen. The first counter was a continuous tally of global rainforest loss, a mesmerizing and disturbing display. On the second digital display, the numbers flicking, almost as rapidly, kept tally of the world’s population growth.”<sup>51</sup> Like Ruether, Seager argues that there is a direct link between population growth and environmental degradation.

In their book, *Genes, Crops and the Environment*, John Holden, James Peacock, and Trevor Williams attribute the destruction of the ecosystem to demographic growth (Malthus) and industrialization. They argue that until 200 years ago or so, humanity lived

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<sup>49</sup> Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 88

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>51</sup> Joni Seager, *Earth Follies* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 213.

in harmonious relationships with nature. This relationship was disturbed by runaway population, poverty, and ruthless exploitation of natural goods. Without denying how climate change may transform ecological systems, they argue that “it has always been a feature of life on this planet that plant and animal species have had to adapt to changing environments and survival has depended on that ability to do so. The new factor in this dynamic relationship between plants and their environment is the greatly accelerated rate of change imposed by man, with which the response mechanisms of species are unable to cope, resulting in large-scale losses, not only of species but also of the whole ecosystem.”<sup>52</sup> To Holden, Peacock, and Williams, the progressive disruption of the ecosystem is due to human- related activities.

### **The Impact of Population Growth on the Gwembe Valley**

The Kariba dam was born from a theory current at the time that viewed economic development as key to human development. The relocation of the Tonga from the valley to selective areas on both sides of the Zambezi River was viewed as saving the uncivilized Africans from perpetual underdevelopment. Illustrated in commerce and civilization, this economic theory disrupted the harmonious relationship that existed between nature and humanity. It also created the crisis of overpopulation in the Gwembe valley. As the population grew, so did poverty and environmental degradation on all

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<sup>52</sup> John Holden, James Peacock, and Trevor Williams, *Genes, Crops and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 3.

fronts. Ezekiel Kalipeni confirms that high demographic rates “have been singled out as one of the major factors that have greatly contributed to the declining economies and food production in most African countries.”<sup>53</sup>

Although Kalipeni pays attention to the impact of population growth on Africa’s economies, he barely addresses the ecological and economic effects of resettlement which are critical to Africa as whole. Resettled people adjust negatively to their new environments since they are not ecologically connected to the land. For instance, the Gwembe Tonga practiced a mixed economy, with both animals and fields. This means that increases in demographics were matched by that of their animals. Because the new land was limited, they did not just over-graze their land; they also over-cultivated their small fields to the detriment of their new land. This led to severe land degradation and the Lusitu area (where Gwembe Tonga were originally resettled) is severely degraded, as is true across the valley.

Lisa Cliggett attributes the degradation of the Gwembe Valley to drought and overpopulation and other social factors. She argues that the poverty of the valley should be traced to land scarcity, poor soils, and HIV. In her historical analysis of the situation, she notes

The Gwembe Valley is known throughout Zambia as a drought-prone, isolated, and impoverished region of scarcity. The difficult living conditions in the Gwembe are linked closely to the local changing environment, agricultural practices, and changing social institutions.

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<sup>53</sup> Ezekiel Kalipeni, *Population Growth and Environmental Degradation in Southern Africa* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Pub., 1994), 19.

Although the Gwembe climate and ecology have always challenged local people's food procurement strategies, the resettlement in 1958 caused additional pressures for both the Tonga and their hosts in new areas. People were forced to compete for the same limited resources, and in most cases, resettlers had access only to poorer-quality soils than their hosts had in the new areas, and than they had had before resettlement.<sup>54</sup>

Although Cliggett accepts that the hard ecological situation of the Gwembe valley existed before the resettlement, she contends that land degradation, changing social institutions, and localized overpopulation contribute to decreasing food security and conditions of scarcity in the valley. Cliggett observes that prior to the construction of Kariba Dam, the Gwembe population was about 86,000, of which 52,000 lived on the Zambian side. At that time, the population density was in the region of eight residents per square mile. After resettlement, however, the Tonga were forced into population densities three times the density of their original communities. By 1987, "the Zambian population of the Gwembe Valley was approximately 125,000. Although portions of the Gwembe remain forested and uninhabited, some areas, especially land close to the lakeshore or tributaries, have become densely populated."<sup>55</sup>

Cliggett's argument, though important in understanding the food crisis in the valley, does not address the ecological integrity of the Gwembe. The valley provided the habitat for millions of other biota as was evidenced by Operation Noah which sought to rescue animals when the dam was filled with water. In fact, what Cliggett sees as empty

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<sup>54</sup> Lisa Cliggett, *Grains from Grass: Aging, Gender, and Famine in Rural Africa* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2005), 59.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

forested and uninhabited areas are homes to millions of creatures; human settlement impacts negatively on these species. Despite this weakness, Cliggett's analysis shows how Africa's food production is not keeping up with rampant population growth. In this regard, Lester R. Brown associates the reductions in per capita cereal production across the globe to population explosion.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, unless the world addresses population growth as a matter of priority, famines will soon become common across the globe.<sup>57</sup>

The growth in sub-Saharan Africa's population is mostly evidenced by the demand for extra food each year. It has become common for African countries to request food aid based on reasons ranging from wars to harvest failure. While international agencies have provided such aid, "suppliers are now finding it difficult to meet the demand."<sup>58</sup> For this reason, Tim Dyson concludes that "population growth is certainly an important factor behind the contemporary problem of human hunger. Slower population growth would probably eventually result in higher per capita food supplies. The world's most poorly nourished populations are generally growing the fastest. And in many

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<sup>56</sup> Lester R. Brown, "Feeding six billion," *World Watch* (Sept./Oct. 1989): 32-40.

<sup>57</sup> Tim Dyson, "Population Growth and Food Production: Recent Global and Regional Trends," *Population and Development Review* 20, no. 2 (Jun., 1994): 397-411.

<sup>58</sup> The BCC reported that the United Nations food agency was cutting food supplies to four million people in Zimbabwe because of a lack of funds. "The World Food Programme said it had had no response to its October appeal for \$140m (£91m) to feed Zimbabwe. Food could run out entirely by January unless fresh support is provided, the WFP warned, as it takes six weeks for supplies to reach rural areas." BBC News, Tuesday, 11 November 2008. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7722631>. Accessed 12/05/08. What the report missed, however, is the fact that food production is not matching up with population growth across the world. With uncontrolled consumption in rich nations, food is becoming more expensive.

locations – not just Africa -- demographic pressures are damaging the resource base upon which people's livelihoods depend."<sup>59</sup>

The myth of economic growth as the answer to population growth assumes that Earth, like the economy, grows; and, that Earth's natural goods can be extensively exploited without consequences to life. This assumption denies the basic point of ecology: that most of Earth's natural goods are non-renewable and, in Rasmussen's words, natural goods are "the one-time endowment."<sup>60</sup> Proponents of expansionist theories ignore the fact that once Earth is degraded, its capacity to sustain life is compromised. As Rasmussen suggests, "An expanding world needs to know the total activity the biosphere can tolerate and yet renew itself indefinitely. It needs to know the biosphere's 'carrying capacity' for the long haul."<sup>61</sup> Because unlimited economic growth on the limited Earth is impossible, Earth's capacity to sustain life amid an uncontrolled population explosion cannot be defended logically or ecologically.

Unfortunately, post-colonial African governments have continued to employ policies that reflect Western assumptions of Newtonian mechanics. They assume that natural goods can be recycled endlessly through the use of capital. But Rasmussen contends against an economic system that negates nature. He explains that in the Newtonian economic system,

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<sup>59</sup> Dyson, "Population Growth and Food Production," 407.

<sup>60</sup> Rasmussen, *Earth Community Earth Ethics*, 112.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

Commodities and production, distribution and consumption processes thus count as the economy. Nature doesn't – except as 'raw material.' So land is 'empty' when 'nothing is on it.' In that pitiful state, it is undeveloped and passively awaits human investment and labor to "make something of it." Until humans acquire and transform it, land is thus devoid of value. Five thousand species may live in this unoccupied earth patch, and its life-support may be very full indeed. But modern economics does not see this and does not understand in either theory or practice that land is embodied energy with its own complex life, its own complex actions and needs, and its own economy.<sup>62</sup>

Although post-colonial Africa has inherited and promoted this understanding, it contradicts traditional understandings of the land. Traditionally, land was held in common as "a sacred trust," which was ever in "the holding of ancestors."

### **Land Degradation and its effect on Africa's future**

Africa is the second largest continent on planet Earth, with approximately 30,000,000 sq km. The continent has two large deserts: the Sahara desert covers almost a third of the continent with 9,065,000 sq km, while the Namib consumes almost 259,000 sq km. While this leaves out almost two thirds of the continent, not every piece of land is agriculture friendly; hence, land degradation and desertification demand immediate attention. The effects of land degradation range from migration to environmental refugees who are seeking productive land. As land become scarce and populations continue to grow, famines and land-related conflicts will become prevalent on the continent.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 118.

Scholars have identified different causes of desertification and land degradation in Africa. These include climatic conditions and human related activities such as farming, deforestation, grazing, and mining. Some scholars have argued that desertification is not new to human history. In fact, it has existed for ages and dates back several centuries when human populations were relatively small. Others argue, however, that desertification is a post-1970 Sahelian drought phenomenon, connected with the advancing deserts. This hypothesis was suggested by ecologist Hugh Lamprey who conducted his study in Western Sudan between 1958 and 1975. He concluded that the desert was advancing at the rate of 5-6 km per year; the position subsequently taken by the Sudanese government. Consequently, the Sudanese government has observed that desertification is a process which starts in small patches and grows bigger at the margins due to human and climatic variations that reduce vegetation and expose soils to erosion. If this process is not arrested in time, small areas can develop into full blown deserts.<sup>63</sup> To Lamprey, human and climatic variations are directly linked when it comes to desertification. For example, drought can precipitate land degradation in areas that are overexploited just as land degradation can cause drought “by the feedback mechanisms involving surface albedo, soil moisture and possibly dust.”<sup>64</sup>

O. B. Smith and S. Koala attempt to bring these two groups together when they argue that although desertification has existed in history, uncontrolled population growth

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<sup>63</sup> Smith and Koala, “Desertification: Myths and Realities,” 188-189.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

has given desertification a new face that did not exist in the past. For this reason, it has “devastating local consequences...with equally alarming global impact, to which the global community should pay commensurate attention.”<sup>65</sup> Desertification is definitely one of the major threats that needs addressing if ecological integrity is to be realized in the world today. Admittedly, ecologists are agreed that while other factors contribute to desertification, poor agricultural practices such as long term irrigation, slash and burn, overgrazing, insufficient crop rotation and short fallow periods bear much of the blame. These practices encourage water and wind erosion, which in turn reduce land fertility and foment desertification.<sup>66</sup> The situation is even worse when we take into consideration that under the spur of desperate poverty and overpopulation, human beings are forced to live in conditions that force overgrazing of rangelands, erosion of marginal farmlands, and de-vegetation from gathering fuel wood.

Indeed, peasant farmers’ agricultural methods in developing countries contribute to land desertification and degradation. But to fault them entirely is to ignore the role of multi-national companies and political corruption in this process.<sup>67</sup> In the globalized

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<sup>65</sup> Nash, *Loving Nature*, 43.

<sup>66</sup> Nash notes that declining safe drinking water, fish stocks and deforestation are indicators that this generation is living beyond planetary means. “The maximization of current benefits for a minority of the present generation is being archived by the reduction of potential benefits for future generation. If humans have responsibilities for future generations, economic systems that stress the virtues of sustainability and frugality are essential.” *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>67</sup> Church Collins and Mary Wright also explain the impact of globalization on the environment. They argue that in order to avoid paying the costs of ecologically sustainable processes and technologies, multi-national or global companies prefer to operate in the Global South where laws are often weak. As such, “precious water around the world is being consumed or contaminated at startling rate. Forests are

world, these companies push poor communities into arid areas while clearing large areas for monoculture and mining projects.<sup>68</sup> As a result, the “quality of the environment continues to decline in many parts of the world. The last great forests in Africa and the Amazon are rapidly disappearing. Rangelands in the tropics are rapidly being desertified. There seems to be few, if any, parts of the developing countries that are immune to this general trend of decline or environmental despoliation.”<sup>69</sup>

The impact of desertification negatively affects the poor. In Zambia for example, copper mining continues to destroy productive land on which many people depend. Although Munyaradzi Chenje argues that mining activities often have minimal impact on the environment, except where the more environmentally harmful techniques are employed, in Zambia, the environment around mining towns is highly degraded.<sup>70</sup> In fact, the exploitation of mineral goods across Africa has had profoundly negative impacts on the land, the water, and other creatures. Copper, iron, gold, and diamond mines have

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being leveled and factories belch pollution into the air. Biodiversity is being rapidly destroyed in order to meet the short-term economic needs of our planet residents.” Chuck Collins and Mary Wright, *The Moral Measure of the Economy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis books, 2007), 112.

<sup>68</sup> David Korten *When Corporations Rule the World* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2001); Collins and Wright, *The Moral Measure of the Economy*, 109-112.

<sup>69</sup> Darkoh and Rwomire, “Introduction,” 1.

<sup>70</sup> Munyarazi Chenje, *State of the Environment 2000: Zambezi Basin* (Maseru: Lesotho, 2000), 122.

scarred the landscape and polluted waterways, reduced land productivity and in most cases displaced local people.<sup>71</sup>

As already observed in chapter four, the World Bank-and the International Monetary Fund-imposed Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) forced many African counties into over-exploiting their natural goods in exchange for foreign earnings. Since then, African governments have sought foreign earnings, while ecological integrity and the poor people's wellbeing are the last items on their agenda. One good example is that of the coalfields in South Africa. While the coalfields and power stations east of Johannesburg produce sulfurous air pollution equal to that of all of Europe, and continue to degrade the land's productivity and peoples' lives, the South African government (like most African governments) does not pay attention to the same.<sup>72</sup>

In addition, land degradation is directly linked to Africa's food security. The 1991 Lusaka SADC declaration on the environment stated that environmental degradation is undermining crop and animal husbandry, which are the mainstays of rural livelihoods in

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<sup>71</sup> G. Letamo and O. Totolo's observation about Botswana is also true with regard to Zambia. Sulphur dioxide (one of the waste products in copper processing) once released into the atmosphere combines with water vapor to form sulphuric acid. "During the rainy season, this acid falls on trees, water resources and buildings. Its impact can be seen by the yellowing of leaves and corrosion of buildings." Chenje, *State of the Environment 2000*, 99.

<sup>72</sup> Kalipeni, *Population Growth and Environmental Degradation in Southern Africa*, 6. This crisis was projected as early as 1991 by the Lusaka Southern African Development Community (SADC) declaration on environmental degradation in the region. Muhamed Salih, "Introduction," in *Environmental Policies and Politics in Eastern and Southern Africa*, ed., Muhamed R. A. Salih and Shibu Tedla (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

the region.<sup>73</sup> This observation was followed up by a 2007 Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) document which warned that mining in Africa was reducing the land's productivity. According to the FAO, "The potential of land to produce is set by soil and climatic conditions and by the level of inputs and management applied to the land. Any over-exploitation or mining of land beyond these limits results in degradation and declining yields and this is now happening in many parts of Africa."<sup>74</sup> Amidst this degradation, Africa's population continues to explode. Even when one agrees with Böserup's hypothesis, Africa's population growth amidst extreme poverty has far-reaching implications for human life and the environment as a whole.

Accordingly, G. Letamo and O. Totolo argue that the effects of desertification are visible around big resettlements. Soil erosion, deforestations, desertification, and a massive influx of rural poor to urban slums and shantytowns are common across the continent. For instance, in the Gwembe Valley, increasing human population has badly affected the environment to such an extent that agricultural land for food crops and livestock pasture is almost gone. Even the Lusitu River which was a major source of water at the time of resettlement is buried in sand; and soil erosion keeps threatening roads and homes during the rain seasons.

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<sup>73</sup> Dibua, *Modernization and the Crisis of Development in Africa*, 249-274

<sup>74</sup> United Nations, *Land and Environmental Degradation and Desertification in Africa*, FAO Corporate Document, 2007. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/x5318e/x5318e01.htm>. Accessed 10/10/2008.

While the blame can be placed on the people, the developer of the Kariba Dam should shoulder much of the responsibility. Chenje confirms this when he attributes much of today's environmental problems in the Zambezi Basin to development strategies of the 1950-1960 era. In fact, he claims that such strategies maximized exploitation of natural goods without paying attention to the environment. "As a result, no serious or effective measures were taken to control environmental degradation, including pollution."<sup>75</sup> Unless governments address the issue as a priority, Africa's food security will be in crisis.

The same sorts of problems can be identified in connection with countless development projects that have been instituted on the continent. Maximization of production has become the norm for African economic growth while the consequences of such production on the environment and the poor are ignored. African communities had special attachment to the land and have historically worked to protect it; but the coming of Western civilization led them into abandoning their traditional lifestyles. Whereas Africa was prone to droughts, the environment was not severely damaged because "Africans maintained a detailed knowledge of grazing and water supplies over enormous areas, moved their herds constantly, and adjusted month to month to changing conditions. Their mobility, low population densities, and careful judgments gave them the ability to endure drought, the ravages of cattle disease, and constant uncertainties."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Chenje *State of the Environment 2000 : Zambezi Basin*, 194

<sup>76</sup>Brian Fagan, *Floods, Famines and Empires: El Nino and the Fate of Civilization* (Basic Books, 2000), 220.

Following Michael H. Grantz's argument that population growth, environmental degradation and poor government land management policies are responsible for Sub-Saharan famines,<sup>77</sup> Brian Fagan argues that the West African catastrophe that resulted in people and animals starving to death was not caused by lack of rainfall since the Sahelian region experienced drought before. Neither does he accept the argument that climate change was responsible. Rather, the catastrophe was caused by rapid population growth and by careless, naïve development planning that paid little attention to the environmental history of the Sahelian regions.<sup>78</sup>

The fact that population growth negatively affects the quality of life on Earth is not disputed by most Third World and Marxist scholars. What is mostly disputed is the assumption that poor nations, whose populations are growing so fast, should put measures in place to arrest this growth. Scholars (among them Murray Bookchin and Curtis Skinner) argue that population growth by itself does not threaten the quality of life on Earth; rather, global economic inequalities promoted through capitalism do. In other words, as long as the majority of the world population continues to survive on less than 20% of the world's natural goods, while a minority consumes more than 80%, the current

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<sup>77</sup> According to Michael H. Grantz, drought follows the plow in that "with increasing pressure to cultivate marginal areas, drought episodes will become more prevalent. This can result from the fact that crops grown in the more reliably watered areas are not well suited to environmental conditions in the margins. Whereas climate often is blamed for a crop failure, that failure may prove to be more the result, for example, of poor land-management." Michael H. Grantz "On the Interactions Between Climate and Society," *Population and Development Review* 16, Supplement: Resources, Environment, and Population: Present Knowledge, Future Options (1990): 188. See also "Drought Follows the Plow," *The World and I*, (April 1988): 208-213.

<sup>78</sup> Brian Fagan, *Floods, Famines and Empires*, 203-220.

environmental crisis will continue whether the world remains at 6 billion or not. While Skinner contends that population growth brings certain challenges that encourage technological innovations, he also blames environmental degradation on economic exploitation of Third World countries.<sup>79</sup>

James Nash supports the theory that human beings, especially those in the global North, are living beyond Earth's limit. Like Skinner, Nash argues that Earth has enough resources to meet everyone's needs. Unfortunately, the global North does not live by needs alone, but by wants; hence overconsumption rather than overpopulation is one of the biggest problems threatening the world today. In Africa, however, one would add another factor: the corruption of those who hold political power. While overconsumption demands the over-exploitation of more natural goods than Earth can sustainably provide, corruption affects how natural goods are distributed and shared in Africa.

The failure to live within the limits of planet Earth has adverse effects on the environment and on human life. To Nash, the questions of poverty, species extinction, overpopulation, and resource exhaustion are expressions of humankind's tendency to exceed the limits of nature's capacity. Unless humanity changes its attitude towards nature, Nash argues, environmental degradation will worsen. In his words,

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<sup>79</sup> Curtis Skinner, "Population Myth and the Third World," *Social Policy*, (Summer 1988): 57-62. According to Murray Bookchin, many families in Third World countries own very little or no land at all. "Land distribution is now so lopsided in the Third World in favor of commercial farming and a handful of elite landowners that one can no longer talk of a "population problem" without relating it to a class and social problem." Murray Bookchin, "The Population Myth—I," *Green Perspective, Newsletter of the Green Program Project*, (8, July 1988). [http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist\\_archives/bookchin/gp/perspectives8.html](http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/bookchin/gp/perspectives8.html). Accessed, 01/16/2009.

“Overpopulation is not the only or the main cause of environmental degradation, but it can be and often is a major factor.”<sup>80</sup> In Africa, however, corruption is another major factor that has caused untold environmental degradation. Apart from the fact that much of Africa’s wealth lands in the hands of multi-national companies and African politicians, the latter are also guilty of enriching themselves by accepting secret payments to sell or lease to international companies numerous protected areas, forests, lands, and rivers, without any form of accountability.<sup>81</sup>

Further, Nash contends that population growth should be juxtaposed against the consumption of available goods. Nash argues that just as overall numbers matter, the per capita consumption of each individual matters. He concludes that the United States is probably the most overpopulated country in the world when it comes to per capita consumption, due to the fact that “the average additional person in affluent nations, particularly the United States, consumes far more and places far greater stress on the world’s natural resources – some say 20–30 times more, on the average – than their counterparts in some poor nations.”<sup>82</sup> While demands can be put on poor nations to check their populations, Nash advocates a morality of reduced consumption and an equitable

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<sup>80</sup> Nash, *Loving Nature*, 47.

<sup>81</sup> Although most African governments have Environmental Councils in place, these agencies are compromised by political interests. In Kenya, the 2004, Nobel Peace Prize Wangari Maathai fought the leadership of Daniel Arap Moi on policies that threatened Kenya’s parks, wildlife, and forests. See Patrick E. Tyler, “Kenyan Environmentalist Wins Nobel Prize for Peace,” *The New York Times*, October 8, 2004. <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/08/international/08CND-NOBE.html>. Accessed 02/04/2008.

<sup>82</sup> Nash, *Loving Nature*, 47.

redistribution of Earth's natural goods. To Nash, "it is no longer the question of how many children a family can afford but rather, what the world can afford."<sup>83</sup>

Although Nash's argument is expressed in the context of what is going on in North America, poverty, species extinction, overpopulation and resource exhaustion are being experienced across Africa. These problems are very visible in urban areas where poverty and environmental degradation are at their worst. Although Africa's colonial legacy bears some blame, corruption and unequal distribution of the Africa's natural goods continue to contribute to the ongoing crisis. African politicians have accumulated wealth at the expense of the majority. Idi Amin in Uganda, Fredrick Chiluba in Zambia, Olusegun Obasanjo in Nigeria, Charles Taylor in Liberia, Mobutu Sesi Seko in the Congo and now Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe robbed their nations of billions of dollars and left their country's environment degraded. Unless corruption is addressed, Africa's economic gains will remain a dream for many. Africa's double curse is that colonialism condemned her children to racial and economic humiliation, while corruption in post-independence Africa condemns them to extreme poverty.

In order to negotiate this double curse, most Africans are forced to migrate to urban areas hoping for a better life. But as James Nash notes, historically, "Migration was a direct response to overpopulation and other environmental problems. That strategy is decreasingly feasible. Increasing numbers of environmental refugees are aggravating

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 48.

social and environmental problems elsewhere and adequate places to migrate are becoming increasingly rare.”<sup>84</sup>

Although war, religious intolerance and ethnic hatred were other factors that led to migration, what Nash alludes to here is not only experienced in rural-urban or global South-North migration, but also in rural-rural migration. In Africa for example, Ezekiel Kalipeni argues that “apart from declining food production, Africa’s landscapes are encountering a range of environmental problems that stem from ever increasing human pressure for more land.”<sup>85</sup> V. Dzingirai’s study of the Bhingira Tonga of the Zambezi reveals that like their international counterparts, rural local communities view immigrants negatively. In his article, *Stealing the Birthright, Migration Dynamics in the Zambezi Valley of Zimbabwe*, Dzingirai notes that new immigrants are viewed as dispossessing and disempowering local communities of land, wild life, and other natural goods.<sup>86</sup>

The disempowering of African communities through forced migration and resettlement should be discussed within the wider context of land tenure acts that came with colonialism. During this period, Africans were forced to settle in areas designated as “native” or “communal lands” while their “original” land was given to European settlers as farms. In Kenya for instance, the “Crown Lands Ordinance No.27,” section II of 1902

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>85</sup> Kalipeni, *Population Growth and Environmental Degradation in Southern Africa*, 4.

<sup>86</sup> V Dzingirai, *Stealing the Birthright, Migration Dynamics in the Zambezi Valley of Zimbabwe*, Institute of Natural resources, University of Natal, Pietmaritzburg, 2003. <http://www.id21.org/id21ext/s10cvd1g1.html>. Accessed 12/20/2008.

declared Kenyan land as “Crown land” save only the lands declared to be “native lands.” The Governor was given power to administer land while the commissioner had the power to divide it into farms not exceeding 7500 acres. Sadly, only Europeans could be given these farms. According to Mbiyu Koinange, Africans communally owned the land that was to be divided; hence, the loss of land was a loss to the entire community.<sup>87</sup>

Koinange’s point is supported by Gillian Solly who argues that for Africans, land is intrinsically bound to spiritual and physical security. Writing about the history of the land issue in Kenya, Solly observes that although Africans hold Earth as a goddess and giver of all fruitfulness, it is the relationship they have with their earthly ancestors which determines their attachment to the land. For Solly,

If an African is driven off the land under which his/her ancestors lived, he could not practice his/her religion and he was no longer a person at all. This is because land belonged to the family and not an individual and the family consisted not only of its living members but also of those who died and those who were yet unborn. If the individual therefore lost the land which was in his use, his ancestors and his unborn descendants would have lost it with him. He, the trustee during his lifetime for this sacred piece of soil, had committed the unforgivable sin against his father and forefathers just as much as against his children and his children’s children.<sup>88</sup>

Solly’s findings have been confirmed by African theologians and ethicists who have studied African traditional landholding customs. Generally, Africans understand

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<sup>87</sup> Mbiyu Koinange, *Africa and the Future: Land Hunger in Kenya* (Nairobi: UDC Publication, 1952), 6-7.

<sup>88</sup> Gillian Solly, *Background to the Land Question*, Undated, Boston University African Studies Library, Kenya Collection, 1-2. The sacredness of land is also found among Native Americans who according to Hart believe that land belongs to the entire nation. John Hart, *The Spirit of the Earth*, 43-45.

land as held in trust to past, present, and future generations. The morality of using Earth's natural goods is conditioned on negotiating the needs of the living dead, the living, and "the living unborn."<sup>89</sup> As Kwame Nkrumah once said, to Africans, "Earth belongs to the family of which many are dead, few are living, and countless members are unborn."<sup>90</sup> Because the circular time of past, present, and future meet in this land, land issues have moral and religious implications. To remove an African community culture (as was the case with the Gwembe Tonga) from the land is to destroy the entire community. As chapter two revealed, this belief was one of the many reasons why the Gwembe Tonga refused to move from the valley because they believed that their ancestors and the river spirit *Nyami-nyami* would defeat the Europeans.<sup>91</sup>

The belief in the power of ancestors to defend their descendants' land is founded on the sacredness of the land. Land was a communal trust to which every family and community was entitled. For this reason, nobody could exist without the land. Being human was directly linked to possessing land, and landlessness was never envisioned. Africans could have conquered other cultures, but the sacred nature of the land stopped them from grabbing vanquished people lands since "they feared the curses of those same spirits far more than the spears of their living descendants and would not (in fact did not)

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<sup>89</sup> By living unborn, I mean future generations. Since the African concept of time is circular, future generations are not abstract but living beings with rights to be protected and defended.

<sup>90</sup> Kwame Nkrumah, *Ghana* (Edinburgh: T Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1959), 10.

<sup>91</sup> Northern Rhodesia, "Report of the Commission," 9. Also author's interviews with Chief Chipeco and Chief Simamba of Gwembe, November, 2006, on tape.

drive their enemies off the land. They robbed, raided, set fire to villages, and did any other damage they could think up, but scarcely ever dared to march into an enemy's country and occupy it."<sup>92</sup>

The sacredness of land provided security for many Africans until Europeans brought the notion of civilization, Christianity, and commerce. Koinange regrets, "African communal ownership had divided the land, with more or less justice, according to the needs of the people. But the Protectorate Government...divided the land according to another principle. Thus European settlers received the best land, but Africans were 'restricted' to inferior land."<sup>93</sup> Although some native lands were fertile at the time they were designated, most were stressed beyond their natural limits as populations grew. As expected, this led to severe land degradation. But as Marthinus Daneel observes, Europeans believed that land degradation in African villages "could be solved through proper land husbandry, control of population growth and industrial development which would take the pressure off the land."<sup>94</sup>

Unfortunately, industrial development did not do this. In most cases, it made it worse. Most people left native lands due to over-crowdedness, work-related migration, ethnic and religious disputes, among other reasons. However, they did not abandon their

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<sup>92</sup> Solly, *Background to the Land Question*, 2. Solly notes that Africans tend to have special affinity to their land even after being exposed to western education. *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>93</sup> Koinange, *Africa and the Future*, 6-7

<sup>94</sup> Daneel, *African Earthkeepers*, 15.

ancestral communities; hence, they kept their rural homes active while working in urban areas. Social problems created by this lifestyle not only led many men to have two wives but also raised the population in rural and urban communities. The end result has created a two way crisis. Land degradation and population growth occurred on both fronts: urban and rural areas. To make matters worse, most people migrate to urban areas as teenagers and return to their rural homes permanently after reaching the age of retirement. To negotiate a degraded environment when you are retired becomes even harder.<sup>95</sup>

Conversely, the restriction of people to “native reserves” had a negative impact on human community and the rest of the ecosphere. The WCED pointed out this reality when it noted that

Within developing countries, poverty has been exacerbated by the unequal distribution of land and other assets. The rapid rise in population has compromised the ability to raise living standards. These factors, combined with growing demands for the commercial use of good land, often to grow crops for exports, have pushed many subsistence farmers onto poor land and robbed them of any hope of participating in their nations' economic lives. The same forces have meant that traditional shifting cultivators, who once cut forests, grew crops, and then gave the forest time to recover, now have neither enough land nor time to let forests re-establish. So forests are being destroyed, often only to create poor farmland that cannot support those who till it. Extending cultivation onto steep slopes is increasing soil erosion in many hilly sections of both developing and developed nations. In many river valleys, areas chronically liable to floods are now farmed.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> See James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of the Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 229-233.

<sup>96</sup> *Our Common Future*, <http://www.un-documents.net>.

Many Africans hoped that the coming of independence would bring about a lasting solution to their landless existence during the long colonial era, but unfortunately, this has not happened. Even nationalistic movements that used the “land problem” as the organizing tool to encourage African resistance to colonialism ignored African land ethics when they became political leaders of independent states.<sup>97</sup> African governments promoted Western land tenure policies that disadvantaged the poor people even more.

Just as land had belonged previously to the Crown, it was now declared to belong to the State; cultural leaders played no role in its administration. In Zambia for example, every piece of land belonged to the state until 1995 when some lands were said to belong to customary leaders or chiefs. Under this tenure, traditional leaders recommended land be given to individuals or companies before they could be given title by the state. Since most people do not understand the value of title deeds, most families do not have title to their residential, grazing and farming land. Although this land remains within one’s inheritance and is handed over from generation to generation, it is easily lost without compensation when a “developer” comes around. Despite their attachment to their ancestral lands, most Africans watch their traditional lands taken by “developers” without

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<sup>97</sup> According to Daneel, people expected the new government of Zimbabwe to address land issues in order to address the crisis created by “communal lands.” By equitably distributing land, Daneel argues, the new government would have brought ecological balance to the wounded Earth. Sadly, the government did not develop policies that encouraged the control and conservation of traditional sanctuaries popularly known as *marambatemwa*. Instead, it allowed people to settle in the *murambatemwa* and other traditional protected areas. The result was deforestation, erosion and overgrazing. In his words, “where I used to hunt as a child, the open veld now lay forlorn, lifeless tree stumps jutting hopelessly from soil like beckoning fingers imploring someone to cover wounded earth.” Daneel, *African Earthkeepers*, 15

any legal protection or meaningful monetary compensation. For this reason, forced resettlements have become common around Africa.

That resettled communities are not attached to the new land spiritually suggests another reason why traditional ecological injunctions and sanctions that once safeguarded specific spaces and the environment are hard to uphold in new places. This complex land issue provides a good illustration of why Africa needs an economic theory that is relevant to the traditional values of interconnectedness.

Walter Rodney argued that Africa's social-political and economic problems should be addressed from the history of the continent. To Rodney, Africa was built on foreign ideologies and until these ideologies are analyzed, Africa's problems are set to worsen. According to Rodney, "Imperialism was in effect the extended capitalist system, which for many years embraced the whole world – one part being the exploiters and the other the exploited, one part being dominated and the other acting as overlords, one part making policy, and the other being dependent."<sup>98</sup>

Michael Darkoh and Apollo Rwomire extend this analysis to environmental problems affecting Africa. They contest that Africa has been separated from its own social, economic, and political history and forced to adapt to European history and values. The imposition of

Western technology and socio-economic systems on Africa's indigenous systems was not well thought out. Africa now has to cope with the

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<sup>98</sup> Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington D.C: Howard University Press, 1982), 12.

unresolved clash of European and indigenous systems, as well as the legacy of its grossly unequal incorporation into an economic system created by and for the Western World... Whereas the Western world itself is slowly coming to grips with reconciling technology, development and environment in its realm, this is far from the case in Africa. Unfortunately for the African continent, the driving force for rapid development is powered by policies of exploitation of its forests, soils, minerals and other natural resources for quick gain, and in all too many instances, the culprits are the capitalist countries.<sup>99</sup>

Indeed, African countries can boast of political independence but the colonization of Africa's natural goods is the most dangerous colonialism from which the continent should be liberated.<sup>100</sup> Like colonialism and capitalism, environmental imperialism exploits Africa's natural goods on the premise of "international investment." To make matters worse, the World Bank and the IMF encourage or require the exploitation of Africa's natural goods as the condition for aid. To these institutions, Africa's development depends on how the continent opens its natural goods to international exploiters in exchange for foreign currency. Amid ever increasing population pressures and limited economic growth, the poor and the environment suffer the most.

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<sup>99</sup> Darkoh and Rwomire, *Human Impact on Environment*, 7.

<sup>100</sup> Jose Ramos Regidor maintains that the economic organization of the Western world is built around the concept of exploitation of nature and poor nations. Jose Ramos Regidor, "Some Premises for an Eco-Social Theology of Liberation," in *Ecology and Poverty: Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, Concilium, ed., Leonardo Boff and Vigil Elizondo (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), 83; D.D. Theo and H. N. Chabwela, "Environmental Conservation and Planning in Zambia," in *Environmental Policies and Politics in Eastern and Southern Africa*, ed., Mohamed Salih and Shibru Tedla (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 177.

### **The Impact of Population Growth on Human Communities**

We have already alluded to the fact that uncontrolled population growth can easily destroy the interconnectedness of communities. In Africa, this is happening at multiple levels. An increase in human population demands an increase in all other areas of community life; consequently, communities are struggling to meet their needs. After all, common sense demands that population growth should match growth in education, health care, sanitation, transport, housing, employment, food production, and other basic needs. Sadly for Africa, these basic needs are not readily met even for the current population. Increasing the population beyond what it is now will only exacerbate this crisis to the point of disaster.

Moreover, Africa's population continues to outgrow economic development; extreme poverty, family breakdowns, street children, civil wars, genocides, and xenophobic attacks result.<sup>101</sup> Nash concurs with this observation when he asserts a direct link between natural disasters and how poor nations are likely to respond in the face of limited goods. He notes that "Growth increases the vulnerability of these nations to natural dynamics like floods and droughts, and increases the potential for social conflicts, within and among nations, as growing numbers compete for static or shrinking resources.

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<sup>101</sup> On May 12, local South Africans attacked and killed immigrants from Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Malawi, and other African countries. Although the attacks started in Alexander, Johannesburg, they soon spread across the country forcing the government to declare the state of emergency. The attacks that lasted more than two weeks forced immigrants to seek refuge at Police Stations across the country and left at least 62 people dead (among them those set ablaze) while more than 25,000 people were displaced. The Times, *Xenophobia death Toll hits 62*, South Africa, May 31, 2008, Accessed, July 28, 2008.

The Malthusian theory that population, growing geometrically, will outstrip the means of substance is actually or potentially a gruesome reality in some regions of the planet.”<sup>102</sup>

Worse still, population growth is concentrated in regions of poverty without medical services and decent living conditions. In most cities, higher populations are reported in shantytowns or illegal compounds where unemployment rates are high.<sup>103</sup> In these areas most of the residents are illiterate and two thirds are likely to be female. Here gender empowerment and education are fundamental to population control.<sup>104</sup>

The attribution of rapid population growth as the cause of lower education standards and unavailability of contraceptives among rural folks was acknowledged by A. W. Clausen in his 1984 address to the “National Leaders’ Seminar on Population and Development” in Nairobi, Kenya. A. W. Clausen, then-president of The World Bank and International Finance Corporation observed that rapid population growth lowers “living standards for hundreds of millions of people.”<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Nash, *Loving Nature*, 46.

<sup>103</sup> Clausen argues that population growth is creating urban economic and social problems. Between 1950 and 1980 the population of city dwellers in developing countries in cities of more than 5 million increased from 2 percent to 14 percent. While some of this should be attributed to rural-urban migration, Clausen argues that 60 percent of this growth should be attributed to natural increase. Clausen, *Population Growth and Economic and Social Development*, 11.

<sup>104</sup> Michael Lipton advocates the provision of quality education and employment to women as vital to voluntary infertility. Michael Lipton, “New Strategies and Successful Examples for Sustainable Development in the Third World,” *International Food Policy Research Institute* 170 (1989): 6-7.

<sup>105</sup> Clausen, *Population Growth and Economic and Social Development*, 4.

Aside from contributing to a breakdown in the social fabrics, the economy and land use, rapid population growth, Clausen observes “threatens a precarious balance between natural resources and people. Where populations are still highly dependent on agriculture, continuing large increases in population can contribute to overuse of limited natural resources, such as land, mortgaging the welfare of future generation.”<sup>106</sup> Because population pressures force people to over work and over use their marginal land and shrinking farms, Clausen argues that “when undue stress is placed on traditional agricultural systems and the environment is damaged, the economic wellbeing of the poor is particularly threatened.”<sup>107</sup> Arguing that strains on natural goods are already acute in some African countries such as Burundi, Malawi, Eastern Nigeria, Rwanda, and parts of Sahel region, he contends that even countries that are rich in natural resources do not escape this problem.

In what appears to be a neo-Böserupian argument, he argues that rapid population growth slows productivity due to the fact that governments are forced to divert resources from technological advancements (that would boost agriculture and production) to social services for their ever increasing populations. Rather than placing the entire burden on the citizens, Clausen suggests that population reduction should be accompanied by sound economic policies. To him, developing countries could cope better with the problem “if

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

the right economic and social adjustments could be made fast enough, if technical change could be guaranteed, and if rapid population growth itself inspired technical change.”<sup>108</sup>

In order to address population growth, Clausen advocates educating women about fertility control methods, provision of contraceptives, and the provision of financial incentives to, and imposition of disincentives on families. He argues that increasing educational and professional opportunities for women can reduce fertility since education delays marriage and can substitute for the benefits of having many children.<sup>109</sup>

In this regard, a combination of social development in which women find professional opportunities and thus reduce the number of children and family planning is key to reducing population growth in developing countries. Following the 1984 World Development Report, Clausen notes that “economic and social progress helps slow population growth; but, at the same time, rapid population growth hampers economic development. It is therefore imperative that governments act simultaneously on both fronts. For the poorest countries, development may not be possible at all unless slower population growth can be achieved soon.”<sup>110</sup> Although slower population growth alone is not the sole solution to development, Clausen argues that poverty and rapid population growth reinforce each other. While advocating government involvement in fertility

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>109</sup> Clausen suggests penalizing and rewarding families with incentives and disincentives which he argues “will provide individuals with direct and voluntary tradeoffs between the number of children and possible rewards and penalties.” Ibid., 17.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

control, Clausen argues that population policies should be “humane, non-coercive, and sensitive to the rights and dignity of individuals.”<sup>111</sup>

### **Religious Basis for Africa’s Population Growth**

Clausen’s argument on Africa’s population growth is representative of Western-developed policies that seek to address the problem of rapid population growth on the continent. Ironically, although Clausen presented his argument in Africa, he did not consider some religious reasons behind population growth on the continent. Clausen, like many Westerners, views the question of population growth in Africa as a social and economic issue. But, this argument seems not to convince many Africans who favor bigger families due to their belief in abundant life promoted by their ancestors. Therefore, the problem of population growth carries a religious aspect that is lost or underestimated by most Westerners.

Clausen is not the only Westerner to use the above argument. In her book, *Gaia and God*, Rosemary R. Ruether concurs when she argues that, while achievements have been registered in increasing human life expectancy in Third World countries, little has been done to control population growth. As she puts it “The burgeoning population in the third world reflects the fact that enough sanitation and expansion in food and industrial production has taken place to create the condition for more and more of those born to

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 26.

survive. But this ‘death control’ has not been matched by a corresponding birth control, especially among the poorest and most uneducated populations.”<sup>112</sup>

Ruether’s point, that enough sanitation and expansion in food and industrial production has taken place to create the condition for more and more of those born to survive, though true, should be evaluated from a global perspective. In many African countries, the opposite is true. The advent of HIV/AIDS, political oppression and corruption, and the worsening of poverty, all continue to reduce Africa’s life expectancy despite the reduction of infant mortality rates.<sup>113</sup> Even for those who survive their teenage years, poverty robs them of a meaningful life. This analysis, however, does not dismiss the fact that Africa should work to reduce its population as a matter of priority.

According to Isaac Addai’s findings, for example, African religious beliefs influenced contraceptive use among married women in Ghana. For this reason, Addai contends that traditional religion has a role to play in population policy.<sup>114</sup> Because children are a sign of divine blessings, one would contend that ancestors are likely to oppose population control. However, a study conducted in Northern Ghana among the Kessena Nankana of Northern Ghana suggests otherwise. Phillip Adongo, James F. Phillips, and Fred N. Binka discovered that some traditional leaders and ancestors seem

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<sup>112</sup> Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 91.

<sup>113</sup> See the 2008 Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2102rank.html>. Accessed, 01/17/2008.

<sup>114</sup> Isaac Addai, “Does Religion Matter in Contraceptive Use among Ghanaian Women?” *Review of Religious Research* 40, no. 3 (Mar., 1999): 259-277.

to favor small families as opposed to bigger ones due to land shortages. They concluded that systematic religious opposition against “family planning” will not be so systematic among the Kassena-Nankana due to the openness of their ancestral spirits.<sup>115</sup> The openness of the ancestors to the issue of overpopulation and their acceptance of smaller families do not imply that African religion’s role in family planning is fast disappearing. On the contrary, the value of the above study lies in the fact that the preference for smaller families is not coming from outside forces of today (*sasa*), rather it is from the past (*zamani*).

### **Arrest this Growth: Family Planning**

Although the phrase “family planning” is associated with the Western world, Africans have long practiced it by employing different methods of reducing fertility. These traditional family planning methods also carried religious and spiritual significance, so nobody dared trespass them.

One traditional family planning method that is found across Africa is postpartum abstinence. In most societies such as the Bemba, the Ila, the Ushi, and the Tonga of Zambia for example, couples were expected to abstain from sex for a period of two to three years after a woman has given birth. While postpartum abstinence provided time for

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<sup>115</sup> Philip B. Adongo, James F. Phillips and Fred N. Binka, “The Influence of Traditional Religion on Fertility Regulation among the Kassena-Nankana of Northern Ghana” *Studies in Family Planning* 29, no. 1 (Mar., 1998): 23-40.

the mother to nurse her baby, it was believed that the husband's semen would contaminate the child's milk and thereby bring illness and even death to the child.

In addition, sexual abstinence was encouraged. In some cultures, once a woman became a grandmother, she was expected to abstain from sex.<sup>116</sup> Other communities encouraged sexual abstinence before marriage. Among the Bembas, it was believed that sex before marriage would make a girl grow long fingers. Such taboos not only gave women power over their bodies but controlled the number of children born in a given community. Since the community was part of an African family, the postpartum and other sexual norms played a crucial role in controlling fertility. In their study of African fertility, the Caldwells concluded that on average, African women ended up with six to seven children in their life time. The comparative success of these traditional means meant men usually considered modern alternative methods unnecessary.<sup>117</sup>

Africa's population experts have observed that the answer to the continent's population explosion lies in young people who are open to contraceptives. As such, emphasis should be placed on educating Africa's young about the need for positive

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<sup>116</sup> The Caldwells argue that post-partum and other female sexual abstinence methods were common in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Caldwell and Caldwell, "The Role of Marital Sexual Abstinence in Determining Fertility: A Study of the Yoruba in Nigeria," *Population Studies* 31, no. 2 (Jul., 1977): 193-217; "The Cultural Context of High Fertility in sub-Saharan Africa," *Population and Development Review*, 13, no. 3 (Sep, 1987): 424-427..

<sup>117</sup> Caldwell and Caldwell, "The Cultural Context of High Fertility in sub-Saharan Africa," 411. The abstinence period is viewed as responsible for polygyny in African communities. However, Dominique Zahan argues that polygyny was both a solution to widowhood as well as an insurance against the infertility of women. It is "compared to the man who wants a drink and who digs several wells at different places to be sure of satisfying his thirst." Dominique Zahan, *The Religion, Spirituality, and Thought of Traditional Africa* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1970), 10. Africans are generally opposed to homosexuality because it does not bring about children.

“reproductive health” and not just family planning. The wording here is important.<sup>118</sup> Africans tend to view the concept of family planning as foreign simply because such policies emphasize individual choices and rights while sidelining the community. In a society where sexuality and fertility are understood within the community context, emphasizing individual rights and choices violates community norms and values.

According to the Caldwells, Africa’s family planning programs were established across Sub-Saharan Africa in 1968-1970. They note that an increase in contraceptive use has been registered across Sub-Saharan Africa. Sadly, the region has not registered any proven fall in fertility. They argue that the phenomenon should be addressed culturally and theologically if Africa is to resolve its population crisis.<sup>119</sup> Put differently, the resistance to fertility decline in Sub-Saharan Africa is due to religious beliefs that emphasize high fertility. The Caldwells assert, “The essence of the traditional belief system is the importance attributed to the succession of the generations, with the old tending to acquire even greater and more awe-aspiring powers after death than in this

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<sup>118</sup> According to Amy Kaler, “the moral lens through which condoms and other health promotions are viewed” in Africa, affects how people perceive them. In Malawi, condoms are linked to health, self-protection, and danger thus, “Disentangling condoms from the symbolic nexus in which they are fused with disease, population control, and malevolence will be an ongoing challenge in the struggle to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS in Malawi.” Amy Kaler, “The Moral Lens of Population Control: Condoms and Controversies in Southern Malawi,” *Studies in Family Planning* 35, no. 2 (Jun., 2004): 105-115. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3181138>. Accessed 02/10/2009.

<sup>119</sup> Caldwell and Caldwell, “The Cultural Context of High Fertility in Sub-Saharan Africa,” 415.

world and with the most frequent use of those powers being to ensure the survival of the family of descent.”<sup>120</sup>

### Procreation as Ancestral Blessings

Fertility is also associated with African lineage eschatology. “The concept of a wider family, usually taking the form of the lineage, and the centrality in religious and moral terms of its reproduction, has molded the African family. To a greater extent, African religion is essentially the reproduction of the lineage.”<sup>121</sup> The Caldwells understand lineage as “a descent group stretching infinitely far back and with an enormous spiritual investment in reaching indefinitely into the future. Only a small proportion is alive at one time. That extension into the future should be a central concern not only of those alive but also of their dead ancestors.”<sup>122</sup> The lineage rolls “on into the future of a finite number of spirits, with ancestors being reborn as descendants. Children are often named after certain ancestors, hence a common accusation against those with small families is that they are forbidding ancestors the right to rebirth and condemning them to eventual extinction.”<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 409.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 419.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 416.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

Similarly, Alfred O. Ukaegbu makes this point when he argues that among the Ngwa Igbo of Nigeria, procreation is the only means by which “reincarnation and continuity of the family tree are effected in time and space.”<sup>124</sup> The emphasis on lineage prolongation explains the opposition Western family planning methods have received on the continent. Western reasons for family planning are designed to meet Western economic arguments that have little to do with African traditional norms. Africans will always resist family planning programs that aim at addressing the needs of the *Homo Hierarchicus*, while ignoring *Homo Ancestralis*. The Caldwells and Pat Quiggin are right in pointing out that Africans

put emphasis on the importance of ancestry and descent, usually accompanied by a belief in ancestral spirit intervention in the affairs of the living; a related social system that... in its most complex form ... places greater importance on intergenerational links than conjugal ones and that gives great respect and power to the old; an inheritance system whereby property, which is usually communal, remains within the lineage or clan and normally passes between members of the same sex... In keeping with the aim of lineage perpetuation, emphasis is placed on fertility: by society, the ancestral spirits, and even the high gods who are otherwise of little day to day importance. Virtue is related more to success in reproduction than limiting profligacy.<sup>125</sup>

Since ancestors retain identity through their living descendants, person who possesses *ubuntu* is expected to meet the demands of the ancestors through lineage prolongation. It is this virtue that assures someone of the protection of ancestors for daily

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<sup>124</sup> Alfred O. Ukaegbu, “The Role of Traditional Marriage Habits in Population Growth: The Case of Rural Eastern Nigeria,” *Journal of African International Institute* 46, no.4. (1976): 393.

<sup>125</sup> Caldwell, Caldwell, and Quiggin, “The Social Context of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa,” 187.

survival. In contrast with the West where bigger families are viewed with contempt, Africa treats them as economically, socially, and religiously rewarding. Higher fertility is among the many signs of divine approval and approbation while lower fertility is associated with divine disapproval. For this reason, when births are slow to come or children die, diviners and ancestors are consulted for answers. One example in which this belief is expressed is when naming children. Africans usually give their children names that illustrate divine favor or the help of the living dead.

Sarah Pasque Margolis observes that while rapid demographic growth is a constraint to sustainable development and is directly linked to food security and natural resource management, failure to reduce population growth is due to the fact that most of the policies tend to focus on individuals in parts of the world where poverty is high and “where religion and culture tend toward pronatalism.”<sup>126</sup> An argument that population should be reduced to address the economic crisis or environmental degradation is likely to appeal to intellectuals but not to traditional pronatalists or even traditional government leaders, she argues. However, once the emphasis is health objectives, traditional pronatalists are likely to allocate resources to fertility programs. In her words, “in a highly pronatalist society, a population policy that casts family planning as a ‘normative’

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<sup>126</sup> Sarah Pasque Margolis, “Population Policy, Research and the Cairo Plan of Action: New Directions for the Sahel,” *International Family Planning Perspective* 23, no.2 (June, 1997): 86.

means of protecting the health of children or of young people provides an invaluable counterweight to ‘normative’ religious or political opposition to family planning.”<sup>127</sup>

The failure to control population growth in Africa is not due to government incompetence alone but to the promotion of programs that conflict with African religious and cultural beliefs. While the question of political opposition to family planning is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to note that most political and religious leaders prefer bigger families despite being exposed to Western norms. This is because African anthropology and psychology favor big families as opposed to smaller ones. Unfortunately, this is the most overlooked factor when scholars, economic development staff, and Westerners in general address demographic growth in Africa today. As reflected in the African concept of time illustrated in chapter three, Africans tend to view life and time as a continuous process. Africans exist in a circle of time, in which marriage is viewed as the norm, and infertility of all sorts is viewed as a social, cultural, and religious curse. For

African thought assigns man different modes of time depending on his marital status. The bachelor is placed in a false human perspective; he registers his life in linear time and follows a straight path with no possibility of returning. In this he resembles the infant whose eventual disappearance leaves his parents and society with only the regret of his lack of human development. The married man, by contrast, follows a curved line because he inscribes his life in cyclical time, and thereby finds himself in the true human perspective. Indeed, through marriage, and especially through fatherhood, man enters into a cycle of generations. He

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 88. The Caldwells state that the emphasis placed on procreation contributes to the spread of HIV/AIDS. John C. Caldwell, Pat Caldwell and Pat Quiggin, “The Social Context of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa,” *Population and Development Review* 15, no. 2 (Jun., 1989): 189.

abandons the straight route in order to follow the gyrating movement of creativity and great undertaking; he becomes fully a man.<sup>128</sup>

The realization of *ubuntu* is therefore dependent on the ability to procreate. In fact, Africans fear dying without leaving children behind. To Africans, childlessness is viewed as a curse and the end of one's vital force. A woman capable of reproduction or anticipating that she will reproduce again is regarded differently from a woman who can no longer have children. As the Caldwells observe, "Not only is premature terminal barrenness abhorrent – whether it's caused by pathological or voluntary sterilization – but attitude or behavioral barrenness in arranging to have no more children or even starting the intention to have no more is abhorred as well"<sup>129</sup> Accordingly, Zahan notes that infertile persons "are compared to the unproductive Earth, having no value....Almost everywhere in Africa, sterility constitutes a cause for 'divorce' because a household without children signifies the extinction of the family line."<sup>130</sup>

Zahan's observation explains the Caldwells' findings that, historically, women who insisted on limiting their families in Africa were sometimes considered as behaving in a "monstrous fashion."<sup>131</sup> Based on this social religious worldview, an African is skeptical as to whether fertility can endanger his family or national economy. The need

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<sup>128</sup> Zahan, *The Religion, Spirituality, and Thought of Traditional Africa*, 10.

<sup>129</sup> Caldwell and Caldwell, "The Cultural Context of High Fertility in sub-Saharan Africa," 412.

<sup>130</sup> Zahan, *The Religion, Spirituality, and Thought of Traditional Africa*, 10.

<sup>131</sup> Caldwell and Caldwell, "The Cultural Context of High Fertility in sub-Saharan Africa," 414.

for prolongation of life, and the socio-political and economic power and stability that big families can bring, make this problem more complex. In an interconnected worldview, religion is connected to every aspect of life and there is no doubt that African traditional religion impacts fertility.

Kevin McQuillan observes that religion can only influence fertility if it meets three basic conditions. First, religion should be central to the social identity of the community. Second, it must have power to articulate norms and values for the given community. Finally, it must have the power to communicate these norms and promote compliance in the specific context.<sup>132</sup> Although the first two are easily identifiable in Africa, the third condition is somehow veiled. To begin, McQuillan's assumption is that there is a clear distinction between religion and norms in all world religions. But as already observed, this is not the case with African religion. Secondly, unlike Christianity and Islam, African religion does not depend on institutional power to communicate norms or promote compliance. On the contrary, it derives its power from community interconnectedness; the community in which an individual is born, grows, dies, and is reborn is the center of African religion.

Alfred O. Ukaegbu observes that the Ngwa Igbo, like many other African cultures, agree with Christian traditions on at least on one point: "increase and multiply!" One would add Islam as well. Numerous children are viewed as "the fulfillment of God's

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<sup>132</sup> Kevin McQuillan, "When Does Religion Influence Fertility?" *Population and Development Review* 30, no. 1 (Mar., 2004): 25-56.

will as well as a sign of harmonious relationship with gods and the departed relatives who are happily reincarnating with their kinsfolk.”<sup>133</sup> This religious worldview undergirds the assumption that high fertility is an “ideal” ethical standard that can hardly be compromised since it is sanctioned by tradition, ancestral spirits, and the Supreme Being.<sup>134</sup> From this perspective, African societies will only tackle population growth when traditional motivations for higher fertility are adequately addressed. Failure to do so will mean that traditional ideals that affirm family and community growth will prevail over any population policy, foreign or domestic.

### **Ancestors, We Need More Land**

The negative impact of population growth on Africa’s ecosystem can not be ignored. However, Africans adhere to an ethic that values many children. In this regard, the ethic of prolongation of life is behind the current population explosion. African morality is built on the concept of abundant life characterized by the abundance of fertile land, food, and children. Today, this abundance is threatened by conflicts, famines, drought, land shortage, and environmental degradation. As guardians of the land, the ancestors are definitely concerned about the state of Africa today. From a traditional perspective, however, the current crisis could be interpreted as an indication that

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<sup>133</sup> Ukaegbu, “The Role of Traditional Marriage Habits in Population Growth,” 394.

<sup>134</sup> According to the Caldwells and Quiggin, in Africa, a person of virtue is the one with many children. How one gets these children is of little importance. Caldwell, Caldwell and Quiggin, “The Social Context of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa,” 187.

ancestors are no longer caring for their living descendants. Since ancestors are morally bound to desire continuity of life, an argument can be made that ancestors have provided for their descendants. However, like Earth, the ancestral lands are increasingly stretched beyond their carrying capacities. As a result, tribal and family conflicts over limited natural goods continue across the continent. Perhaps it is time to reconsider how many family members the ancestral land can adequately sustain.

According to Ines Havet and Luc-Joel Gregoire, Africa can hardly provide safe drinking water for its current population, and only a fraction of that population has access to proper sanitation. Despite the majority of the Africans living in rural areas, Africa does not produce enough food to feed its population. Hence “Environmental challenges constitute a major and pre-eminent axis for the continent’s development since the majority of the African population lives in rural areas and are directly dependent on natural resources for their subsistence and livelihood. Yet Africa remains, despite its enormous potential, the only region in the world that does not produce enough food to feed its population, and improvement in production lags behind other developing regions.”<sup>135</sup>

Although uncontrolled population growth is partially to blame for Africa’s failure to produce enough food, Havet and Gregoire fault government failures to invest in food security. They share the assumption that development in agriculture coupled with sound

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<sup>135</sup> Ines Havet and Luc-Joel Gregoire, “The Environmental Challenges for Africa and the Implementation of the Millennium Development Goals,” in *Africa and The Millennium Development Goals*, ed., Ahmed Rhazaoui, Luc-Joel Gregoire, and Soraya Mellali (Paris: Economica, 2005), 179.

government policies will definitely address Africa's problems. But as Nash warns, development and population questions should be addressed in the context of consumption of available resources. As Nash already argued, we should be mindful of how many people the *world* can afford.

The economic pressures Africa faces today have led many people into abandoning the concept of interconnectedness on which the ancestral phenomenon of *ubuntu* is based. As a result, people are failing to share their resources equally and this has led to food shortages across the continent. While traditional thought would attribute the current shortages to the wrath of the ancestors against the living for violating the ethics of *ubuntu*, scholars attribute it to various secular factors. For instance, Michael Lipton, like Böserup, attributes it to lack of investment in agricultural technology and the failure to share the economic benefits of the land equitably.<sup>136</sup>

Lipton argues that environmental degradation is also accelerated “by some of the methods through which rural poverty is attacked: by high levels of pesticides use; over-exploitation and erosion of marginal lands; by irrigation systems designed without longer view; perhaps above all, by dangerous nonsense believing that one should strive for ‘low-input, high-output agriculture.’”<sup>137</sup> In order to address the problem, he suggests that

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<sup>136</sup> Lipton, “New Strategies and Successful Examples for Sustainable Development,” 2.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

African governments should invest enough resources in agricultural research, production, and repeal land tenure laws that discriminate against the poor.<sup>138</sup>

Lipton also notes that Africa's environmental degradation can be attributed to some global causes. While accepting that developing countries have contributed to environmental degradation, he argues that for the most part Western monetary authorities have pressured these countries to degrade the land. Since Western governments have domestic policies that depress and destabilize world prices for many developing countries, Lipton argues that Third World countries are forced to exploit more natural goods in order to meet their budgets.

What Lipton's analysis fails to address is the fact that African leaders exploit natural goods not only in order to meet their national budgets, but also to keep themselves in power. Aside from getting much of the foreign earnings for personal use, most African political leaders have taken advantage of these natural goods to remain in power. From this perspective, an argument can be made that while the developed global North continues to exploit Africa's natural goods, post-colonial leadership is equally responsible for the continent's ecological crisis. For instance, the land re-distribution program which sought to address colonial inequalities failed dismally. After an attempt to redistribute the land through a referendum in 2000 failed, Mugabe called on his followers to invade farms that were owned or run by white farmers and opposition supporters.

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 2ff.

Although originally intended to address the ecological future of Zimbabwe, the land redistribution exercise only served Mugabe's obsession with power. Farm invaders felled millions of trees and destroyed more than 85% of all wildlife on farmlands within four years. Despite the attachment Africans have towards their land, some Zimbabweans, like many other Africans affected by political related land degradation, are forced to abandon their rural base for urban areas. To ensure Africa's ecological integrity, African theologians need to expose the impact of Africa's corrupt leaders on the ecological integrity of the continent, and the economic conditions of the poor.

Centuries ago in Europe, St. Francis of Assisi demonstrated that poverty need not be an enemy of nature or of community wellbeing – where it is voluntary and its practitioners have the freedom to respect Earth, humanity and all creatures. However, in Africa, conditions in which families and communities are deprived of a sufficiency of needed goods demonstrate that involuntary poverty definitely increases pressure on poor people, and affects how they relate to the land and one another.

As chapter four illustrated, Africans are proud of community solidarity expressed through the ethics of *ubuntu*. But the ever increasing population is forcing families to redefine the meaning of this solidarity. In the past, the concept of family carried a community focus and care of children was a community activity. Today, the community is not involved in the caring of children and the result is a breakdown in traditional family networks that previously provided support to individuals in times of social crisis. In past eras, one did not starve when his/her harvest failed; rather, the society provided for such a

one from community goods, out of a sense of community obligation. With the growth of population and capitalism, however, such values are disintegrating. Theological, ethical, and community consciousness work needs to be done such that problems of population expansion and natural goods consumption are adequately and meaningfully addressed, utilizing traditional African beliefs, values, and intergenerational lineage understandings and associations.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE CHALLENGE OF DOING ETHICS IN AFRICA

#### **Doing Ethics in Africa**

The challenge of doing ethics in Africa is that African Christian ethics is expected by some Western ethicists to be in line with Western ethics. This is despite the fact that the worldviews that inform Western and African values are different. As observed in previous chapters, African ethics is community based and individuals' ideologies are of little importance. Just as important is the fact that African moral theologians have been influenced by Western mentors; consequently, Western moral theology is considered normative by some Western scholars. For instance, while moral theologies from the non-Western worlds are qualified (Asian moral theology, Latin American moral theology, African moral theology etc.), Western ethics continues to enjoy its normative position in Christianity. This is despite the fact that Christianity is no longer a Western religion.

Jehu J. Hanciles has attempted to address this problem. Hanciles cites Priscilla Weeks analysis of "structures of academic dependency" that explain institutional and theoretical dependency of Third World academicians on Western counterparts. In what he terms "Western intellectual hegemony," Hanciles argues that Third World academics depend on the West due to various reasons. As is the case with Western political and economic structures through which the West dominates the global South, Western intellectual research journals, universities, and publishing houses overshadow non-

Western ones. Third World scholars find credibility by belonging to Western academic organizations and publishing in Western journals. While accepting the reality of globalization, he maintains that

This state of affairs takes on added significance if one accepts that globalization — the escalating experience of interconnection and interdependence that increasingly deepens our consciousness of the world as a single place... engenders new forms of hegemonic relationships that build on the old structures of dominance. This is not to pander to the prevalent perception of globalization as a one-directional, Western controlled phenomenon, synonymous for the most part with American capitalist expansion and cultural imperialism.... But it can hardly be denied that certain aspects of globalization worsen global inequalities and intensify exploitative structures.<sup>1</sup>

Western-developed intellectual values and ideologies which are considered normative knowingly and unknowingly encourage these exploitative structures. As such, Non-Westerners are generally expected to fulfill Western-produced agendas in the name of globalization. Usually, those who attempt to develop indigenous ideologies or promote local moral values are either dismissed or simply ignored.

The accountability of non-Western theological ethics to Western ethical thought has led to the overdependence of African theologians on Western thought patterns. On the local front, however, it has limited the freedom of non-Western theologians to examine and affirm some aspects of their cultures that may contradict Western thought. In the case of an ancestor cult for example, until recently, only elements that corresponded with established Western Christological facets were analyzed for their

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<sup>1</sup> Jehu J. Hanciles, "New Wine in Old Wineskins, Critical Reflections on Writing and Teaching a Global Christian History," *Missiology: An International Review* XXXIV, no. 3 (July 2006): 374.

theological significance. The role of ancestors as guardians of the land and to some extent rain-givers, and their other manifestations in nature, were not given enough theological attention. Likewise, the gender balancing roles of ancestors, the motherhood of God and the interconnectedness of all life were not adequately addressed.

The selective use of certain elements of the cult has created what Matthew Schoffeleers called a “Christological crisis” among African theologians.<sup>2</sup> Schoffeleers observes that “Africans find it difficult to integrate the person of Jesus Christ in their belief system, either because he is automatically associated with the West and the colonial past, or because his very essence is supposed to be incompatible with autochthonous religious conceptions.”<sup>3</sup>

Although he is speaking about the title of Christ as a healer (*nganga*) (the title taken up by Buana Kibongi, Gabriel Setiloane, and Michael C. Kirwen), Schoffeleers’s point needs emphasizing. It seems that African theologians have been uncomfortable with titles that contradict Western theology or Western-developed Christological titles. Only anthropocentric titles and roles that were in agreement with Western and biblical theology were theologically analyzed; the ecological roles of the Christ in African cosmologies were missed or even dismissed. As the following discussion will reveal,

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<sup>2</sup> This crisis is illustrated in Robert J. Schreiter’s edited volume, *Faces of Jesus in Africa*. Robert J. Schreiter (ed.), *Faces of Jesus in Africa* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001). The concept of an African Ancestor is a major unifying theme across Africa. This concept should be taken as the starting point of any African Christology.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Schoffeleers, “Folk Christology in Africa: The Dialectics of the Nganga Paradigm,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 19, Fasc. 2 (Jun. 1989): 157. Also published in *Religion in Africa: Experience and Expression*, ed., Thomas D. Blakely, Walter E. A. van Beek and Dennis L. Thomson (London: James Currey, 1994), 73-88.

despite the ancestor cult's ecological implications, African theologians only analyzed anthropocentric aspects of the cult.

### **From Cult to Christology**

The discussion on the *lwiindi* revealed that the cult of ancestors has ecological significance in Africa. But it also exposed shortfalls of Christologies that present Jesus as an “ancestor” while ignoring the ecological role of the living dead. The following discussion is an attempt to develop a Christology of Christ as the origin of ancestors, to which the biblical testimony attests. According to the Bible, Jesus is the “origin” of creation and “the first born of all creation” (Col 1:17).<sup>4</sup> In African cosmology, however, ancestors are considered to be the first persons to exist or simply the first born of the human lineage. Yet ancestors find their origin in the Supreme Being. Due to their ontological position, however, ancestors are also regarded as the guardians of the land. Being the source of all life, Jesus as the origin of ancestors becomes the Supreme Guardian of the land.

Whereas the authority of ancestors has dominated both historical and anthropological literature, the functional role of ancestors has dominated the Christological literature. African theologians have generally accepted Jesus as an ancestor. John S. Pobee, writing from an Akan perspective, views Jesus as *Nana*, “the

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<sup>4</sup> All biblical quotations are from the New International Version.

Great and Greatest Ancestor.”<sup>5</sup> Charles Nyamiti, who had developed this Christology more than any African theologian, argues that Jesus should be viewed as our brother-ancestor. François Kabasélé adds that Christ is an elder brother-ancestor. For Bénézet Bujo of the Congo, however, Christ is the proto-ancestor, healer and master of initiation.<sup>6</sup> All these titles are indicative of the multi-functional roles of ancestors in African cosmologies.<sup>7</sup> Since ancestors do not occupy one office, these Christological titles point to the many roles the Christ plays in African Christianity. It is for this very reason that analysis of the cult of ancestors is central to African studies.

The preceding Christologies were born out of a desire to make Christ relevant to African cultures. Susan Smith argues that the task of making Christ relevant to a specific culture is equally reflected in biblical genres. Biblical writers constantly negotiated the dialectical relationship between the gospel and culture in how they presented the gospel of Jesus. She concludes that:

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<sup>5</sup> John Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 94.

<sup>6</sup> There are as many African Christologies as there are African theologians. Charles Nyamiti, Kwame Bediako, Bénézet Bujo, Jean-Marc Ela, François Kabasélé, Kä Mana, R. Buana Kibougi, John Mbiti, and Gift Makwasha among many others have attempted to resolve the Christological crisis. Jesus as our ancestor, elder brother, healer, liberator, chief, guest, proto-ancestor and Earthkeeper are among the African Christologies titles proposed. See Schreiter, *Faces of Jesus in Africa*; Donald J. Goergen, “The Quest for the Christ of Africa,” *The Journal of the Faculty of Theology*, Catholic University of Eastern Africa, 17, # 1 (March 2001): 5-51.

<sup>7</sup> Michael C. Kirwen advocates a positive attitude towards African Traditional Religions, which he sees as “seedbeds for the Christian message.” For him, the cult of ancestor is parallel to “the veneration of saints.” Likewise, *ngangas* or diviners should be accepted on the same lines as pastors or missionaries. Kirwen argues that African traditional religious thought has “a purer notion of the uniqueness and unity of God than Christians do.” Michael C. Kirwen, *The Missionary and the Diviner: Contending Theologies of Christian and African Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 24.

Christianity would never have moved beyond its Palestinian confines if the early church had not been able to take up the challenge of the relationship of culture to faith in positive ways. The story of the growth of the primitive Christian community is the story of communities responding positively to the challenge through creative adaptations of the good news of Jesus of Nazareth. What we have in synoptic gospels are wonderfully crafted texts that point to the different authors' judicious awareness of and reliance on Hebrew and Greco-Roman literary traditions, and responsiveness to the reality of their respective communities' contexts.<sup>8</sup>

Smith points out that the act of enculturation belongs primarily to the local community, which she argues is the primary agent of inculturation. Yet the local community is connected to other communities of faith. This mutual interaction between the local community and other communities of faith is fundamental to enculturation.<sup>9</sup> In terms of developing an African Christology, such mutual interaction is significant. Sadly, only non-Western Christological titles are subjected to these interactions, while Western ones remain normative. But as Susan Smith observes, each gospel writer intended to make it clear that Jesus is the Son of God. But how each writer communicated this conviction depended on the cultural context of the author and his audience.<sup>10</sup> This observation suggests that the number of African Christologies is not a crisis *per se* as Schoffeleers suggests. Rather, like the gospel, it is a direct response to different cultural and historical contexts of the writers and their audiences. Given that this

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<sup>8</sup> Susan Smith, "Gospel and Culture," *Missiology: An International Review* XXXIV, no.3 (July 2006): 347.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 344.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 341.

is how we should understand different African Christologies, let us now look briefly at the Christologies of Bénézet Bujo and Charles Nyamiti.

### **Bénézet Bujo: Christ as the Proto –Ancestor**

In his book, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, Bénézet Bujo argues that the cult of ancestors should inform African Christian life. As the discussion on the concept of time revealed, the present and the future depend on this cult.<sup>11</sup> As such, the cult carries social, religious, and moral sanctions. However, unlike Fortes, Kopytoff, and McCall who interpret the cult from the perspective of authority, Bujo interprets it from a social functional viewpoint. For him, the cult's primary role is to secure the future of the community.

Unlike Gift Makwasha who divides ancestors into three groups (family, tribal, and national ancestors),<sup>12</sup> Bujo categorizes them as bad or good ancestors, based on their social and ethical functions. The bad ancestors spread fear and anxiety among the living

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<sup>11</sup> Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context* (Maryknoll: Obis Books, 1992), 77.

<sup>12</sup> In order to develop his “the tripartite Christology of the Shona,” Gift Makwasha divides ancestors in three parts: family ancestors, tribal ancestors, and national ancestors. Although his argument seems to be convincing, the influence of the ancestors is usually limited to the family and tribe. Makwasha’s analysis of the cult of ancestors in Zimbabwe seems to be based on the interpretation of the word *nyika*, which like the Bemba *calo*, can mean tribal land, territory or country. Therefore, the national role of ancestors, which Makwasha proposes comes from the contemporary understanding of “nation,” which is arguably foreign to African cosmology. Even Mbuya Nehanda, Sekuru Kagubi, and Chaminuka who are considered national ancestors of Zimbabwe do not have power over other Zimbabwean cultures save in the Shona political discourse. In fact, even when they manifest, they do so among their fellow Shonas. Under no circumstance can Nehanda or Chaminuka possess a Ndebele or Tonga individual. In this regard, the third aspect of the ancestors is far-fetched. Gift Makwasha, *The Repression, Resistance, and Revival of the Ancestor Cult in the Shona Churches of Zimbabwe: A Study in the Persistence of a Traditional Religious Belief* (Lewiston, N.Y: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010).

while “the God fearing ancestors” have good influence among the living. Bujo argues that the term “ancestor” ultimately can only be applied analogically to Jesus, since Jesus transcends all ancestors. Although Bujo advocates the Christology of Proto-Ancestor, he nevertheless argues that Jesus is the master of initiation, who ushers humanity into a life-long relationship with God and ancestors. As Proto-Ancestor, Jesus becomes the vehicle of a new life energy that unites the “tribal community and promotes its growth.”<sup>13</sup>

The concept of Christ the Proto-Ancestor has some sociopolitical moral implications. Just as the Proto-Ancestor defended the weak and the oppressed and identified with sinners and outcasts, his living descendants ought to do the same. Accepting that ancestral responsibilities were limited to one’s clan and family, Bujo argues that a Proto-Ancestor Christology widens these responsibilities and duties to the whole human race. Although Bujo limits these responsibilities solely to the human race, it might be asserted that, ecologically, Jesus as the Proto-Ancestor has responsibility towards Earth, all biota, and the entire cosmos. For this very reason, Jesus challenges the errors of both modern and traditional Africa in order “to overcome all inhumanity.”<sup>14</sup>

Using the liberation paradigm, Bujo concludes:

Jesus Christ is our Proto-Ancestor for today, our modern Moses who will lead us through today’s problems of oppression and poverty to the waters of life. In giving himself as food to those who believe in him, he becomes the life-giving grace which flows into all his descendants, the true “life-force” which Africa has always been seeking. Today the African community, clan or nation, can only develop by participating in the proto-

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<sup>13</sup> Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, 87.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

life of Jesus, as we may call it; at the same time individuals can only help their communities to grow when they remain grounded in Jesus, the living sap which is a unique source of life for the whole mystical body.<sup>15</sup>

Proto-Ancestor Christology demands solidarity with the poor and oppressed.<sup>16</sup> Unlike Kwame Bediako who sees the democratization of Africa as hindered by ancestor cults in which “praise-names and titles of some African presidents bear ancestral overtones,”<sup>17</sup> Bujo argues that the Proto-Ancestor model can hold African leadership accountable. This is due to its emphasis on community responsibility:

When we speak of the responsibility of the people of God, we cannot help thinking in particular of African leaders, especially when they are Christians. True leaders must not think of their own interests, but must be dedicated to increasing life throughout the community. This ancient African tradition is crucial for modern Africa. Chiefs must exercise their authority, not for their own benefit, but for the sake of all. The chief has no right to operate as a kind of a lone ruler, apart from the people. Frequently the people would depose an unsatisfactory chief, all the more reason to work with the people.<sup>18</sup>

In a footnote, he adds, “If traditionally in many tribes chiefs could be deposed for inefficiency, this may be the case for politicians, and even for bishops and parish priests. They have to give account of their ministry.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>17</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in African Culture [A Ghanaian Perspective]* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1990), 25-27; *African Christianity: Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 239-242. See also chapter two.

<sup>18</sup> Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 113.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 113

Bujo's observation is important to understanding authority in Africa today. Sitting on the authority of ancestors implies honoring community obligations of *ubuntu*. Any politician or Christian leader who does not honor the values of *ubuntu* is not serving after the manner of African ancestors. John Pobee is right in arguing that although traditional authority can be said to be held under the authority of "God and ancestors," traditionally, power has been viewed as service, which demands accountability and moral obligations to the governed. Power ought to promote order, peace, and security in community.<sup>20</sup> From this perspective, post-independence African leadership should convert to the ethics of *ubuntu*; the current chief would then be accountable to the community of the living and the dead.<sup>21</sup> Failure to do so would invite expulsion from ancestral protection and dethronement from the community.

Bujo's preference of the Proto-Ancestor title for Christ, our ancestor, is based on his conviction that the historical Jesus is beyond an African ancestor-ideal. As repeatedly observed in the study, this argument is misleading if we take into consideration that ancestorship has much to do with bearing children. However, it is important to note that Bujo's understanding of ancestors is based on their social functions. For this reason, Jesus is not just one ancestor among many, but an ancestor who fully represents the ideal of African ancestors generally.

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<sup>20</sup> John Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 146-149

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

According to Bujo, African moral life is experienced and lived in community together with the ancestors. “This togetherness is based on a common ancestor who founded the community of the clan or tribe, which is composed of the living as well as the dead.”<sup>22</sup> Because ancestors are a bridge between God and the living, they provide directives to the living in light of what God, the Great Ancestor, requires. These directives “reflect the ancestors’ experiences; they give wisdom and life. Whoever lives in accordance with ancestral ethics chooses life. To reject them means death, that is, the destruction of one’s own life and that of the clan, both in their visible and invisible dimensions.”<sup>23</sup>

Bujo further argues that Africans understand life as a unity encompassing the dead and living members. “Biological life is transmitted by God through the elders and ancestors. Along with this life, God and the ancestors, and the elders in their respective positions, take care to lay down rules, in the form of laws and taboos, to ensure the prosperity of the society.”<sup>24</sup> Ancestors lived by these rules and they pass them onto their descendants, who make the experience of the living-dead their own. In doing so, “they remained in living communion both with the ancestor and their own living kin,

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<sup>22</sup>Bénézet Bujo, *The Ethical Dimension of Community: The African Model and the Dialogue between North and South*, Translated from the German by Cecilia Namulondo (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998), 15.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>24</sup>Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, 21.

continually reliving the history of their people and proclaiming marvels which God had performed for them.”<sup>25</sup>

Unlike John Mbiti in chapter three, who argues that Africans lack a conception of the future, Bujo argues that time and history are real, irreversible, and unrepeatable; life goes beyond imitating the ancestors. For this reason, while African morality may be rooted in the past, “it is a past which has meaning for the present and the future. The present is shaped by the past. Indeed, the final consummation, when all things will come to their perfection, is already present in the beginning.”<sup>26</sup> To Bujo, however, this does not suggest that Africans are bound by the futureless past as Mbiti argues. Rather, by cherishing the wisdom of the ancestors, they are using it to address present and future challenges. “The present day African is thinking eschatologically, of those last times when all will be changed. In looking towards the ancestors, and hence becoming a partaker in their privileges, such an African becomes in turn a source of life for succeeding generations.”<sup>27</sup> Hence “the human being does not become human by *cogito* (thinking), but by *relatio* (relationship) and *cognatio* (kinship). The fundamental principle of this ethic is not *cogito ergo sum* (I think, so I am), but rather, *cognatus sum ergo sum* (I am related, so I am).”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 21-22.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 54.

Bujo complements Henry Rowley discussed in chapter two who contended that African moral life can hardly be lived in an individualistic manner.<sup>29</sup> This is because an African “lives a simple socialistic life; subordinating his individuality to the necessities of a tribe.”<sup>30</sup> Africans understand that “all clan members can be brought to court, if one member has committed a crime.”<sup>31</sup> But just as the community shares collective blame in cases of wrongdoing, so do the members share a collective success. If one member buys a car, the entire clan is said to own it. On a social front, they share collective responsibility to care for orphans, the sick, the elderly, and other “weak members of the community.”<sup>32</sup>

Theologically, the upholding of ancestral norms and traditions is imperative to salvation. As stated repeatedly throughout this work, Africans understand salvation as earthly rather than heavenly. For this very reason, Africans do not conceive the end of Earth as bringing the destruction of sinners and the rapture of the righteous.<sup>33</sup> Neither do they expect Armageddon through which this Earth ends up in flames as the righteous are

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<sup>29</sup> See discussion in chapter two.

<sup>30</sup> Reverend Willoughy cited in Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in Southern Africa*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997), 128.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-76.

<sup>32</sup> Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 163.

<sup>33</sup> Allen Effa argues that there is need to “correct the faulty thinking” of “an eschatology of abandonment” to one of restoration. A strain peculiar to some expressions of Christian thinking believes that creation is destined for destruction and that all that really matters is how people settle the issue of their eternal destiny. In this line of thought, people get saved, wait until Jesus raptures them away, and then get to watch the planet burn. This defective eschatology must be corrected by the consistent biblical witness that creation is part of God’s redemptive plan.” Allen Effa, “The Greening of Mission,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 32, no. 4 (2008): 174.

rescued and sinners and animals are roasted alive. Instead, the living and the ancestors are expected to continue living in everlasting harmony and fellowship on Earth. In this regard, salvation as being escape from a dying Earth is foreign to Africans.

By contrast, in fact, the revival of the dying Earth is fundamental to African religion. As already observed, the Supreme Being and ancestors are always considered as the forces behind the restoration of Earth's capacity to provide abundant life. Therefore, the restoration of Earth to its original state with abundant water, animals, trees and other biota, and fertile lands is central to salvation. It is this understanding that controls the cults of ancestors and gods across Africa. In short, African religious eschatology upholds the restoration of Earth, and not its destruction (Cf. Rev. 21-22).

Following Augustinian philosophy, Bujo maintains that Africans understand that human beings have the freedom to make choices between choosing life (by following the rulings of the ancestors), or choosing death (by neglecting these).<sup>34</sup> This is because in the African notion "of life... it is not simply religious and political leaders who have the obligation to preserve and transmit life. Every member of the community, down to the least significant, shares the responsibility for strengthening the force of the tribe or clan and each of its members. The morality of an act is determined by its life-giving potential: good acts are those which contribute to the community's vital force, whereas bad acts, however apparently insignificant, are those which tend to diminish life."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

According to Bujo, although life is central to the Africa worldview, Africans believe that “life ultimately is God’s gift.”<sup>36</sup> As we saw among the Tonga, while God may appear to be absent from this worldview, whenever Africans honor their ancestors, they are implicitly honoring God.<sup>37</sup> “God is not far from the African world. All relationships, between person and person, living and dead, and between persons and nature, are rooted in God and point towards God and towards the end of all things in God. They have a sacramental nature, proclaiming that every person’s future lies with God. It must also be added that, for the African, God cannot be imagined without God’s creation or without God’s saving will for humankind.”<sup>38</sup>

Accordingly, humanity can neither add anything to the Creator, nor take anything away from God. Thus the consequences of immoral life affect the living only. “It is true that God may punish human wrongdoing; but God does this for the sake of humankind, who otherwise could bring the established order to ruin. God knows everything, and knows that we love God: God does not need to be continually assured of our love by prayers and ritual offerings.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 23

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>39</sup> Bujo, 33. In his book, *Between God, the Dead and the Wild*, Richard Fardon makes a similar argument when he notes that among the Chamba of Nigeria and Cameroon, prayers for rain or fertility are directed to God through sacrificing to the dead: “God has no use for beer or sacrificial animals.” Despite making such a great observation, Richard Fardon projects the demise of traditional religion among the Chamba since it can only be found among the margins of the societies in both countries. Usually, only those marginal to current political and economic developments participate in traditional rituals; those who are exposed to Western values are giving up on their traditional religion. Richard Fardon, *Between God, the Dead and the Wild: The Chamba Interpretation of Religion and Ritual* (Washington: Smithsonian

As already observed, duty refers to mutual obligations between interconnected beings. In line with Kopytoff's argument on the authority of ancestors, Bujo argues that the duty of children towards elders and ancestors is fundamental to African morality; hence, a good life is not only dependent on ancestors but also on parents and the clan elders.<sup>40</sup> While old people might not be able to contribute physically to community life, their experience and wisdom transmit life to present and future generations.<sup>41</sup>

### **Charles Nyamiti: Christ as our Brother Ancestor**

Charles Nyamiti, a Roman Catholic theologian, has written a great deal on the theological implications of Christ as our ancestor. His thoughts on the subject are nicely laid out in his influential book, *Christ As Our Ancestor*, in which he argues that Christ should be understood as our brother-ancestor. Like Bujo, Nyamiti posits that the cult of ancestor should control how the Church in Africa understands its life and mission.<sup>42</sup> What sets Nyamiti apart, however, is his attempt to bring the ancestors into Trinitarian

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Institution Press, 1990), 186. Fardon's views African religion as static, which is not the case. Like any other religion, the religion adapts to new challenges and there is no doubt the Chamba religion will do so.

<sup>40</sup> Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 35.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>42</sup> Nyamiti argues that "African ecclesiology presupposes African Christology [because] the Church is the prolongation of the mysteries of the incarnation and redemption in human Communities." Charles Nyamiti, "The Church as Christ's Ancestral Mediation," in *The Church in African Christianity: Innovative Essays in Ecclesiology*, ed., J.N. K Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi: Initiatives, 1990), 129.

theology. Nyamiti sees some similarities between the operation of the ancestor cult and that of the holy Trinity.

Specifically, according to Nyamiti, the term “ancestor” carries five elements: a kinship between the living and the living dead; a superhuman or sacred status acquired through death; an aspect of mediation between God and the living; an exemplar of conduct; and the right to respect through ritual offerings and supplications.

Nyamiti points out that these qualities can be found analogously in the Trinity. In his words, “there is parental kinship between the Father and the Son, both of whom are definitely sacred. Besides, the Father is the exemplar of his Son who is as a consequence, the perfect image of his Father. Both live their sacred relationship in the Holy Spirit whom they produce as the fruit of their reciprocal love and necessarily communicate him to each other.”<sup>43</sup>

He argues that the Father is the parent-ancestor of the Son; the Son is the descendant of the Father; and the Holy Spirit is their ancestral oblation and Eucharistic gift. Through the incarnation and redemption, Christ has become our kin, our mediator, and our example. Rooted in the Trinity, his ancestorship makes us children of the Father; it follows logically that Christ is our brother-ancestor whose “ancestral relationship transcends all tribal, racial or sexual distinctions.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Charles Nyamiti, *Christ As Our Ancestor* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1984), 130.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

Christ the brother-ancestor is related to the Church as the ancestor of all saints in heaven, purgatory, and on earth. Therefore, the Church becomes the extension of Christ's ancestorship to human communities. In its life, the Church should carry out Christ's ancestral functions through prophetic, pastoral, and priestly ministries "through his divine Spirit and...the saints in the next world."<sup>45</sup> For this reason, an African ancestral ecclesiology is inseparable from the idea of the tripartite Church. From a socio-anthropological perspective, Christ is not just the ancestor of the living but also of those who died in him.

Because of the two divine ancestors (the Father who is the parent ancestor and the Son, who is our brother ancestor), Nyamiti argues that *koinonia* with divine ancestors implies fellowship with the Father and the Son in the divine Spirit. This communion is extended to saints in heaven and purgatory, who act as ancestors to the Church militant on Earth.

Mary occupies a special place in this communion since she is the parent-ancestress of the Church on earth and also sister ancestress to Christ. Through his brotherly ancestorship, Christ her Son shares with Mary the same parent-ancestor, who is God. This *koinonia* carries vertical and horizontal aspects. The vertical is experienced in the relationship between the living, the divine, and human ancestors. The horizontal is found in the relationship among community members who share the same ancestor. This, too, can apply to the *koinonia* with ancestors in the church, which transcends all

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

distinctions of tribe, nation, race and gender; hence there is no difference between the non-African saints and African ancestors. “By African ancestors is meant those saints in heaven or purgatory who have, with the living on earth, consanguineous or non-consanguineous ties which are necessary for one to qualify as an ancestor according to African traditional beliefs. Because of the modern social and religious changes that have affected the African traditional way of living, it is necessary to modify and enlarge the scope of ancestral ties so as to include African national or racial ancestors, or those belonging to the Third World.”<sup>46</sup>

What Nyamiti suggests here is important to the development of Christian ecological ethics. Ancestral ties should be expanded to include all the habitat of Earth including humanity. After all, Jesus is the source of all life and the founder of life itself, the very attributes Africans associate with ancestors. In this way, nothing exists without God’s loving spirit.

### **Toward An African Environmental Christology**

The ecological role of the ancestor cult has not received serious attention in Christian theology. This oversight does not negate the value of an ancestor Christology in Christianity. As Donald J. Goergen concludes,

The major strength of an ancestor Christology is that it enables the development of a Christology that is both thoroughly African and also thoroughly Christian. Even if ancestor traditions wane, or become less significant in the face of westernization, the concept of ancestor and its

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

accompanying world view remain particularly African. *Of course, no African theologian proposes an ancestor Christology to the exclusion of traditional titles for Jesus. But “Jesus our Ancestor” inculturates Jesus within African cultures.* It inserts Jesus into African soil. It incarnates Jesus as God’s Word in an African context. It is an African Jesus. Jesus is our ancestor, an ancestor of all Africans, the proto-ancestor of us all, the new Adam, our new ancestral origin.<sup>47</sup>

Despite the importance of the cult across sub-Saharan Africa, traditions pertaining to ancestors vary from community to community. Nonetheless, all communities agree that ancestors are always physically dead members of one's family, clan, or tribe who are concerned with the wellbeing of their descendants. In this case, rather than debating the historical and traditional meanings of the cult, the ecological functional role of ancestors needs critical examination. In line with Mutukudzi, we need to bring ancestors back to Earth, which is their home and our home.

### **Christ the Ecological Ancestor: Biblical Perspective**

In order to understand the ecological ancestorship of Jesus, there is need to provide a biblical basis for the argument.<sup>48</sup> The biblical world did not ignore ancestors, but held them in great esteem. For them, ancestors were the source of life and identity. While God was held as the source of the nation, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were held as

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<sup>47</sup> Donald J. Goergen, “The Quest for the Christ of Africa.” <http://www.sedos.org/english/goergen/htm>. Accessed 01/20/2009. Goergen does not escape the biases that have characterized Western theology. His reference to “traditional titles for Jesus” suggests that Western-developed Christology should be maintained at all levels.

<sup>48</sup> Many Africans are likely to argue that their societies seem to hold many things in common with the biblical world. Polygamy, drinking of ritual beers, belief in witchcraft, honoring of ancestors, dreams, and sacrifices are among the shared elements. While these similarities are issues that demand research from African scholars, I will limit my discussion to the question of ancestors.

the founders of the nation. The call of Abraham therefore was imperative to the self-understanding and definition of Israel (Gen 12:1-3). Abraham's obedience to God not only served as the foundation for the unique relationship Israel enjoyed with Yahweh but also set the standard for Israel's obedience. Israel, like Abraham, was expected to be faithful to Yahweh's demands. Even when the nation of Israel was threatened with death due to slavery, God identified Godself to Moses as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex 3:1-15). In short, Israel's identity and religion is planted in the cult of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Furthermore, the Israel of the living was directly linked to that of "the living dead" through the Abrahamic covenant. The rite of "circumcision" which was laid on the nation of Israel should be viewed as an ancestral ritual through which Israel is reminded of her historical relationship with Abraham and Yahweh. From this perspective, Jesus declared the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to be the God of the living (Mk 12:27). Yet the God of Abraham could also be said to be the God of Moses, Joshua, Gideon, David, and many more. Although each generation had its own names, which it considered to be the archetype and epitome of obedience to Yahweh, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob remained for all Jews the vital links to Yahweh. The interconnectedness of generations was later recorded and kept for present and future generations.

If we accept that much of the Hebrew Bible was written after the exile, then it makes sense to argue that such genealogies were transmitted verbally, just as Africans have done over the centuries. Interestingly, the human Jesus is presented according to the above understanding. Matthew begins his account with the words, "An account of the

genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham”(Mt 1:1).<sup>49</sup> Luke addresses this when he speaks about the ministry of Jesus. “Jesus was about thirty years when he began his work. He was the son (as was thought) of Joseph son of Helli...son of Judah, son of Jacob, Son of Isaac, son of Abraham...son of Adam, son of God.”(Lk 3:23-38). To Mark, however, Jesus was the son of God; John does not provide the genealogy, but provides a prologue which locates Jesus in God. In short, Matthew and Luke provide us with the human ancestors of Jesus, while Mark and John provide his divine origin.

Raymond Brown, one of the most respected New Testament scholars, observes that genealogies tended to serve many purposes. In various ways, they established one’s identity for survival purposes.<sup>50</sup> (For example, Paul used his ancestry to argue against those who were doubtful of his Jewish ancestry, and used his Roman citizenship to gain release from prison.) Ancestry also established one’s identity in regard to certain offices. For one to be a king, such a person was expected to show that he was connected to royal ancestors. Since David was a successful king, his son would be expected to follow in his

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<sup>49</sup> William Barclay observes that Jews took their genealogies very seriously. One’s life was told from the perspective of lineage which determined one’s identity. Any person who could not trace his lineage “lost the right to be called a Jew and a member of the people of God.” He adds that Matthew 1:1-17 may seem to be uninteresting but to a Jew “it would be a most impressive matter that the pedigree of Jesus could be traced back to Abraham.” William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975), 11-13.

<sup>50</sup> Raymond Brown observes that Mathew identified Jesus as son of David and Abraham as illustrated through his ancestors in order to provide Jesus’ identity in a mixed community of Jews and Gentiles. Accordingly, he argues that even among scholars, genealogical research has been ignored, since “Wellhausen showed that the name-lists of the Pentateuch generally belonged to its latest stratum and were worthless as sources for early Israelite history.” This, however, changed following R.R. Wilson’s definition that a genealogy is a written or oral expression of one’s descent from an ancestor or ancestors by enumeration of intermediate persons. It may appear in a format of either a narrative or a list. Raymond Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977), 64-66.

father's footsteps. Priests, too, were expected to trace their ancestry to Aaron before they could be admitted into Temple services.<sup>51</sup> These perspectives guided the gospel writers when they addressed the pedigree of Jesus.

As already observed, in Ancient Near East, a person was a person through his ancestry; forgetting one's father had negative implications. In fact, Paul boasted of his zeal in keeping the traditions of his ancestors (Gal:14). When his authority was disputed, he wrote, "if anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews" (Phip.3:4-6). By arguing from his Jewish ancestry, Paul linked himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and ultimately to God.

Further, Paul did not end by citing Israel (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), but mentioned the tribe of Benjamin and finally made an individual case for his living parents, "a Hebrew of Hebrews." This example shows how Jews understood and defined themselves. Since they were children of Abraham through ancestry, they had the right to the natural goods of the land that God gave to their ancestors. As descendants of Abraham, the founder of their nation, Jews expected to benefit from the favor that God granted to Abraham. Through the ritual of circumcision, a male Jew inherited the life of Abraham and became a friend of God after the pattern of Abraham.

From an African perspective, an argument can be made that the biblical phrase "son of..." should not be taken as referring to living parents alone but the "living dead."

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

This is why the Jews can claim to be the children of Abraham. Likewise, the fourth commandment to honor one's parents should not be limited to the living (Ex. 20:12) but should include the living dead. Arguably, this perspective should explain why Jesus's claim to have existed "before Abraham" was viewed as blasphemy by some of his fellow Jews (John 8:58).

Honoring the traditions of ancestors was also behind Jesus' discourse with a Samaritan woman. As among Africans, ancestral shrines (*malende*) played a vital role in how people communicated with the divine and their ancestors. Aside from informing us about the Jesus' encounter with a Samaritan woman, Saint John alerts to the historical ancestral conflict that existed between Jews and Samaritan. The Woman told Jesus, "Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." But Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem" (Jn 4:20ff).

As a Jew, Jesus could have contended for the superiority of the Jewish ancestors in the divine covenant over the Samaritan. However, as the Christ (*logos*) and the origin of all creation, he was equally an Origin-Ancestor to Samaritan. By declaring that "the hour is coming when you will worship the father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem," Jesus makes Jewish and Samaritan, and by extension African ancestors subordinate to his reign. This is because his coming brought about a new manner of relating to God and one another in an interconnected cosmos.

Indeed, the ancestral shrine that the Samaritans used to approach God was on a mountain, whereas the Jews held Jerusalem sacred. Jesus, however, did not promote one

over the other. Rather, he declared that the time had come to relate to the Creator after the order of the Spirit. Unlike the old order which separated people into camps based on their ancestor cults and sacred spaces, the Spirit brings about new relationships among God's creation and demands a new way of relating to God. Samaritans and Jews are challenged to abandon their traditional manner of worship at their ancestral shrines (*malende*) and to accept the code that Jesus the Christ instituted. Under this code, every space on Earth becomes the Spirit's shrine from which God can be experienced and worshipped. In this sense, the authority of Christ obliterates that of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and, by extension, African ancestors.

Just as Jesus reduces the authority of Jewish and Samaritan ancestors (by reminding them that both meet in him), the authority of African ancestors is similarly reduced. It is now God's son who takes over the authority to direct and intercede for rain on behalf of God's creation. This new order brings about a new birth and a new community in which Jews, Samaritans, Europeans, and Africans can worship together through one Origin-Ancestor *par excellence*, who existed before Abraham, African ancestors, and ancestors of every creature.

Speaking about the origin ancestorhood of Christ, it is important to state that the ancestorhood of Christ cannot be limited to humanity. Christologically, the Christ is the origin of creation and an ecological ancestor of all life. The implication is clear that Christ, as the Origin-Ancestor and thereby the origin of all ancestors, has authority over all ancestors. The dispute between Jesus and the Jewish authorities in the New Testament illustrates this. Like African theologians, the Jewish theologians tended to limit the

understanding of ancestorship to humanity and saw Abraham as their ancestor. They claimed to be the descendants of Abraham and rightly so. However, Jesus declared himself to be above Abraham and by extension the origin of every ancestor to whom even the Jewish and African ancestors are accountable. Thus, “before Abraham was born, I am!” (John 8:59). While most scholars tend to understand this verse as referring to the divinity of Christ, this verse is vital to an ancestor Christology. As already alluded to, it does not make sense to argue that Jesus is an African Ancestor. Neither can one argue that Jesus is the Jewish Ancestor. But as the origin of all that exists, the “I AM” becomes the ancestor of the entire cosmos.<sup>52</sup>

The interpretation of Christ as “our” ancestor is problematic and might even be viewed as heretical if by “our” we exclude nonhumans. As the Origin-Ancestor of all ancestors, Jesus is not just the provider of abundant life but also the guardian of all creation. The gospel of John testifies to this ecological ancestorhood of Christ when it states that “through him, all things were made and without him, nothing made was made” (Jn 1:1ff). It is to this reality that the Nicene Creed points when it states, “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of the Father...through him *all things* (beings) were made.”<sup>53</sup> Although the creed limits redemption to humanity, the present work argues that

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<sup>52</sup> The question of the salvation of ancestors is thereby resolved. If Abraham was justified based on his relationship with the I AM, there is enough room to argue that before our African ancestors were even born, Jesus existed. In this case, they saw the day of the Lord and rejoiced. However, like the Jews, many theologians are likely to question when and how Jesus met our ancestors. His answer remains the same, before your “ancestor was born, I AM.”

<sup>53</sup> The Episcopal Church, *Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated.1979), 362.

it is time to advocate for an inclusive and ecological creed that accepts Christ as both the guardian and the origin of all life. Christ as “the first born of all creation,” then, becomes the origin of every ancestor in creation history.

Similarly, from a liturgical standpoint, in Anglican worship the preface to the *Sanctus* ignores the role of creation in praising God. In the *Episcopal Book of Common Prayer*, Eucharistic prayer A, the preface reads: “Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who for ever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.”<sup>54</sup>

We have already established that creation exists to honor God. Limiting the company to Angels, Archangels, and the saints, then, misrepresents biblical witness: the invitation to praise God is made to creatures big and small (Psalm 148).

### **Christ the Ecological-Ancestor: Replenishing the Earth**

Understanding Christ as the Origin-Ancestor of every creature has implications for how we relate to Earth. Since all creatures trace their ancestry from Christ, they are ontologically bound to praise their Creator. In this regard, humanity has a moral responsibility not just to acknowledge its evil acts towards nature, but to repair the damage it has caused towards other creatures. As African Earthkeepers have shown, sin

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

is not just limited to human actions against other humans but must be extended to nonhumans as well. Likewise, *ubuntu* cannot be limited to humans. Our relationship with God should be informed by our relationships with the natural world.

As already touched on above, African Christianity should develop a theological rationale for healing Earth. It is here that some Western values might complement African ecological ethics. The ethic of replenishing Earth through tree planting and restocking other goods is somehow weak in African cosmologies. Arguably, this is one aspect which needs developing in African Christian spirituality of Earth healing. For example, lucrative timber trade, overpopulation, firewood, the clearing of land for cash crops, and other economic reasons have led to the loss of Africa's forests. According to Daneel, "the so called agro-economic progress is in fact killing Earth. Guinea Bissau loses 20,000 to 35,000 hectares a year; Burkina Faso loses 85,000 hectares and Senegal 50,000 hectares, mainly to peanuts and other commercial crops."<sup>55</sup> Deforestation continues to haunt Africa with a loss of more than 2.3 million hectares annually but little is being done to replace such trees. While siding with the needs of the poor for fuelwood, Daneel argues that "sustained production of firewood should be made a condition for the use of this commodity in the rural areas."<sup>56</sup>

In a complementary way, the Energy, Environment and Development Programme (EEDP), a London-based organization that monitors illegal logging in the world, argues

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<sup>55</sup> Daneel, *African Earthkeepers*, 19.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

that deforestation has social impacts in forests that house an estimated fifty million indigenous people. While forests support positive ecological development opportunities such as eco-tourism and non-timber products, the EEDP observes that illegal logging harm the people and planet Earth:

Forests provide for informal economies related to hunting, gathering and fuel wood. Commercial logging, often illegally, competes for access to the resource with those that live in forests, sometimes resulting in localised violence. In the worst cases, commercial logging can result in the destruction of indigenous peoples' rainforest territories, and the denial of their human rights, which is often in contravention of international laws and conventions. The World Bank states that illegal logging has deprived the governments of some of the poorest countries in the world billions of dollars in lost revenue. It has also promoted corruption, undermined the rule of law and good governance and fueled devastating armed conflicts in countries in Asia and Africa.<sup>57</sup>

In this regard, population growth is not only directly linked to the disappearance of trees, but also to the continent's security and stability.<sup>58</sup>

*The State of the World 2002* (SW 2002) noted that deforestation has a severe impact on the biosphere and humanity as a whole. While arguing that rain forests provide a secure livelihood to indigenous peoples and that the destruction of these forests will

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<sup>57</sup> Energy, Environment and Development Programme, Chatham House, 10 St James's Square, London. [http://www.illegal-logging.info/sub\\_approach.php?approach\\_id=15&subApproach\\_id=55](http://www.illegal-logging.info/sub_approach.php?approach_id=15&subApproach_id=55). Accessed, July 13/2008.

<sup>58</sup> The three major tropical wildernesses are: the Upper Amazonian and Guyana Shield, the Congo River Basin, and the New Guinea-Melanesia complex Islands. Richard Cincotta and Robert Engleman, "Nature's Place: Human Population and the Future of Biological Diversity," (Washington, DC: Population Action International, 2000), 7- 8. Hotspots provide more than 1300 medicinal plants, on which many developing countries depend for their medicaments. Sadly, human population in hotspots is growing very fast. Hotspots house about 1.1 billion people while tropical forests have a population of about 75 million people. In both areas, population is growing at the rate of 3.1%; over twice the world demographic growth. From this scenario, the Böserup hypothesis of intensified agriculture might temporarily resolve the overpopulation problem but never the habitat fragmentation and mega-extinctions.

impact negatively on human life, SW 2002 warned that “Forests provide a host of environmental services: trees regulate the flow of water between soils and the atmosphere; their roots hold soils in place, preventing erosion; and their branches, bark, leaves, and soils provide habitat to the largest collection of biodiversity of any ecosystem on the planet. Deforestation means lost lives and livelihoods.”<sup>59</sup> This SW 2002 warning is repeated by the EEDP:

Threatened forests in Asia, Africa and Russia are home to a number of critically endangered species. The current failure to protect forests around the world from...logging is resulting in what has been described as the next great ‘spasm of extinction.’ Forests also help to shelter water resources in the ground, protecting vital supplies for animals, communities and, in some cases, other resources such as hydropower. Short term commercial exploitation of forests can lead to many long term problems with water supplies in local areas, and water protection is one of the ‘ecosystem services’ that, it is hoped, may help to pay to protect forests in the future.<sup>60</sup>

Reflecting on the rate at which species are being extincted, Julia Marton-Lefèvre, Director General of the World Conservation Union observed that humanity ought to act now to significantly reduce the “global extinction crisis. This can be done, but only with a concerted effort by all levels of society.”<sup>61</sup> This observation was echoed by Jane Smart, who argued that “Our lives are inextricably linked with biodiversity and ultimately its protection is essential for our very survival.”<sup>62</sup> Andrew Gonzalez and Enrique J.

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<sup>59</sup> Gary Gardner, “The Challenge for Johannesburg: Creating a More Secure World,” in *State of the World*, The World Watch Institute (New York: Norton Books, 2002), 9.

<sup>60</sup> Energy, Environment and Development Programme.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) “Red List of Threatened Species” is widely recognized as the most reliable evaluation of the world’s species.. According to the report, 12,043

Chaneton regret that, “Never before, in 3.5 billion years of life on Earth, has a single species chipped away large portions of the entire early array of life. Yet that is what human beings are doing today, however, unintentionally. If most of the trends evident in the 20<sup>th</sup> century continue, it is hard for most biologists to project anything other than a much less diverse-and therefore less wondrous-web of life in the coming century and beyond.”<sup>63</sup>

Michael Northcott estimates that the extinction rate over the many millennia of Earth’s existence did not exceed one species per year.<sup>64</sup> Today, however, habitat loss alone is “creating a mass extinction on a scale comparable to those that have ended the geologic eras.”<sup>65</sup> Ironically, habitat loss is something that human beings can address by halting deforestation through tree planting.

In Africa, however, the ethic of replenishing Earth is not a common Bantu virtue.<sup>66</sup> Traditionally, Africans understood that natural goods came from the world of

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plants are now on the “Red List, with 8,447 listed as threatened.”  
[http://cms.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/species/red\\_list/index.cfm](http://cms.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/species/red_list/index.cfm) . Accessed 08/07/2008.

<sup>63</sup> Richard Cincotta and Robert Engleman, “Nature’s Place: Human Population and the Future of Biological Diversity,” (Washington, DC: Population Action International, 2000), 13.  
<http://rmportal.net/library/content/tools/biodiversity-conservation-tools/putting-conservation-in-context-cd/population-and-environment>. Accessed 10/12/2008.

<sup>64</sup> Michael Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 25. Leonardo Boff, *Cry of Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll: Obis Books, 2003), 1ff.

<sup>65</sup> Cincotta and Engleman, “Nature’s Place,” 8.

<sup>66</sup> I am aware that some communities in West Africa have systematically increased the tree cover around their villages over the past century, as shown by old and recent photographs. See <http://dss.ucsd.edu/~ccgibson/docs/Ribot%20-%20A%20History%20of%20Fear.pdf> and also James C. McCann, *Green Land, Brown Land, Black Land: An Environmental History of Africa 1800-1990*

ancestors.<sup>67</sup> As the *lwiindi* revealed, for Africans drought, famines, floods, and other natural disasters are under the control of ancestors and the Supreme Being. This understanding is extended to how people view natural goods. The assumption is that as long as the living continue to be faithful to the rulings of the ancestors and the Supreme Being, these natural goods would be readily available to their descendants. Extinctions of wildlife, fish and other natural goods, then, are interpreted as punishment for moral lapses on the part of the living.

By defining the crisis as human caused, Christian spirituality can inculcate the ethic of replenishing as an applied biblical mandate to “serve” and “guard” the Earth (Gen 1.15). When people are conscious of the extinction of natural goods due to human overpopulation and environmental degradation, the value of replenishing becomes part of Africa’s Christian moral teaching. The African Earthkeepers’ ministry of tree planting is an excellent example of this ethic. Because African ethics is open to other ethical systems, Earthkeepers have employed diverse theological and scientific outlooks in their endeavor to heal the bleeding Earth. For instance, although they understand that God is the owner of creation, they also understand what types of trees would grow in specific environments by seeking scientific guidance.

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(Portsmouth: Heinemann Educational Books, 1999), 60-63. However, such values were not very common among the Tonga, Shona or Bemba cultural groups addressed in this study.

<sup>67</sup> Mutombo Mpanya argues that some African cultures encouraged the planting of trees in honor of their dead relatives. Mutombo Mpanya, “The Environmental Impacts of a Church Project,” in *Missionary Earthkeeping*, ed., Calvin DeWitt and Ghillelan T. Prance, 91-109 (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1992), 100ff. Among the Bembas, trees were planted when new villages were founded. Although such activities can be aid an ethic of replenishing Earth, they do not encourage replacing felled trees.

In many respects, the integration of Western Christian and African Traditional heritages in formulating responses to the ongoing ecological crisis is helpful to address the crisis. Africans are more afraid of the ancestral world than of mere political authorities. They believe that they can elude the secular authority of law enforcement agencies but not that of ancestors or prophets. As long as environmental policies continue to lack a spiritual sanction, the ecological crisis will worsen. Therefore, new social and ecological ethics in post-independence Africa should call on the authority of ancestors as Mutukudzi did.

That the Bantu did not have an active ethic of replenishing Earth does not mean that they have been ignorant about the matter. Most African tribes throughout history had domesticated animals, planted fruit trees, maintained sacred groves, and tended precious gardens. That they knew the importance of saving for future use suggests that the ethic was present if perhaps unspoken. If ethicists are to develop an ethic of replenishing renewable natural goods among Africans, they should capitalize on this aspect of the African heritage.

### **Christ the Ecological Ancestor: Respecting Life**

The origin ancestorship of Christ demands that African Christianity re-examines its attitude towards non-human beings. If Christ is the ancestor of every creature, then, the doctrine of dominion which some theologians have used to justify human exploitation of nature cannot be defended. For instance, Albert Schweitzer's 1936 article, "The Ethics of

Reverence for Life,” argues against the doctrine of dominion of Earth.<sup>68</sup> Schweitzer observed that humanity is just one among the many species in the cosmos. To him, every creature is driven by “the will to live,” which he contends, should direct human-nature relationships.<sup>69</sup>

Like Francis of Assisi, Schweitzer advocated for equality of life and the intrinsic value of every creature. To Schweitzer, “evil annihilates, hampers, or hinders life.”<sup>70</sup>

Based on this conviction, Schweitzer argues for biota egalitarianism:

The absolute ethics must reverence every form of life, seeking as far as possible to refrain from destroying any life, regardless of its particular type. It says of no instance of life, “This has no value.” It cannot make such exceptions, for it is built upon reverence for life as such. It knows that the mystery of life is always too profound for us, and that its value is beyond our capacity to estimate. We happen to believe that man’s life is more important than any other form of which we know. But we cannot prove any such comparison of value from what we know of the world’s development. True, in practice we are forced to choose. — But the reverence of life is nonetheless universal.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Born on January 14, 1875 in a country village in Alsace (then part of Germany; later part of France), Albert Schweitzer was the son of a Lutheran pastor. At 30, Albert Schweitzer began his studies in medicine, specializing in tropical medicine and surgery. At the age of 38, Dr. Schweitzer intended to join The Paris Missionary Society but was turned down due to his theological views on the grounds that “it would only intensify their problem by encouraging intellectuals and freethinkers who could only disrupt the mission enterprise and confuse the natives with their theological improvisations....They were not about to sponsor Schweitzer and open the floodgates to other liberals and radicals.” In March 1913, Dr. and Mrs. Schweitzer left for Africa and established their hospital at Lambaréné in the French Congo, now Gabon. Schweitzer was also an important Biblical scholar as well as one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s best musicians and musicologists. [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/1952/schweitzer-bio.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1952/schweitzer-bio.html). Accessed 08/12/2007.

<sup>69</sup> Albert Schweitzer, “The Ethics of Reverence for Life.” <http://www1.chapman.edu/schweitzer/sch/reading4/html>. Accessed 07/16/08. Originally published in *Christendom* 1 (1936): 225-39.

<sup>70</sup> As we shall see, this conclusion has much in common with the ethics of abundant life as found among Africans. Schweitzer, nonetheless, argued otherwise. To him, the ethics of reverence for life comes with civilization, thus a “primitive man knows no such reverence for life.” *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

Schweitzer further points to the interconnectedness of life as being at the center of this ethic. As humans, we are directly connected to other forms of life and it is imperative that we reverence these lives. In this regard, the value of solidarity should be extended to the entire biota. In his words,

The important thing is that we are part of life, we are born of other lives; we possess the capacities to bring still other lives into existence. So nature compels us to recognize the fact of mutual dependence, each life necessarily helping the other lives which are linked to it. In the very fibers of our being, we bear within ourselves the fact of solidarity of life. Our recognition of it expands with thought. Seeing its presence in ourselves, we realize how closely we are linked with other [biokind] — Life demands that we see through to the solidarity of all life which we can in any degree recognize as having some similarity to the life that is in us.<sup>72</sup>

Subsequently, Sallie McFague advocates respect for the sacredness of life regardless of the creature.<sup>73</sup> In her book *Life Abundant*, McFague affirms appreciation of the interrelatedness or interconnectedness of the ecological system. She argues that our life is directly linked to other beings in the ecosphere, and hence “By destroying the

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<sup>72</sup> He argues that physiological and spiritual make-up are the origin of this ethic. “Solidarity for and sympathy with all life encourages sympathy with all life and “becomes engraved upon our hearts, and culminates in spiritual union and harmony with the Creative Will which is in and through all.” *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>73</sup> Today, the ethic of reverence for life has found new expression among “deep ecologists.” Deep ecologists share the following principles in their expressions: the concept that every creature has inherent value; the conviction that diversity is imperative to life; the belief that development and an ever-increasing human population is threatening ecological diversity and therefore encouraging the ecological crisis. Deep ecologists are awfully suspicious of modern economic structures, which they see as tailored to meet human greed. In addressing the question of population growth, for instance, some of these groups will favor genocides, HIV/AIDS, and natural disasters as the safest way of reducing human impact on Earth. To them, the integrity of Earth is more important than human life. While deep ecology’s origin is attributed to the Norwegian Arne Næss’s “biospheric egalitarianism,” the notion that all life is interconnected and that other biokinds have equal rights to life was advocated long ago by Albert Schweitzer. Arne Næss’s contribution perhaps lies in the fact that he addresses this concept in light of the ecological crisis debate. Arne Næss, “The Shallow and the Deep, Long Range Ecology Movement,” Originally published in *Inquiry* Oslo, 16 (1973); Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology* (Salt Lake City, Utah: G.M. Smith, 1985).

health of nature, we are undermining our own. The ecological [society] does not support either/or thinking: either my good or yours, either our good or nature's. The good life for nature—a resilient, complex nature – is what we must have for our good life, but our good life rests on our caring for nature's well-being.”<sup>74</sup>

Not all ecologists would accept this. In fact, the late James Nash objects that “biota egalitarianism” is a moral absurdity and an antihuman ideology. Arguing against Albert Schweitzer, Nash posits that biota egalitarianism fails to appreciate “the unique capacities of humans to experience and create moral, spiritual, intellectual and aesthetic good. The value-creating and value-experiencing capacities of humans are morally relevant differences between us and all other species, and justify differential and preferential treatment in conflict situations.”<sup>75</sup>

In contrast, John Hart argues for egalitarianism. According to Hart, from a relational perspective human beings see themselves “as one part of a dynamic biotic community living in egalitarian relationships in ecological systems.”<sup>76</sup> Speaking about the value of Salmon and how they are honored by the Wanapum Indians in the U.S.

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<sup>74</sup> Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 117-8

<sup>75</sup> James Nash, *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 149.

<sup>76</sup> John Hart, *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 70.

Northwest, Hart argues that “Salmon and all creatures are good, and their natural rights, based on their intrinsic value, are egalitarian rights.”<sup>77</sup> Accordingly, he asserts that:

All creatures, including humans, should exist in egalitarian relationships. All have unique and complementary capacities, though not, of course, on the same intellectual or moral plane. Some, including humans, are predators. But since humans alone have moral agency, they alone have the capacity to be *responsible predators*—thoughtful, conscientious, taking and using only what they need, compassionate, and trying to conserve creatures’ lives or Earth’s abiotic goods—rather than *reckless predators*—thoughtless, irresponsible, driven by wants more than needs, wasteful of commons goods, callous, and without regard for the well-being of biota.<sup>78</sup>

As previous chapters have shown, the preferential treatment of humans over nature was not always the case in traditional Africa, where certain creatures occupied important positions. In fact, humanity is part of creation, and is interconnected with all creation. Extinction of species therefore reduces the vital force of the universe in which humanity experiences life. On this basis, the reverence for life should become a Christian duty. After all, Christian love demands that we love God with all our hearts and our neighbors as ourselves (Deut 6:5; Mk 12:30). Since love should be ecological, humanity has much to learn from how St. Francis of Assisi, Schweitzer, African and other traditional peoples related to the rest of creation. Nature to St. Francis was one big family, having the same origin in God the creator. Today, we should join Francis in loving every creature as our own brother and sister.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 128

<sup>79</sup> Francis called every creature “brother” or “sister,” but he, like Nash, held humanity as above other creatures. For example this is how he addressed the wolf, “Brother Wolf, you have done great harm in this region, and you have committed horrible crimes by destroying God’s creatures without any mercy. You

### ***Mukowa: Ecological Principle of Interconnectedness***

According to Theo Sundermeier, “symbols link the past to the present; they link people to their environment, of which they are a part, and transform them. Symbols are mirrors of real life, mirrors of people in society and the cosmos. The symbol, which points beyond itself, involving many layers of meaning which cannot be grasped rationally, is the point of contact with the ‘transcendence,’ the channel for the power of the other world, which in Africa is close and so immanent....Symbols make Africans aware of themselves, and of the world in which they have a part.”<sup>80</sup>

One of the community symbols that identify Africans is a belief in totems. Almost all Bantu tribes have totems, which they employ to identify, differentiate, and interconnect families, clans and kingdoms. In most African societies, totems are vital to understanding how one is connected to wider community. While genealogies are important in the West, in most African cultures, totemic identification is the only way one can find out to whom s/he is related.<sup>81</sup> The Tonga call totems *mukowa* while Shonas

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have been destroying not only irrational animals, but you even have the more detestable brazenness to kill and devour human beings made in the image of God.” Despite calling non-human creatures irrational, Francis is opposed to the destruction of God’s creatures without mercy. St. Francis, *Little Flowers of St. Francis*, in *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies*, English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis, ed. Marion A. Habig (London: SPCK, 1973), 1348-5. I have argued that though this story has been criticized by some as a myth, historical investigations have shown that Gubbio was affected by wolves at the time of Francis and that a Skeleton of a big Wolf was found in the Cathedral around Gubbio. My argument has been that there is no explanation for burying the wolf in the Cathedral unless there is something sacred about it. That sacredness is what the story presents. John Kaoma, *Listening: Journal of Religion and Culture* 35, no. 3 (Fall, 2000).

<sup>80</sup> Sundermeier, *The Individual and Community in African Traditional Religions*, 51.

<sup>81</sup>Richard P. Werbner, “Totemism’ in History: The Ritual Passage of West African Strangers,” *Man, New Series* 14, no. 4 (Dec., 1979): 663-68

speak of *mutupo*. Colson observes that among the Tonga lineage identity is determined by *mukowa*. All clans are associated with some plant, other creature, or natural phenomena. The *mukowa* links individuals to each other “no matter where they go and can fit strangers from other tribes into their clan system.”<sup>82</sup>

That even children know their *mukowa* explains the significance of totems. As we discovered in chapter two, the Chieftainship of Simamba identifies its self as “*bagande* royal establishment clan.”<sup>83</sup> Since *bagande* means frog, one wonders why the establishment can pride itself in a frog. Yet to the Tonga, life cannot be envisaged without *mukowa*. As a schoolboy assured Colson, “The clan is the most important thing we Africans have.”<sup>84</sup> Accordingly, Tumani Mutasa Nyejeka asserts that *mutupo* was vital to how the Shona and Ndebele conceive social systems. Aside from affirming the interconnectedness of creation, the uniqueness and individuality of species is well pronounced in this principle. In other words, *mutupo* affirmed and rationalized diversity of life and interconnectedness in the universe.<sup>85</sup>

Although Africans did not know the theory of evolution as propagated by Charles Darwin, it goes without saying that they were aware of the relationship between the natural world and humanity. Their beliefs place humanity *in* nature rather than *above*

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<sup>82</sup> Colson, “The Plateau Tonga of Northern Rhodesia,” 129 -130.

<sup>83</sup> From the letterhead of His Royal Highness Chief E. M. Simamba the XI, Bagande Palace, Box 67, Siavonga, Zambia.

<sup>84</sup> Colson, “The Plateau Tonga of Northern Rhodesia,” 132.

<sup>85</sup> Tumani Mutasa Nyejeka, “Shona Women and the Mutupo principle,” *Women Healing Earth* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 135.

nature. The often celebrated concept of “I am because I belong” should become “I am because I have *mukowa* and because I have *mukowa*, I am therefore interconnected to Earth community.” No wonder when two people meet, their first obligation is to seek how they could be related through *mukowa*. In fact, individuals who share the same *mukowa* cannot get married no matter how distant they might be.<sup>86</sup>

Since Bantu relationships are built around the natural world, observing *mukowa* principles means honoring the ecosphere. Clans are obliged to protect their totem and may not eat the meat of that totem. The Shona, the Ndaou, the Baganda, and the Luvale cultures, among many others, do not allow consumption of totemic animals.<sup>87</sup> However, some cultures such as Bemba may eat their totems.<sup>88</sup> The Bemba *bowa* (mushroom) people consume mushrooms. That they eat does not mean that they disrespect their totem. On the contrary, they do so with reverence and gratitude to their totemic ancestors for providing themselves as food to their own people.

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<sup>86</sup> According to Karla O. Poewe, among the Bemba, marriage “within the same *mukowa* is prohibited.” Karla O. Poewe, “Matriliney in the Throes of Change Kinshi, Descent and Marriage in Luapula, Zambia, Part One,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 48, no. 3 (1978): 205-218, 210.

<sup>87</sup> Dora E. Earchy notes that the Vandau of Sofala are socially linked by totems. Unlike the Bemba, the Ndaou don’t eat meat of the totem. “They firmly believe (apparently even the Christians among them) that any infraction of their particular taboo will cause loss of teeth or skin disease in the offender.” Dora E. Earchy, “The VaNdaou of Sofala,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 4, no. 2 (Apr., 1931): 222-230, 226.

<sup>88</sup> Elizabeth Colson observes that the word *mukowa*, which she translates as “clan,” carries the meaning of species, kind or type. Totems are usually employed as “special praise-names” during funeral or t puberty rites. Elisabeth Colson, “The Plateau Tonga of Northern Rhodesia,” in *Seven Tribes of British Central Africa*, 94-163, ed. Elizabeth Colson and Max Gluckman, (First published Oxford University Press 1951; Reprinted Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), 129-130.

Apart from their role as indicators of human relationship, *mukowa* principles foster social relationships among people who are not directly related otherwise, through the concept of *ubwali* or *ubunungwe* (traditional cousins) among the Bemba. For example, the Bemba have *nsoka* (the snakes), *mbeba* (rats) [which by the way is my father's *mukowa*], *mumba* (soil), *bowa* (mushrooms), *mfula* (rain), and many more.<sup>89</sup> Based on the operation of the ecosystem, the *mbeba* (rats) make their homes in the soil (*mumba*); hence they are cultural cousins with the *mumba*. We do not expect the mushroom to grow without water; hence their relationship with *mfula* (water/rain) is evident. Snakes (*nsoka*) are a threat to rats (*mbeba*); therefore, they are cultural cousins.

John Mbiti rightly states that “the totem is the visible symbol of unity, of kinship, of belongingness, of togetherness, and common affinity.”<sup>90</sup> Writing about the value of totems among the Bemba, Chinyanta M. and Chiwale J.C observe that *mukowa* creates “warm and intimate relationships between the individuals or groups.”<sup>91</sup> For this very reason, “The *mutupo* of a man never dies. It is handed on from father to son [among the

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<sup>89</sup> *Batenda* Elephant, *baleya* (goat), *bansaka* (eland), *bafumu* (pigeon), *bansange* (rabbit), *bayuni* (bird), *bacindu*, *beetwa* (crocodile), *balongo* (baboon) are some of the clans that are found among the Tonga. Colson, “The Plateau Tonga of Northern Rhodesia,” 130.

<sup>90</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 105

<sup>91</sup> Chinyanta M and Chiwale J.C., *Mutomboko Ceremony and the Lunda - Kazembe Dynasty* (Lusaka. Kenneth Kaunda Foundation, 1989), 88.

matrilineal tribes; from mother to daughter] throughout the ages.”<sup>92</sup> As such, the *mutupo* will wreak vengeance on its enemies until appeased when a person is wrongly killed.<sup>93</sup>

The *mukowa* does not just bind humanity to each other in an anthropocentric sense; rather it reminds humanity of its interconnectedness to the natural world. Humanity, despite its celebrated intelligence, can hardly exist outside the natural world; the *mukowa* principle emphasizes this. The Bantu people knew of nodal affiliations of the web of life long before this came to be understood in Western consciousness, and expressed this interdependence in their daily relationships.

### **Celebrating Natural Rights to Life**

The acceptance of our interconnectedness to the natural world through totems (*mukowa/mutupo*) confirms that non-humans are an extension of our common life. Speaking about the Batswana, G. Letamo and O. Totolo note that they “have deep respect for trees and have detailed knowledge of their names and uses. The deep respect is expressed in mythology, traditional religions and ceremonies.”<sup>94</sup> However, this identification is changing. Africans continue to harvest trees for profit, for example, and the mythological and religious significance of nature is slowly being lost.

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<sup>92</sup> Earthy, “The VaNdau of Sofala,” 226.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Letamo, G. and O. Totolo “Population-Environment interface in Botswana: Issues, Challenges and Prospects,” in *Human Impact on Environment and Sustainable Development in Africa*, ed., Michael Darkoh and Apollo Rwomire (Hampshire: Aldershot, 2003), 117.

The perspective that the instrumental value of nature provides a bank for human prosperity tends to control how humans view the natural world. However, an ecological consciousness that we have a moral responsibility to provide a fertile and fruitful Earth for future generations is slowly changing people's views of nature. What has not been emphasized, however, is the intrinsic value and rights of non-humans.

Human beings are the only species that, as some assert in word and practice, have unchallenged rights to life. Regarding themselves to be lords of creation, humans continue to claim power over nature. The assumption that humans are the only species with inherent rights should be rejected from an eco-ethical perspective. God is the origin of creation and the source of its inherent value. Therefore, the instrumental value that humanity attaches to nature cannot be held as the defining factor of nature's worth. After all, the natural world was declared good long before humanity set sight on it (Gen 1:11,13,19 ff). The concept of interconnectedness ought to humble us into accepting that we are part of the whole and not that whole.

Our interconnectedness in the sphere of life also reveals that other species have territorial rights. Understandably, the issue of space puts humanity and other species in moral conflicts. Who counts, snakes or humans? Should we stop building a dam simply because it is a home to an endemic species? Since decision makers are human beings, we usually side with our own kin. In Africa, as elsewhere, territorial rights of non-humans are continuously violated when it comes to developmental projects, even in areas that traditionally were considered sacred groves. The "Operation Noah" that occurred during the construction of the Kariba Dam addressed in chapter one is just one among many

examples where nature's rights were violated in the name of progress. One would therefore argue that unless humanity changes its view of territorial rights, extinction of species will continue through habitat destruction and fragmentation. As moral beings, we have a special responsibility to respect other species' places, something that other species can hardly do themselves. Biodiversity is another biotic condition that we should hand over to future generations.

In order to leave behind diverse species to benefit their ecosystemic relations and future generations of multiple species, each individual should take action to celebrate nature's rights by protecting other species from extinction. The ethical conviction that other species have natural rights to space should be brought into theological discourse. African and Christian traditions are agreed on the fact that every creature was given space on Earth. In the Bible, God's garden was a gift to all creatures. Until human beings sinned, all creation lived in harmony on Earth (Genesis 1-3). Since redemption has to do with restoration of creation, securing the space for other species in order to maintain biodiversity ought to become our theological moral imperative in this overpopulated and over-consuming era. Policymakers and the public should work out means of living within limits without displacing other species from their homelands. As already indicated some species are endemic to certain environments and displacing them means forcing them and interdependent species into extinction.

While Africans can accept the value of protecting biodiversity for the sake of future generations, it is human responsibility to the ancestors and the Creator God that informs this value. Earth and her species belong to the Creator God, who provided these

natural goods to our ancestors. God and ancestors are, in essence, the guardians of the land. Both are provoked when some species are become extincted without reason.<sup>95</sup> In fact, biodiversity represents their presence and blessings while extinctions point to their absence and banishment. Since God and ancestors manifest in nature, extinction of species robs them of physical bodies.

Furthermore, most African cultures hold totems as vital to human identity. That totems are based on nonhuman species suggests the relational consciousness of African cultures to Earth. This identification makes biodiversity important to the African worldview, but it also points to the natural rights of the entire biotic community. For example, if my rat totem is extincted, I will grow up without knowing who I am, to whom I am related, and how I am related to the natural world. Although this might sound silly to the Western mind, in Africa, who I am is linked to and rooted in a particular species of the natural world.

### **Celebrating Life: Rejecting Dominion**

In his article, “The Cry of Earth,” Christoph Uelinger argues that dominion has received different interpretations at different times in Church history, ranging from unlimited domination to stewardship of Earth. Uelinger argues that the doctrine of dominion has been subjected to the socio-cultural and historical context of the people,

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<sup>95</sup> Hart differentiates between species going extinct due to competition for Earth’s goods or habitat to meet their needs and being “extincted” by human beings, who disrupt ecosystems and evolutionary processes. Hart, *Sacramental Commons*, 108-113, 223.

which in some contexts has been very problematic. Failure to discern ecological relationships and respect interconnectedness among species is likely to promote a one-sided doctrine of dominion, and

the paradigm of responsibility connected with it in an illusory and ultimately irresponsible idealism. Modern technology has long since advanced into the experimental sphere in which human beings can no longer disregard the consequence of their intervention in the natural order. In this situation a responsible way of dealing with the natural environment can only be appealed for; in fact the demand can no longer be fulfilled. Even those who today want to devote themselves wholly to the protection of nature for the sake of human survival are not immune to contributing to its destruction<sup>96</sup>

Although the above statements are true, it is worth noting that the argument that humanity is connected to the wider web of life contradicts some assumptions of the doctrine of dominion. According to this doctrine, creation is appreciated for its instrumental value, and humanity retains the right to interfere with nature in a way that would “better” and “perfect” it. As article 17 of the Dominican Bishops’ Conference observed, “human beings are born, grow, and develop within a system that is complex, closed, and interrelated. Nature is home in which they live. They depend on her for their existence and the quality of their lives. In turn, nature depends on human beings who with their intelligence and capacity (both scientific and technical) must preserve, defend,

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<sup>96</sup> Christoph Uelinger, “The Cry of Earth,” in *Ecology and Poverty: Concilium*, ed., Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 55.

better, and perfect it. In this system of many and varied interrelated levels, the breakdown of or interference with one of these has a negative repercussion on all.”<sup>97</sup>

Likewise, in *The Episcopal Book of Common Prayer* (BCP), “Eucharistic Prayer C” places creation at the mercy of humanity. Despite acknowledging God as Creator and Earth as “fragile” and “our island home,” and acknowledging that we were made from “primal elements,” the BCP claims that God “made us the rulers of creation. But we turned against [God] and betrayed [God’s] trust; and we turned against one another.”<sup>98</sup> This creation theology is founded on dominion theology and lacks ecological consciousness. Genesis 3 makes it clear that human betrayal of God’s trust upset sound relationships not only between humans and nature – but human relations as well.

The bleeding Earth continues to cry for help and only a theology of creation that is non-anthropocentric and self-limiting in consumption can assist the healing. We must accept that the Creator declared creation “good” and that human involvement in it cannot “perfect” it without consequences. In the name of perfecting Earth, humanity has continuously threatened the web of life while its own population has continued to grow.

### **All One, Strong and Free**

The concept of ecological interconnectedness is not foreign to Africa. According

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<sup>97</sup> *Pastoral Letter On the relationship of Human Beings to Nature*, article 17, The Dominican Episcopal Conference, *And God Saw that It Was Good, Catholic Theology and the Environment*, Drew Christiansen, SJ, and Walter Grazer (Washington DC, United States Catholic Conference, 1996), 262.

<sup>98</sup> Episcopal Church, *Book of Common Prayer* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979), 370.

to the second verse of the Zambia national anthem, the unity of the continent of Africa is based on our shared Earth.

Africa is our own motherland  
Fashioned with and blessed by God's good hands  
Let us all her people join as one  
Brothers and sisters under the sun  
All one, strong and free.<sup>99</sup>

This anthem suggests that God is the Creator and sustainer of our mother Earth. It also confirms that Earth is not an end in itself, as some deep ecologists would like to suggest. Neither is Earth the product of random chance. Rather, Earth was created and “fashioned with, and blessed by God’s good hands.” Because of our common origin, all Africans are “brothers and sisters under the sun.” But as chapter four illustrates, this anthem emphasizes the anthropological interconnectedness of the human family while ignoring the ontological interdependence of African cosmology. As already observed, African cosmologies are rich with themes and myths that point to the brotherhood and sisterhood of humanity with every creature. Similarly, Christologically, we are all sisters and brothers through one Origin-Ancestor; the Christ.

However, the most important aspect of this anthem comes from the idea that our Mother land was created by God. We are children of Earth and therefore belong to mother Earth. Nonetheless, together with our mother Earth, we are all creatures of God’s good hands. While this reasoning finds space in Christianity, it is the African ethic of

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<sup>99</sup> “Stand and Sing of Zambia, Proud and Free,” also known as *Lumbanyeni Zambia*, Zambian National Anthem, adopted 1964. Words collectively written; music composed by Enoch Mankayi Sontonga, 1897.

interconnectedness, which views Earth as created by God, and therefore the center of God's activity, which is behind this point. To Africans, Earth is not cursed, but rather blessed, by God (cf. Genesis 3). The Bemba version of this anthem translates the phrase "blessed by God's good hands" as *ukusenaminwa naLesa*. Earth is blessed (*ukusenaminwa*) because it has its origin in God. That the Bemba refer, too, to Mary and Jesus as *uwasenaminwa* (blessed) might suggest further that Earth, like Mary and Jesus, are sacraments of God's grace to humanity.

Unfortunately, this anthem has been understood anthropocentrically from a pan-African ethic that controlled Africa in the early 1960s. During this time, many African countries were still under colonial rule. Despite this nationalistic attitude, Africans did not regard Earth as belonging to humanity alone; existing for the benefit of humanity. Neither did they associate the motherhood of Earth solely to humanity, as is the case today. For them, the motherhood of Earth was incomplete without non-human beings. Earth is mother to all her children: mountains, trees, rivers, and countless other creatures. Thus, only when all creatures join as one can we become "all one, strong and free."<sup>100</sup>

The oneness of creation by virtue of its common origin has implications for Christian ecological ethics. As observed in chapter five, the future of Earth depends on human attitudes toward the natural world. Irresponsible attitudes that have led to deforestation, air and water pollution, land degradation, uncontrolled population growth, climate change, and many other ecological predicaments are slowly driving us to our own

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<sup>100</sup> Zambia National Anthem, 1964.

demise. Mutukudzi's assertion is worth repeating: by destroying Earth, we are spitting into the well from which we drink.

The liberative element of this anthem should be explored ecologically. Because Earth is part of an interconnected universe, only when all creatures are one can a country be said to be strong. The fact that we are connected means that our strength is found in maintaining the knots of life that connect us to each other and make us one Earth community as God intended. Attitudes that separate the rich from the poor, the global North from the global South, men from women, heterosexuals from homosexuals, people of color from whites, and humans from non-humans, weaken this Earth's community.

The above observation suggests that human freedom is directly linked to Earth liberation. Africa's freedom will not be complete without the liberation of Earth, Earth's biota, and Earth's poor. The prophet Isaiah was right when he proclaimed God's salvation as the restoration of creation. God's intention is to create new heavens and a new Earth in which all creatures will live in harmony. In the new Earth (as God originally intended), the weeping of Earth and the weeping of the poor will be heard no more (Is 65: 20; Rev. 21:1-4). Because political, social, and economic oppression will have no place in God's eschatological community, every creature will have equal access to Mother Earth's goods:

No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; My chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands. They will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; For they will be a people blessed by the Lord, they and their descendants with them. Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. (Is. 65:21-24 NIV)

The harmony of the new Earth is not limited to humanity alone, since God desires harmony between humanity and non-humans. The salvation that God promises has implications for the whole Earth. Just as humans will come to live as one, God will enable humans to relate to non-humans in peace. According to Isaiah, “Wolves will live with lambs. Leopards will lie down with goats. Calves, young lions, and year-old lambs will be together, and little children will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest.” (Is. 11:6-9; cf. Is. 65: 25).

Paul concurs with Isaiah's prophetic eschatology. According to Paul, the fullness of the times will involve “the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth” (Eph1:10). As long as enmity between created beings persists, we cannot speak about the reign of God being established on Earth. The fear of creation that has sometimes led to the destruction of non-human creatures will be replaced with friendship of all creatures. Against this background, landlessness, poverty, overconsumption, uncontrolled population growth, corruption, and uneven distribution of natural goods, are all sinful acts that deserve prophetic ethical responses.

Despite the evil of these oppressive attitudes, they are religiously conditioned. Often Christian teaching has stated that Earth is to be exploited for human wellbeing. The traditional African teaching that Earth is Mother was reduced to be understood from an economic rather than religious point of view. Such teachings changed people's attitude

towards the sacred Earth and created a paradigm shift in how Africans related to non-human beings. However, since the spiritual, the natural, and the human worlds are interconnected in African cosmology, such a paradigm did not distance from Earth those Africans who retained this cosmology, if only surreptitiously under colonial rule. As a result, while Earth is understood and treated as a commodity by some, many Africans still associate sacredness with certain aspects of the natural world.

If the Bible does not sanction destruction of God's creation, then our attitude towards Earth's natural goods should be informed and directed by this ecological spiritual consciousness. The appropriation of Earth's natural goods by less than 20% of the world's population, the violations of poor people's rights by multi-national corporations, unfair trade between the global North and South, increasing poverty amidst extreme population growth, the destruction of rainforest, and unprecedented levels of corruption in post-independence Africa, are among the many issues that African ecological ethics ought to address. Ignoring these issues will be sins against God, ancestors, future generations of all biota, and Earth.

### **Our Mother Earth is Our Home**

Christ the guardian of the land demands that we examine our attitudes towards Earth. The theological notion of resident aliens, which can sometimes negate Earth as our home in favor of another world to come, demands revisiting. If we see ourselves as strangers on Earth, then destroying Earth simply accelerates our arrival in our heavenly city; as emigrants going to our heavenly city, we care less for Earth. Given the attitudes

we tend to have towards other people's properties, it is understandable that the destruction of Earth is very much due to an understanding that rejects Earth as our home.

As already observed in previous chapters, however, the universal ancestorship of Christ makes him the supreme guardian and protector of Earth. By virtue of Christ's relationship with Earth, this Earth is our home, which should be spiritually guarded and protected at all costs. This understanding is equally found in African traditional religion, where Earth is considered our home forever. While Mbiti attempted to argue that Africans have no future, it is clear that the African concept of the future is Earth bound. We have no other home to which we might migrate; Earth is our permanent home.

Accepting Earth as our permanent home has practical implications for our relationships: human to human, and nonhuman to human. For instance, rather than promising the poor a better world to come, Christianity must be willing to address socio-political and economic issues that have reduced the majority to abject poverty. Acknowledgement, in practice as well as in theory, of Earth's status as our home, is fundamental to meeting the Millennium Development Goals. This requires that ethicists and theologians engage economic and political issues from the perspective of Earth. It involves a learning process based on critical scrutiny of long-held assumptions about Earth. As long as Earth is viewed as our transitory home, the crisis will persist.

### **The *Telos* of Creation**

Since African Christians hold the Bible as the supreme source of morality, it is important to address the biblical concept of creation. Biblically, Earth exists through and

for the Creator God. According to the creation narratives of Genesis, it is God who created heavens and Earth (Gen 1:1ff).

The creation of Earth is fundamental to life, as represented in the narrative that describes how the first human being was created from the dust or clay of Earth (*adamah*, the Hebrew for clay; Gen 2:9), a story that also suggests a continuing relationship between humanity and Earth. This is reiterated in the story of the Fall, at the end of which God reminds humanity of its relationship with Earth: “For Earth you are, and to Earth you will return” (Gen 3: 19).

Not only are humans part of Earth but they, like any other part of creation, belong to the Creator God. As the Psalmist puts it, “the earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters” (Ps 24:1-2). The belief that Earth came into being by God’s own love and care is, in fact, a biblical given. Biblical writers were careful not to treat Earth or humanity as above God. Doing so would be considered idolatry. Neither did they present Earth as something outside God’s realm. It is for this reason that Yahweh’s covenant at the end of the Flood story is not just with humans: it is with Earth and all living creatures, including humanity; it includes God’s promise not to destroy Earth again (Gen 9:11-13). Just as God cares for humanity, the Creator cares for every creature, big and small. In the Psalmist’s words, “The heavens are yours, Earth also is yours; the world and all it contains; you have founded them” (Psalm 89:11 cf.1 Corinthians 10:26).

This Old Testament conviction that Earth is the Lord’s is carried over into the New Testament, where the supremacy of Christ is linked with creation. According to the

gospel of St. John, creation is the product of the Christ. Similarly, the letter to the Colossians identifies the Christ as the source of all creation.

[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross (Col. 1:15-20).

In this text, Christ is the firstborn of creation and connected to the rest of creation by virtue of being one with the Creator. Unlike an African ancestor, Jesus is the source of creation visible and invisible. Moreover “all things were created by him and for him.” That said, Christ becomes the ecological ancestor as well as a relative of all that exists on Earth. In other words, it is through him, in him, and for him that all things exist. In this regard, the interconnectedness of creation is founded on the power of Christ, who is both the Creator and the vital force behind creation. Like an African ancestor, however, Christ is also the link that connects Earth to the Supreme Being.

The *telos* of creation is also hereby pronounced. Whereas outside Christian thought (and sometimes, unfortunately, within Christian thinking) it is assumed that creation exists for humanity, in Colossians, creation exists for Christ who is both the Creator and the *telos* of creation. The declaration that Jesus Christ is both the source and goal of life finds expression in other biblical books as well. Writing to the Romans, Paul argues that “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things” (Romans 11:36).

Likewise, he argues that “for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him (1 Cor. 8:6).

This biblical conviction is important in developing an African Christology of the land. Christ is not only the origin of human life; he is life (cf. John 1:4). Thus, the assumption that Earth exists solely for its instrumental value, fails to address the ecological importance of creation in Christ. Just as humans exist to worship God, every creature exists to worship God. In fact, Psalm 148 invites all the ecological community to worship and praise the Creator God for their existence:

Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights above.  
 Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his heavenly hosts.  
 Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars.  
 Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies.  
 Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created. He set them in place for ever and ever; he gave a decree that will never pass away. Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, Small creatures and flying birds, kings of the earth and all nations, You princes and all rulers on earth, young men and maidens, old men and children (Ps.148: 1-11.cf Ps150:6).

Arguably, this Psalm presents the interconnectedness of creation as well as the goal of the same. To the Psalmist, God deserves praise from every creature regardless of its usefulness to humanity. As part of the creatures’ expression of gratitude, praise to God is expected. Thus all creatures of Earth and the sea, both big and small, are obliged to render praise to the Lord. Despite the anthropocentric liturgies and catechisms that limit worship of God to humanity, the bible shows that the worship of the Creator is an act in

which the entire ecological community of Earth partakes. Because of this reality, many saints and mystics have seen creation as a companion to Christian worship; therefore, destroying creation or unwarranted exploitation of natural goods is a crime against the Creator, whose praise we diminish.

For instance, St. Francis preached to diverse creatures; he invited animals and birds to praise their Creator after the pattern of Psalm 148. In the “Canticle of Brother Sun,” also known as *Laudes Creaturarum* (Praise of the Creatures), St. Francis illustrates the ecological praise rendered to the Creator. Composed around 1225, when his health was at its worst, St. Francis invited all creatures to join him in glorifying the Creator God.

Part of the canticle reads:

Most high, omnipotent, good Lord,  
 Praise, glory and honor and benediction all are Thine.  
 To Thee alone do they belong, most High,  
 And there is no man fit to mention Thee.  
 Praise be to Thee, my Lord, with all Thy creatures,  
 Especially to my worshipful brother sun,  
 The which lights up the day, and through him dost Thou brightness give;  
 And beautiful is he and radiant with splendor great;  
 Of Thee, most High, signification gives.  
 Praised be my Lord, for sister moon and for the stars,  
 In heaven Thou hast formed them clear and precious and fair.  
 Praised be my Lord for brother wind  
 And for the air and clouds and fair and every kind of weather,  
 By the which Thou givest to Thy creatures nourishment.  
 Praised be my Lord for sister water,  
 The which is greatly helpful and humble and precious and pure.  
 Praised be my Lord for brother fire,  
 By the which Thou lightest up the dark.  
 And fair is he and gay and mighty and strong.

Praised be my Lord for our sister, mother earth,  
 The which sustains and keeps us  
 And brings forth diverse fruits with grass and flowers bright.<sup>101</sup>

This canticle reflects the biblical tradition that celebrates “the wonders of the Spirit in creation.”<sup>102</sup> The prophet Isaiah equally reflected on this reality when he called on the mountains and trees to shout for joy. “Shout joyfully, you lower parts of the earth; break forth into a shout of joy, you mountains, O forest, and every tree in it; For the LORD has redeemed Jacob and in Israel. He shows forth His glory” (Isaiah 44:23; cf. 49:13; 55:12). From this perspective, John Hart’s argument, that the belief that the natural world exists solely to serve humanity is idolatrous, is definitely true.

### **Spitting into the Well from which We Drink**

As observed in previous chapters, the supposition that Earth exists for humanity has been emphasized ever more increasingly during the scientific age. Jonathan Bonk observes that post-enlightenment science influenced Western missionaries’ assumptions about the goal of civilization.<sup>103</sup> Bonk notes that the missionaries carried the gospel of plenty as indicative of Christian civilization. With this gospel, they assumed that non-Westerners would live and consume like Westerners. Today, however, this “good news”

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<sup>101</sup> *The Writings of St. Francis of Assisi*, tr. by Paschal Robinson, [1905], at sacred-texts.com. Accessed 07/ 30/ 2009.

<sup>102</sup> Hart, *Sacramental Commons*, 27. Hart argues that St. Francis linked his nature mysticism to the biblical traditions such as Daniel 3 and Psalm 148. *Ibid.*, 27-29.

<sup>103</sup> The Comaroffs discuss the question of European attitudes toward Africans-within-nature in their book, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 1. Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 126-132.

has led to “human induced climate change, with its concomitant degradation of habitat and destruction of species.”<sup>104</sup> Bonk further argues that the entire ideology of civilization “was framed within a theological cocoon that prevented [missionaries] from adequately understanding the end result of their civilization’s notions of progress, development, and the social material destiny of humankind. The planet is simply too small to accommodate large numbers who think and live as we do.”<sup>105</sup>

Ronald J. Sider makes a similar observation. He argues that North Americans, Europeans, and the Japanese are deceived into consuming more resources than the entire poor majority of the world’s population. This is stimulated through advertisements: “The ever-more affluent standard of living is the god of . . . North America and the adman is its prophet.”<sup>106</sup> These adverts have influenced how Earth’s natural goods are viewed and distributed when the rich and the relatively rich covet a lavish lifestyle. Like Bonk, Sider notes that the world does not have limitless resources to sustain such lifestyles. Rather, human beings need to share Earth’s goods equitably.

It is important to realize that while the mission theory of Christianity, the dominant philosophy of Western civilization, and the ideology behind extension of commerce all advocated the exploitation of natural goods, some missionaries treated the natural world with great dignity. In Africa therefore, the current paradigm shift in African

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<sup>104</sup> Jonathan Bonk, “Mission and the Groaning of Creation,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 32, no. 4 (October, 2008): 169-170.

<sup>105</sup> Bonk, “Mission and the Groaning of Creation,” 170

<sup>106</sup> Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1990), 28.

cosmology should not be attributed to missionary teaching alone. Rather, the Westernization of African culture was highly influenced by the concept of civilization and commerce which controlled colonial governments. In order to negotiate the social impacts of colonialism, most Africans migrated to urban areas.

Despite existing in the new environment, most of them upheld traditional beliefs about procreation. To them, ancestors willed many children; hence procreation is a virtue to which every person aspires. Unfortunately, such beliefs were confirmed by new religions, such as Islam and Christianity, to which Africans were exposed. Amid such religious beliefs, African populations exploded in urban areas to an extent that post-independence African governments failed to provide basic facilities in urban areas, and later on in rural areas. Worse still, most African governments were and are still trapped in the wave of corruption, which by far is the worst threat that Africa faces today. Thus, while colonialism robbed Africans of their homelands, corruption destroyed the land to the benefit of a few, as is evident today in the case of Zimbabwe, among many African countries, as reported in the news media.

The distancing of Africans from the land in the name of civilization, coupled with uncontrolled population growth, land degradation, and corruption in Sub-Saharan Africa, contributed to the exploitation of natural goods and the poor.<sup>107</sup> The negative effects of Western civilization and commerce are visible everywhere. Whereas in traditional perspectives land was viewed as a commons, to which nobody could claim ownership,

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<sup>107</sup> The Comaroffs address this subject at length in their third chapter, "Cultivation, Colonialism and Christianity." Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 119ff.

today the land is in the hands of few individuals, and this is justified ideologically.

This accumulation of land by the chosen few has resulted in the landlessness of many Africans. Since social, political and economic status determines who gets the land in post-independence Africa, most poor people are forced to migrate to urban areas where resources for survival are generally limited. Overpopulation, extreme corruption, lack of fuel resources, education, and proper sanitation facilities, and pollution are some of the environmental issues that African urban dwellers have to negotiate. These are the very issues that have wrecked the environment across Africa. In some cases, even once-sacred places and animals are now threatened with destruction.

The commercialization of Earth's natural goods has caused a great deal of suffering across Africa. While originally Africans had unlimited access to the beauty of creation, today, nature has become a luxury to which only the rich are entitled. Across Africa, Western Safari operators control access to certain important spaces such as waterfronts and game parks. Despite being direct victims of the dam, Chief Chipepo and Simamba have had lack of access to the waters of Lake Kariba.<sup>108</sup> The privatization of natural goods is not just limited to waterfront. In most African countries, Game Parks are now in private hands. Only those with the capacity to pay have access to such places. While the intention is to protect wildlife from poachers, natural goods are part of a commons to which people should have access regardless of their ability to pay. Commercial interests should always be balanced with community interests, which

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<sup>108</sup> Interviews with Chief Chipepo, Lusaka, October 2006; Chief Simamba, Lusaka, October, 2006.

unfortunately is not the case in post-independence Africa.

Leonardo Boff's argument that the cry of Earth and the cry of the poor are interconnected rings true. Across Africa, those whose livelihoods depend on the land are the most vulnerable in the current and ongoing crisis. Because natural goods are the only source of income for the poor majority, many have abused the land in pursuit of survival, while others abuse it for profits. As long as Africa continues to pursue profit at the expense of ecological integrity and the poor, the continent is headed toward severe environmental degradation. Africa needs economic development to address ever-increasing poverty. Responsible new fundamental principles of commerce and economics should encourage sustainable living rather than endless economic growth.

Although transforming existing principles may take many years, acknowledging our responsibilities to the natural world and to future generations is an ethical imperative that demands immediate attention. To use Charles Lagus's phrase, the "White Man's disease" or the "English Sickness" of exploiting nature could have come to Africa to stay.<sup>109</sup> However, it is time to heal Africa from this illness. The therapy for this illness demands accepting human responsibility for the natural world as a spiritual, social, and scientific necessity. *Ignoring this therapy is spitting in the well and bringing ourselves closer to self-annihilation.* That said, the triumph of Western civilization over African religious thought should be challenged by an ecological consciousness informed by *ubuntu*, which alerts us to the interconnectedness of the ecosphere.

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<sup>109</sup> Charles Lagus, *Operation Noah* (London: William Kimber and Co., 1959), 37.

## CONCLUSION

Christianity, informed directly or indirectly by African religious traditions, is among the fastest growing religions in Africa today. As indicated throughout this study, since the mounting ecological crisis has religious ramifications, African Christianity should work to address it significantly and forcefully. African traditional religious teachings, integrated with Christian ethical teachings, can approach the crisis with complementary views on the value of creation via the divine perspectives expressed in their respective traditions. While African ethics and Christian ethics are deeply anthropocentric, critical examinations of both religious worldviews has uncovered complementary emphases on human responsibility toward planet Earth and future generations. Most significantly, both religious cosmologies view Earth as part of an interconnected universe of intimately related beings.

This study has argued that to fault Christianity as solely or primarily responsible for the current crisis, as some critics have done, is not entirely accurate. Certainly, Western-controlled or guided development of a type of “civilization” distinct from traditional African cultural and religious worldviews helped encourage the desacralization and exploitation of the natural world. However, the Bible and the Christian heritage have proved over time that Christianity is not ecologically bankrupt. In fact, major teachings and representatives of Christianity illustrate ambivalent ecological premises in Christian traditions. St. Francis of Assisi and many Desert Fathers, for

example, lived in harmony with nature. These Christians understood themselves to be connected to the natural world in a sacramental manner. In an African context, they would recognize that rats, crocodiles, trees, gazelles, and lions are all symbols of divine revelation and presence, just as wolves, trees, and deer are in other geographic areas and bioregions. Like traditional Africans, these Christian saints understood that God was present in nature. Similarly, biblical teachings and ideas developed during the past half-century by Christian ethicists and theologians, such as those cited throughout this work, have affirmed the intrinsic value of creation and human responsibility to the Creator and creation. Such examples illustrate how African Christianity has much to learn from traditional and contemporary Christian teachings regarding human-nature relationships.

In particular, African Christianity should uphold traditional Christian teachings in its response to the ongoing eco-social crisis. Denouncing Christianity in the continent where the religion is growing rapidly will not help to mitigate consequences of the crisis. Rather, attempts to integrate Christian and African traditional teachings on the meanings of “nature” and “natural” in the cosmos can lead to ecological consciousness and actions.

By advocating for Christian teaching, one should not ignore some actions by those early missionaries who destroyed sacred groves and considered nature-related rituals idolatrous. However, African religions hold the world as interconnected, the very views once held by Christian saints and early missionaries to Africa such as Henry Rowley and Albert Schweitzer. As such, Western Christian ecological thought can easily find room in African Christianity.

The interconnectedness of nature as understood in African cosmologies is the

foundation of traditions that attributed sacredness to or, better, acknowledged sacredness in the natural world. Ancestors, gods, and other spirits were understood to reveal themselves in sacred groves, mountains, rivers, and animals. Unlike in Christianity, where humanity claims to be the sole *Imago Dei*, Africans have perceived humanity to be one part of nature, and not the sole representative of God on Earth. Just as diviners and *n'ganga* can become avenues through which humanity can experience fellowship with the Supreme Being and ancestors, a python or a cow can equally be that medium. This study has considered how destruction of these creatures was considered an affront on the Supreme Being and ancestors. It has further argued that such an ethical understanding directed the active interaction between ancestors, the living, and mother Earth. Africans expressed these beliefs through community symbols: rituals, totems, taboos, and many ecological sanctions.

In times of crisis, Africans would consult the diviners who would consult the ancestors and, in extreme cases, the Supreme Being. Usually, the forthcoming answer would be associated with the natural world. An explanation could be, for example, that somebody annoyed the ancestors by polluting the land through social inflections. This pollution could be in the form of murder, cutting a sacred tree or even killing a sacred animal. In traditional societies, some of which still survive today, the relationship is only restored by killing the persons responsible for such acts. Harsh as this may sound, the goal of such taboos was to uphold the ethics of interconnectedness between humanity and the natural world while maintaining a favorable relationship with ancestors and the

Supreme Being. In this regard, *ubuntu* was closely associated with upholding the ethics of ecological interconnectedness.

The spiritual significance of animals in African cosmology is experienced at two levels. First, animals possess a vital force which, as we already observed, is the knot that holds nonhumans and humans together. Therefore, human behavior toward nature is of spiritual importance to the community. In fact, in traditional African understanding, to possess *ubuntu* included living in harmony with the rest of creation. A person with *ubuntu*, therefore, cannot deny non-humans their natural rights without provoking the wrath of the Creator Spirit and ancestors.

Second, Africans respect the natural world for its spiritual overtones. In addition to the many taboos associated with the forests, rivers and mountains, Africans comprehend the natural world as an avenue through which human beings ultimately understand their own world. This supernatural quality of nature does not come from creation in itself. Rather, the Creator Spirit and ancestors confer it. Sacred mountains, trees, snakes, and many other creatures are respected by virtue of their association with the spirit world. In a sense, the natural world is the ambassador of the Divinity to human mind.

The interconnectedness and sacredness of the universe provide a foundation for Christian ecological ethics as this study has demonstrated. Earth is part of the complex whole in which every creature has an equal claim. Similarly, the universe is sacred by virtue of creation's origin. To destroy the Earth is to commit sacrilege. This is because the Creator conferred the Earth with sacred worth; Earth is to be respected and honored. This understanding finds support in Christianity and African traditional religions.

Christianity teaches that creation originates from God. As already observed, since the Spirit is present in the cosmos, the cosmos itself is another form of divine revelation. It is on these two assumptions that the doctrine of natural revelation affirms nature's sacramental value.

The sacramental value of the Earth is similarly complemented by the belief that Earth is a generational heritage and our common home. Like the bread of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, which is given for all people, Earth's natural goods are a commons that should be enjoyed equally: not only by humans, but by all living creatures. Likewise, every creature is entitled to space on Earth. The destruction of habitats for many creatures should prompt moral outrage from Christians and African traditionalists alike. This is because both religions acknowledge that Earth is a God-provided home to all creatures.

On the economic front, this study has argued that Western export-driven capitalist economies are putting extreme pressure on African natural goods and consequently causing severe environmental degradation across the continent. It has already been established that most of the Western driven economies do not pay attention to the ecological integrity of the land. Neither do they take into consideration the plight of the poor. As a result, nature and the poor are equally threatened by these economies. Amid corruption in post-independent Africa, these economic policies continue to deceive Africans into believing that they will have a livable future without respecting Earth.

African Christianity understands that such a belief is invalid; their future, and that of their continent, depends on how humanity acts today. The concept that Africans can act as if there is no future misleads on all fronts. Traditionally, Africans have understood

the meaning and reality of “future” and planned for it. In fact, they understood that what we do today has significant and, perhaps, severe implications for the future. Such an understanding explains why so many Africans refused to part with the land even when they had the freedom to make that choice. Theologians and ethicists, therefore, should work to re-examine important ecological themes already present in African religions in order to integrate them into the global ecological community. As this dissertation has revealed, the ancestor cult, Mwari and Mbona cults, *lwiindi*, and many other rituals can be instrumental in healing Earth. Just as these cults have resisted oppression of the poor and other people in post- independence Africa, they have power to influence human attitudes towards nature.

The present work has particularly considered the case of the Kariba Dam construction in Southern Africa. To many European, the construction of the Kariba Dam was purely an economic issue. But for Africans, the entire project was a threat to the interconnected universe. Aside from opposing it for its social impacts, many Africans resisted it because they saw it as an attack on the very center of their being. Only the policies of colonial agents enabled them to abandon their homes for new lands. The sacrifice and appeasements that followed the construction of the Dam illustrate how many Africans viewed the modern life.

To many Africans, life cannot be separated into spheres, as the Western intellectual world tends to do. Social, economic, political, and now ecological issues are equally spiritual within an African context. Yet, Western ideologies have presented these issues as solely secular. Many Africans have rejected and ignored this view.

Consequently, this study contends that the ongoing ecological crisis should be presented to Africans as an African eco-ethic spiritual issue and event that threatens African ethics of interconnectedness.

As the Kariba case demonstrated, the significance of the belief that Nyami-Nyami and other *basangu* spirits would destroy the Dam is that it provided the Tonga people with spiritual reasons for resisting resettlement. For Westerners and westernized Africans, “civilization” and commerce were at the heart of the construction of the Dam. But for Africans, faithfulness to the ruling of ancestors was more important than economic development. So-called “development” issues, then, have significant spiritual implications for the majority of Africans.

The realization that life is interconnected further ought to direct our ecological actions and responsibilities. This study has argued that African ecological ethics should inform all disciplines in order to address the ecological crisis facing the continent. It has also attempted to make such an inter-disciplinary contribution. Since the ecological crisis knows no boundaries, it is proper to conclude that the African concept of interconnectedness serves as a point of contact between African Christian ecological ethics and the rest of the world. M. L. Daneel and African Earthkeepers, and the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Wangari Maathai, all of whom are currently involved in ecological actions of Earth healing, have highlighted and capitalized on this relationship.

African and Christian traditional values are fundamentally compatible when it comes to the human relationship with creation. This is not to say that these religions are fully ecological in their outlook. Rather, in light of their current ecological consciousness,

these religions possess strong ecological insights necessary for the healing of the bleeding Earth. In this regard, the works of John Hart and Marthinus Daneel have shown how traditional and religious values can become instrumental in sustaining a warm relationship with the Earth. They also suggest that appreciating local people's heritages is critical to doing environmental ethics in the global world.

For example, John Hart's observation that the false belief that Earth exists solely for its instrumental value to humans is a form of idolatry deserves reaffirmation. He states that people should recognize instead that Earth is a sacramental commons which must be respected for its sacredness and intrinsic value, and conserved and cared for by humanity. Human beings should have "a relational consciousness" about, and exist in a "relational community" with, non-human beings in the interconnected universe. Because Earth is a trust given by God for our care, we are responsible for Earth's wellbeing. Neglecting this role is an abomination to God and our ancestors. Our love for God, Christ, and ancestors should also inform our relationships with Earth. Our consciousness of the interconnectedness of life among humanity, nonhumans, and Divine Being should direct our actions and environmental policies. Loving nature means accepting that we are part of Earth community. It also implies recognizing that creation shares with us a common origin in the Spirit Creator.

The concept of interconnectedness that exists among many native peoples also cannot be ignored when developing environmental policies. The theologies of adaptation, inculturation, contextualization, and liberation that have characterized theology in Africa can and should engage the ongoing crisis as a matter of urgency. This study has

especially argued that the ecological crisis demands an ecological ethic relating the cosmic Christ to our Earth context. The biblical mandate to love God and our neighbor as ourselves should also be extended to every creature, seen and unseen. This understanding would then be concretized in practices and projects such as recycling, reforestation, controlling population, limiting consumption, and cleaning up the waters around us, on which all life depends. Such an understanding also means standing up for the natural rights of nature in a globalized capitalistic world that views the created order as a commodity to be exploited for commercial gain. Theological ethics in Africa should take the ecological community as a whole, rather than humanity alone, as an ethical starting point. God did not create humanity in isolation from other creatures. Creator-God created the entire ecological community, and proclaimed all of it “very good” (Gen. 1:31).

The current destruction of Earth due to human-related activities demands immediate ethicizing at all levels, in all places. For African ethicists, this means employing both Western and African heritages in their ethical analysis. The ethical concept of interconnectedness illustrated by *ubuntu* should be emphasized.

This study has further considered how an ecological nature of African communities is behind the respect accorded to ancestors as guardians of the land. In fact, territorial and ancestor cults function as insurance for community well-being; they enforce directives with regard to a community’s use of natural goods. In African worldviews, scarcities of food, and drought and other natural disasters, are attributed to human failure to live in harmony with the environment. This was illustrated in this study

in a recounting of elements of Chief Simamba's *lwiindi*. Such cultic observations enjoin ecological injunctions on social life and influence the production and distribution of natural goods. These ecological dimensions are readily present across Africa. Consequently, theologians should explore them for ecological illustrations of good ecological practices.

Additionally, it is clear that ancestors play a crucial role in upholding ecological injunctions. This study has considered how an identification of Jesus with ancestors (as the ancestor *par excellence* or unique ancestor) has ecological implications. Across religious traditions, recognition of the value and contributions of ancestors to guide and promote ecological responsibility and action is found in its universal application throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. Since ancestors are the foundation of Bantu morality and are the guardians of the land, recognition of Jesus' concern for and involvement in the resolution of the ongoing crisis is a categorical imperative.

Africa faces problems of ecological devastation evident from rapid population growth, deforestation, and ever increasing poverty. During this crisis, African Christianity has continued to experience rapid growth, which presents an opportunity and a potential political, economic, social, and spiritual force for addressing the crisis. African Christianity should capitalize on its numbers and influence to teach people about Earthkeeping. This teaching could effectively utilize the African heritage in dialogue with the Western Christian ethical heritage. The ethics of interconnectedness, found in both Western Christianity and African traditional religion, could be useful in this task.

Cognizant of the impact of Africa's population growth on the environment, Africans must acknowledge and alter a traditional understanding that an abundant life means having many children. Retaining this understanding and practice will mean that ecological initiatives will continue to be undermined. Consequently, consultation with Spirit mediums (*basangu*) and other traditional religious leaders should be brought into consideration of this and other issues in the ongoing crisis. Since ancestors are vital in addressing population growth in Africa, it is time African elders were alerted to the negative effects of this growth on the biota, the land, and human communities. Together, ancestors and elders can be called on to recognize that land is limited, and uncontrolled population growth will lead to land-related conflicts and extreme poverty.

Ancestors are not the only forces influencing morality in Africa today. Forces of Christianity, civilization, and commerce continue to influence and inform African Christian Ethics. Like African theology, however, ethics can benefit immensely from the African traditional religion which possesses certain ecological themes and insights for ecological actions and responsibilities. The concept of life, totems, and ethics related to *ubuntu* and sacred groves are among the many insights that offer particularly good examples of such contributions. The principle of interconnectedness, expressed in an ethical ideal of *ubuntu*, demands accepting that human actions are ecologically related at all levels. It implies living in harmony with nature. Since the ecological crisis threatens this harmony, the ethics of *ubuntu*, considered here at length, should determine human relationships with nature.

*Ubuntu* as the ethics of ecological interconnectedness suggests that every creature is sacred from God's perspective. The manifestation of God, ancestors, and other spirits in nature does not only suggest that Earth is sacred; it also reminds us of the interconnectedness of the universe. Equally important is the Christian doctrine of natural revelation, which confirms the sacredness of nature. Therefore, humanity ought to relate to nature from a sacramental perspective. Indeed, redemption will not be complete unless Earth is so liberated. Paul makes this clear when he observes that

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time (Rom. 8: 19-22).

Biblical witness that creation is part of God's redemptive plan is consistently clear. Therefore, the liberation of Earth and all biota from current exploitation should also characterize the ethics of *ubuntu* in Africa and elsewhere.

Finally, this work has argued that the ecological crisis in Africa demands the ecological face of Jesus. Since the Christ is the origin and an ecological ancestor of every species, his "vital force" is inherently active in every creature that exists. Ignoring the current environmental crisis while species are extincted and Earth dies, means ignoring the ethical sanctions of Christ, who is the origin-ancestor and ecological ancestor of all creation. It is, in effect, *spitting in the well from which we all drink*. Jesus, our ancestors and our descendants, however, demand more from us: *ubuntu* rather than indifference and exploitation should characterize African ecological consciousness and conduct.

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