3 The challenge of environment and climate justice¹

Imperatives of an eco-theological reformation of Christianity in African contexts

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Contexts: current challenges and debates on sustainability and the role of religions

The issue of ecological transformation and eco-theology is not a new theme in African theological discourse. Already in 2008, the All African Conference of Churches (AACC) gave prominent space to the water and environmental crisis at its general assembly in Maputo. At that time the topic of the environment and spirituality came on the agenda when a cholera outbreak in Zimbabwe illustrated how pollution, environmental degradation and inadequate water supply were affecting people in Africa. The Maputo Covenant from that assembly stated: 'We affirm that earth keeping is a crucial dimension of the church's mission and we need to confess of the times when the church has been unfaithful in this mandate or at worst, acted and taught against' (World Council of Churches 2008). In this chapter I argue that facing the gravity of current and future environmental challenges for the African continent and its implications for forced migration both within and beyond the African continent needs to become a top priority in the new working period of AACC as in many African (as well as other) churches the seriousness of the environmental challenges has not yet been fully grasped. This chapter is structured along the following themes:

- contexts – current challenges and debates on sustainability and the role of religions;
- texts – resources for inspiring an ecological reformation of Christianity in Africa; and
- visions – imperatives for churches engaged in climate justice and ecological transformation.

A critical question at stake: is Christianity responsible for the environmental crisis in Africa?

A West African theologian once shared the following story based on his personal biographical experiences:

The village in the East of Ghana where I grew up was located close to a forest and a river. In the forest from ancient times onwards the ancestors live, therefore it was sacred. In the river there lived the spirit of the water, therefore it was sacred as well. Then people of my village became Christians. Now, according to the new Christian world view, there were no ancestors any more in the forest and also there were no spirits any more in the river. The taboos were disintegrating and disappearing. Instead the people started to make use and exploit both the forest and the water of the river for their own purposes. Today next to this village there is no forest left anymore and the river – it turned into a cesspool. Who has done a major mistake here? And for what reason?

(Emmanuel Anim of the Church of Pentecost,
Ghana, story transmitted orally)

The key question embedded in this narrative is the following: Is the introduction of Christianity in Africa responsible for the environmental crisis? Is Christian tradition even the main root of environmental degradation?

This thesis is not new at all. Since the famous article written by Lynn White in 1967 'The historical roots of our ecological crisis', this perception has been reiterated by many scholars (e.g. Amery 1978; Münk 1987). White's article placed the blame for the ecological crisis on western Christianity as such. White's argument is that the Judeo-Christian doctrine of creation has led to the disenchantment of nature. Biblical religion has expelled the gods from the forests and streams once and for all. The biblical notion of 'dominion' of humankind over nature has given rise to western science which encouraged empirical investigation of the 'book of nature' and thus also promoted the spread of exploitative attitudes to nature. White argues that 'Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen' (1967, 1205) and concludes that 'Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt'.

Several African scholars have taken up some elements of White's provocative thesis (although in-depth empirical research on the influence of the arrival of Christianity in the African continent on attitudes relating to nature and the environment has not yet been conducted). Harvey Sindima, for instance, following some of the arguments of Lynn White argues that the original and pre-Christian African concept is about 'the bondedness of life', a view based on the integral whole of life being interconnected with spiritual and material realms relating to each other. However, he argues that in the process of colonial expansion, this spiritual worldview which was traditionally dominant in African cultures was replaced and superseded by mechanistic worldviews originating by western enlightenment cultures of modernity (Sindima 1990).

Sindima concludes:

For some time the people of Africa have been influenced by a cosmology inherited from the West: the mechanistic perspective that views all things as lifeless commodities to be understood scientifically and to be used for

human ends. Yet these people have an alternative way of looking at the world, an alternative cosmology, which can better serve their needs for cultural development and social justice in an ecologically responsible context. This alternative way might be called a life-centered way, since it stresses the bondedness, the interconnectedness of all living beings.

(1990, 137)

Thus, some African scholars like Sindima view the introduction of Christianity in Africa as a factor which weakened human ability to interpret and reconstruct the systems of values and norms that give meaning to the lives of Africans. But the belief that scientific progress was the way in which misery would be eliminated in the world by and large did not work out in reality. The alliance of progress, science and technology has not eliminated misery.

The recommendation therefore which Sindima and others are bringing is that African Christianity nowadays has to rediscover traditional African values and rethink Christianity in a non-western, African way. Thus, African eco-theologies embedded and implicitly articulated in African Initiated Churches potentially present an attractive, feasible and necessary way out of the ecological dilemmas presented by the current trends in African modern culture.

It is the key question of this chapter to see whether there are indeed traditional African worldviews incorporated in the life and worship traditions of African Initiated Churches, which have the potential of offering substantial solutions to the environmental challenges on the African continent or at least can offer motivational energies for ecological commitments and how their potential can be strengthened.

Even a quick look at current African theological discourses provides evidence that much more serious theological and empirical research is needed to deepen historical, systematic, cultural as well as ethical insights into the ecological assets of African Christianity. Although some major work has been done on the general relation between Christianity and eco-theology (Conradie 2006), empirical research on African Initiated Churches and their potential contribution for eco-ethics is still in its initial stage and we can only gather some very first insights and hints on this topic but can never explore this in full detail as the task is huge.

We first need to take into consideration that there have been other scholars who have seriously refuted and contradicted the thesis of White, that Christianity as such is the root cause of environmental degradation. Several scholars have accused him of overgeneralisation and oversimplification, historically and theologically. Scholars like this have argued

- that exploitative attitudes to nature have other causes and roots than just Christianity;
- that the biblical witness on relationships to nature cannot be reduced to just the *dominium terrae* tradition;

- that Christianity did not harmoniously pave the way to scientific and technological revolution as much of the Enlightenment traditions were achieved in struggling against Christianity;
- that White deals with Christianity indiscriminately, generalising all traditions of Christianity and failing to realise the only partial validity of his claims.

(Conradie 2016; Conradie *et al.* 2014, 120ff.)

The counter thesis to White's convictions expressed by many later scholars therefore reads: Christianity does have ecological wisdom traditions embedded in biblical witness and in the tradition of the church. Therefore, rightly interpreted, Christianity cannot be blamed as being the *causa principalis* of all of the global environmental crisis, but certainly is both part of the problem but also one major part of the solution to it – as it can offer major insights to ecological transformation and awareness-building from rereading ancient biblical tradition.

Christian traditions show some ecological ambiguity: some elements in Christianity have reinforced attitudes which can legitimate violent subjugation of nature and exploitative attitudes. Other traditions in Christianity and the Bible show admiration for the mystery of God's love in the beauty of creation and attitudes of care in solidarity with creation (Habel and Wurst 2001).

Reading the signs of the time: the interrelatedness of environmental degradation, global climate and economic injustice, bad governance and unlimited power of transnational companies in African contexts

In reading the contemporary context related to issues of environment and climate justice we need to take a look at actual challenges concerning the environmental situation in the African continent. It is often said that the African continent is the most religious continent in this world. However, it is also the poorest in terms of accessibility of livelihoods and the highest ranking in corruption and one of the continents most affected by land degradation and environmental pollution (Bounaim 2016). Why is this so?

The intersectionality of economic injustice, environmental destruction, bad governance and unlimited power of external transnational corporations (TNCs) certainly plays a significant role. It is striking and confusing to see that while the African Union (AU) adopted an African Convention on Nature and Natural Resources in 1968 (United Nations 1968), the legacy of colonial rule and the influx of transnational corporations and the lack of proper good governance and corporate political determination within the AU have so far prevented African governments from setting up proper and sufficient mechanisms to ensure that this crucial convention (updated in 2003; see African Union 2003) can be properly updated and that its provisions can be enforced and put into practice (Lubbe 2015).

Clearly, protecting the environment of sub-Saharan Africa is an issue that needs to be examined more carefully and incorporated into an overall strategy of sustainable economic development (Nana-Sinkam 1995). Of particular urgency there are four major ecological challenges:

- 1 Loss of fertile soil and degradation of territories by erosion and draught (Nana-Sinkam 1995).
- 2 Reduction of rainfall, melting icecaps on Mount Kilimanjaro, river draining, drying out of major lakes (Mugambi 2016, 1117ff.).
- 3 Deforestation and loss of biodiversity (<https://helpsavenature.com/environmental-issues-in-africa>, accessed 10 May 2019).
- 4 *Dramatic reductions in local food production* and application of land policies which encourage export of cash crops in African export countries while at the same time suffering internally from undernourishment (Mugambi 2016, 1124).

Once we take a general look at the ecological role of African's Christianity however, with regard to the Christian potential to counter environmental degradation and injustices, the result for some African authors seems rather meagre. The senior South African scholar Ernst Conradie has argued: 'In many contexts Christians are not environmental activists and environmental activists are not Christian' (2011, 158).

Obaji M. Agbiji (2015) has argued that faith communities in sub-Saharan Africa have only recently and gradually developed awareness of the dangers of ecological injustice and its connection with socioeconomic injustice. In many churches – at least observed in the Nigerian ecclesial community in particular – not too much has yet been achieved with regard to developing a strong Christian ecological ideological orientation and activism which could stem the devastating impact of human beings on the environment.

The ecumenical learning journey: from limits to growth towards a new concept of degrowth-oriented sustainability

The first ever ecumenical definition of 'sustainability' as articulated in the WCC Bucharest 1974 conference is worth noting again:

The goal must be a robust, sustainable society, where each individual can feel secure that his quality of life will be maintained or improved. We can already delineate some necessary characteristics of this enduring society. First, social stability cannot be obtained without an equitable distribution of what is in scarce supply and common opportunity to participate in social decisions. Second, a robust global society will not be sustainable unless the need for food is at any time well below the global capacity to supply it, and unless the emissions of pollutants are well below the capacity of the ecosystem to absorb them. Third, the new social organization will be

sustainable only as long as the rate of use of non-renewable resources does not outrun the increase in resources made available through technological innovation. Finally, a sustainable society requires a level of human activity which is not adversely influenced by the never ending, large and frequent natural variations in global climate.

(quoted in Vischer, n.d.)

In 2009 a major official statement on eco-justice and ecological debt was released by WCC which summarised some of the core convictions developed, bringing together the 'limits to growth' debate, the concept of 'just, participatory and sustainable societies' of the Nairobi assembly 1975 and the so-called AGAPE process (Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth) which followed in the 1980s: it summarised ecumenical key convictions, like that 'the era of "unlimited consumption" has reached its limits', that a new understanding of natural resources need to be developed which moved beyond labelling them simply as means of exploitation and that 'human existence is utterly dependant on a healthy functioning earth system' (World Council of Churches 2009).

The political learning journey: the SDG agenda 2030 as both a political chance for sustainability concepts as well as a document of internal tensions

Another element which needs to be mentioned in terms of shaping and influencing our current contexts for the purpose of articulating new visions for sustainability certainly is the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG Agenda).

The African Union in 2015 developed a similar vision, the Agenda 2063, which at least in its first major goal also mentions sustainability in talking about the vision of 'A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development' (African Union 2015, 2).

The tracking process on Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals published by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), however reveals serious challenges ahead (African Union *et al.* 2017a). The most recent Executive Summary of the 2017 Africa Sustainable Development Report among several items points to three major results:

- slow progress made in reducing poverty and inequality owing to limited decent employment opportunities and weak social insurance mechanisms;
- rising food insecurity and undernourishment are a growing concern in Africa: some 355 million people in Africa were moderately or severely food insecure in 2015;
- globally, the proportion of fish stocks that are at biologically sustainable levels is declining.

It also states: 'Approximately six out of every ten SDG indicators cannot be tracked in Africa due to severe data limitations.' Therefore, particularly there

are no data and trends available yet on a wide range of parameters pertaining to environmental sustainability. Dimension 7 in the AU Agenda 2063, which relates to 'Environmentally sustainable climate resilient economies and communities', does not have a clear set of indicators and reliable data yet on the African continent's level (African Union *et al.* 2017b).

This is deplorable, even more so as there is a fundamental tension and even contradictions between the socioeconomic and the ecological goals of the SDG Agenda. The fact that they are not harmonised yet indicates a hidden fundamental political ambiguity even within this most advanced UN Agenda and points to a hidden conflict within the global political discourse which centres around the concept of growth and sustainability: is the completion of major economic and social goals dependent on an unlimited increase of the exploitation of natural resources, or is the reduction of the use of natural resources the precondition for formulating more modest and less growth-oriented goals also for social and economic development (Wijkman, Weizsäcker and Club of Rome 2017, 90)?

It is here that the specific role of Christian Churches as well as other religious communities both within and beyond the African continent comes into play. This is because the SDG Agenda in the long run cannot be achieved without clarified concepts of sustainability and growth: governments are dependent on broad approval and motivation of the people to follow a paradigm shift in social development and ecological transformation. The moral and spiritual basis for a new concept of development can only come from bodies which reach deeper than secular governmental agencies, as fundamental values and spiritual orientations are at stake. Here is the task for an ecologically sensitised African Christianity to enter into serious political dialogue with the African Union (AU) and with other spiritual communities within Africa.

Texts: resources for inspiring an ecological reformation of Christianity

The call for an ecological reformation of Christianity: rereading the reformation heritage as a protest movement against human greed and corruption

In 2016, in the Greek Orthodox Academy of Volos, after an intensive conference of eco-theological experts from several different denominational traditions a 'Manifesto for an Ecological Reformation of Christianity' was published (World Council of Churches 2016). The Manifesto defines ecological reformation of Christianity, explicitly pointing to the reformation jubilee occasion celebrating its 500 years, as a comprehensive and long-term process:

Such an ecological reformation cannot be restricted to a recovery of a theology of creation or a call for responsible stewardship. It calls for reflection, discernment, prayer and a transformation of Christian practices that may be

harmful to others, to all God's creatures. It also calls for a rereading of the canonical biblical texts, a critique of the environmental impact of specific Christian traditions and practices, a retrieval of historical insights, figures and practices, a reinvestigation of the content and significance of the Christian faith, a reconsideration of influential symbols, a renewal of Christian communities and a transformation of the ministries and missions of the church.

(Conradie, Werner and Tsalampouni 2016)

Thus:

the environmental crisis has therefore not only led to the claim that Christianity could and should make an important contribution to a more adequate understanding of the role of humanity in nature. It has also led to calls for a critical reassessment of the Christian faith itself.

(Conradie 2006, 65–66)

An ecological reformation of Christianity also takes up again an essential feature of the *ecclesia semper reformanda est*, which lives in the promise to be constantly renewed in spirit and in practical obedience. An ecological reformation of Christianity reminds us that classical reformation essentially was a liberation movement for the Gospel to be fully enacted and realised in its potential. European classical reformation was a protest and liberation movement against the combination of a religion of fear, superstition and idolisation of human greed and systemic spread of corruption. In a similar manner, today's ecological reformation of Christianity should liberate contemporary Christianity from becoming complicit in the cult of economic greed, unlimited material growth and structural violence against nature, animals and plants in the twenty-first century.

Rereading key texts of ecological biblical hermeneutics: a different ecological understanding of the dominium terrae in Gen 1:28 and Gen 2:15

If an ecological reformation of Christianity includes a reinvestigation of the content and significance of its most important sources, symbols and texts, this will certainly include key texts which up to the middle of the last century were predominantly read and used to justify the approach of dominance and subduing in western modernity, namely the creation narratives from Genesis. While the biblical witness on creation is much broader than just the creation narratives in the book of Genesis, it is obvious that an ecological reinterpretation of Gen 1:28 (to 'have dominion over the earth') is needed. While many authors argue that the *dominium terrae* is to be understood in the historical framework of an agrarian society and should not be interpreted in terms of domination or military conquest, but rather in terms of caring, protecting, nurturing, gardening,

cultivating and serving (Conradie 2006, 77), others argue that the Hebrew term used (*radah* = have dominion and *kabash* = subdue) cannot be completely pacified and does have some rather harsh connotations. However, as these Hebrew words and their understanding are rooted in kingship roles in the ancient Near East specific understanding needs to always be heard as well, that

the ruler has the responsibility for the well-being of the ones who are ruled over. The ruler (humans) therefore has the responsibility to protect the interests of the ruled (the other animals) with mercy and fairness. Although the provision is made for the use of force and violence, this may never cause the destruction of the community and solidarity between human and the other animals.

(Conradie 2006, 80)

It thus has become clear in extended exegetical discussions that the modern approach to nature in the process of industrialisation and mass exploitation can by no means be related or justified by the *dominium terrae* tradition of the creation narrative which is developed in a completely different cultural, historical and climate-related context.

Rereading texts with new ecological hermeneutics does not stop just with some key texts of the creation narratives. There have been new initiatives and exciting projects for an ecological rereading of biblical traditions both in African as well as Asian or European biblical scholarship which are worth noting and which encompass many different textual traditions of the Bible (Horrell 2012; Rao 2012). These are based and inspired by the conviction that God's interaction with creatures is not limited to humanity:

It is always an interaction with humanity in relation to the rest of creation and at times with other creatures to the exclusion of humanity. God's acts of creation, judgment and redemption embrace the earth and all its creatures.

(Conradie 2006, 83)

Rereading Roman Catholic theological teachings: Laudato Si' as provocation for an eco-theological reformation of Christianity

The encyclical letter of Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* (Franciscus PP. 2015), can be regarded as the Magna Carta of a new integral ecological theology and one of the most courageous and outspoken critiques of the suicidal course of modernisation of humanity at present. It is unquestionably the most widespread, ecumenical and most radiating Christian call for a radical repentance which has reached out widely in UN circles and also into the fields of other world religions, for instance Muslim discourses. *Laudato Si'* thus is a historic call for a radical ecological reformation of Christianity and much beyond. *Laudato Si'* includes a clear warning to all those responsible in world politics to overcome

indifference and ignorance with regard to the primary victims of environmental degradation and to seriously change the basic patterns of development so as to move towards a more sustainable path of transformation as otherwise the very survival of humankind is endangered.

Rereading indigenous African wisdom traditions: the concept of Christ the ecological ancestor and the notion of 'vital force' as starting point for an African eco-theology

There is a debate in African theological discourses about what could provide a good cultural bridging point for linking African eco-theological considerations to elements in traditional African cultures and the spiritual African worldview. African community cultures have been strong in paying respect not only to living elders, but also to the seniority of ancestral spirits. Ancestors are involved in the very conception of life – family, clans, community, nature, the visible and the invisible worlds. Several authors have argued that in African cultural milieus Christ can be presented and understood also as ecological ancestor. Following Benezet Bujo or Charles Nyamiti, Kapya Kaoma has argued that eco-theological reflections in Africa would benefit by moving towards 'an African Missional Christology of Jesus as Ecological Ancestor' (2016, 159ff.). Based on the relevance of genealogies in biblical tradition where the ancestry is traced back several generations to indicate that all goes back directly to Abraham or to David, and bearing in mind that the ancestors stood for the promise of being rooted and blessed with the land and the fruits of nature, biblical passages receive a new meaning in eco-theological reflections which describe Jesus as the 'first born of all creation' (Col 1.17), which would make Jesus an elder brother to all that lives in creation (Kaoma 2016, 172). Also, the Gospel of John testifies to the ecological ancestry of Christ when it states: 'through him all things were made and without him, nothing was made' (John 1:3). Christ thus can be preached and confessed as a role model of providing care not just for human beings, but also for creation as a whole. If Christ is the ancestor of all creation, we cannot regard the human species as fundamentally different from nature, but all need to be viewed as ontologically related beings which live in a relationship of mutual interdependence and interconnectedness. Sin in ecological terms is no longer limited to human beings but extends to nonhumans in the universe (Kaoma 2016, 175).

In taking up the language of Christ the ecological ancestor it needs to be kept in mind however that the messianic language needs to be held together with the language of traditional wisdom: Christ is not only the one holding the cosmos together as the first fruit of a new creation, he is also the one to bring justice to creation. Overcoming the tension between a justice and sustainability-related approach to eco-theology is what is demanded in African contexts. This also is what the South African Council of Churches (SACC) underlined in 2009 in trying to learn anew how mercy and loyalty, justice and peace are intimately connected (see Ps 85:10–11).

In ecumenical documents on climate change, also from within the African context, climate change is typically regarded as an issue of justice and not only of sustainability. This is usually related to the observation that the current and the most likely future victims of climate change contributed least to the problem.

(Conradie 2010, 208)

Since climate change is a function of certain specific and distorted forms of production of wealth, it can only be addressed through economic transformation that will entail a *redistribution of wealth*. Therefore the most appropriate mechanisms for peaceful and mutually agreed redistribution mechanisms need to be clarified.

An interesting side debate in this perspective is related to the question of how to assess the role of Pentecostal Churches and theologies with regard to eco-theological stewardship and responsibility. Some scholars like Teddy Sakupapa (2012, 424) argue that 'the pneumatology of African Pentecostalism also tends to focus more on the individual quest for welfare much to the neglect of societal needs and the care of the earth' and therefore is not really conducive for an eco-theological transformation, but instead is contributing 'to the perpetration of capitalistic greed and the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor' (Ngong 2010). But there are also voices which argue that the original traditional African concept of the Spirit as a 'vital force' in nature can facilitate more dialogue between African pneumatology and the eco-theological discourse. Teddy Sakupapa has convincingly argued:

In light of the conceptual framework of vital force therefore, it can be argued that the Holy Spirit will be understood as the vital force and life that is common to all. In other words, the Spirit's presence will be recognised in the whole of creation in a panentheistic sense. This perspective is particularly important in getting African Christians and churches involved in ecological work. In fact, in African cosmology, the sacredness of nature is derived from nature's relationship with the creator whose vital force has animated nature. Humans are therefore in an ontological relationship with nature given their common descent from the creator. A pneumatological understanding of vital force enhances this ontological relationship.

(2013, 428)

Rediscovering the missio Creatoris Dei: bringing together sources and insights from Orthodox, feminist and Pentecostal traditions

Kapya Kaoma has stated repeatedly that the very understanding of mission of the church as *missio Dei* has to be enlarged and put into an ecological universal context: Christian mission is not church or human centred, but God centred. But as God is concerned about the whole of the universe and not just about the human being, also the understanding of his mission has to be liberated from

anthropocentric reductionism. If Christian mission is joining God in proclaiming and performing God's rule on earth, then the church's mission is related to the mission of Christ (*mission Christi*), empowered by the mission of the Spirit (*mission Spiritus*), but at the same time participating and related to what God is doing already in the midst of his creation, which he did not cease or leave behind, the *missio Creatoris Dei*, his loving and caring for all that lives in creation (Kaoma 2016). A Trinitarian approach to *missio Dei*, understood as *missio Creatoris Dei*, according to Kapyia Kaoma can lean on very important witnesses of faith as included in biblical tradition as well as in church hymns (e.g. Ps 19:1–4).

Once we ask which theological traditions in African Christianity have mainly supported this view of a *missio Creatoris Dei* and the work of the Holy Spirit in the whole of the universe we find significant evidence for a crucial support of an eco-theological reformation of African Christianity particularly from some of the predominantly marginal church or theological traditions, i.e. Orthodox, feminist, Independent and Pentecostal church traditions. Some of these church traditions – while no generalisation is possible – significantly seem to contribute to broadening an understanding of the ongoing activity of God's Spirit in the midst of the universe – though this does by no means imply that other church traditions have nothing to offer in terms of eco-theological expertise and wisdom. There are some clear hints to a cosmological understanding of mission also in some recent conceptualisations of African as well as evangelical missiology (see, e.g. Bosch 1991; Samuel and Sugden 1999; Walls and Ross 2008). It might be important to bring together and to assess the different learning streams and renewal movements within African Christianity with regard to their potential contribution to a new sense of awe, wonder, respect and responsibility to the beauty of creation:

- Ancient Orthodox church traditions in Africa like the Ethiopian, Coptic or Eritrean Oriental Orthodox traditions have an understanding for indwelling activity of the Holy Spirit in Creation as well as a respect for regular fasting traditions as well as the blessings of water and with it all of creation which also have a profound significance for the relation of human beings to nature and the ecological integrity (Orthodox Christian Network 2016).
- Feminist theological circles in Africa stress the female characteristics of God and the works of the Holy Spirit which contradicts patriarchal patterns of rule and oppression against women as well as against nature. The discourses about human sexualities, alternative masculinities as well as the human body have also contributed to the search for new attitudes to nature within the environmental challenges at hand (see, e.g. Dube 2015; Masenya 2010; Siwila 2014).
- Marthinus L. Daneel has argued that African Independent Churches are potential 'Vehicles of Earth-Care in Africa' (Daneel, n.d.; 2006) and Öhlmann, Frost and Gräb (2016) have added significant research insights on African Initiated Churches to be regarded as significant development

actors and potential partners of development cooperation in Germany. We will look at one case study in more detail in the last section.

There is a more conflictive or ambivalent and divergent view on the eco-theological openness and contribution of African Pentecostal theological traditions: there are also some important voices to argue that African Pentecostalism has a potential to become a major contributing factor to ecological awareness-building on the African continent (Sakupapa 2012). But other voices like Ben-Willie Kwaku Golo (2013) argue that Pentecostalism first needs to rethink the traditional understanding of salvation in African Christianity which in many cases follows the notion that the divine restorative plan is *creation–sin–redemption*, which for many centuries also dominated the western church. To become more open to the eco-theological movement Pentecostalism instead needs to be guided by the earlier notion and sequence of a *creation–incarnation–recreation* divine restorative plan, which was the way the early church understood God's redemptive plan, as it centred on Jesus Christ and the victory of the Redeemer-Creator God in Jesus (Golo 2013). Only with an approach taken from a Trinitarian concept of *missio Creatoris Dei* could the prevailing ecological negligence in parts of African Christian salvation theology and the related divorce between creation and salvation be overcome.

The ambivalent picture regarding the eco-theological relevance and openness of African Pentecostalism might be summarised in voices such as Chammah Kaunda, who stated that African Pentecostalism still has a major task to become fully engaged with ecology and with eco-theological reflection. While there is a remarkable new Pentecostal scholarship in the area of eco-theology emerging on a global scale (Studebaker 2008; Swoboda 2013; Yong 2011) we are still lacking more prominent and younger scholars to come up with new African Pentecostal theological outlines and conceptualisations to really make an impact on Pentecostal African Christianity. The need for training faith leaders in eco-spiritualities is obvious all around but taken up systematically only by very few institutes in Africa so far.

Visions: imperatives for churches engaged in climate justice and ecological transformation

The greening of churches: local churches as laboratory for learning sustainable and environmentally responsible lifestyles

Ecological transformation starts with changes in attitudes, awareness and daily practices in local places. The churches have the advantage that they have thousands of local congregations which assemble regularly. Each of them usually has a place which is relevant for a larger group and therefore has an educational function as well. Church courts, church-related cemeteries, church buildings are ecological learning centres. In several countries 'green church' networks have emerged which bring local churches together which have similar standards to

commit themselves to learning about environmentally sound and transparent ways of living. Some have developed detailed guidelines about how to provide ecologically sensitive care for church premises (Eco-Congregation Scotland 2011). While these initiatives can provide important incentives to do something in one's own backyard these initiatives need to maintain a clear focus on the interrelatedness of justice and ecological concerns.

There are some examples from the African continent as well where churches have started green church learning projects, like in the Diocese of the Anglican Church of Swaziland and African Methodist Episcopal Church (Ncumisa 2017). There is an impressive Southern African Eco-Congregations network which is promoted by SAFCEI, the South African Faith Communities Environment Institute (<https://safcei.org/about-us>). But an association of African green churches on the whole of the continent which could encourage earth spiritualities to be developed in different contexts does not yet seem to exist. A full-scale African theology of environmental stewardship as a joint project of churches on the African continent is still a vision to be implemented and worked for (Beisner *et al.*, n.d.).

Interrupting the cycle of unlimited consumerism: rediscovering the value of ancient practices of fasting and praying

In Christian as well as in Muslim traditions in Africa there is a widespread knowledge alive in terms of traditions of regular fasting periods, which have a profound implication for sustainable lifestyles and eco-theological awareness-building.

Fasting has been an ancient practice in all of Christianity, which held regular fasting days traditionally each Wednesday and Friday (still preserved in Orthodox Christianity also in Africa). This aimed at a regular interruption of the cycles of violence against nature and in society as well as a period of preparation for prayer and for meditating the journey of Christ to the Cross. The regular exchange of periods of fasting and consumption can contribute today to an attitude of respect and appreciation for nutrition and healthy food as well as cultivate a sense of solidarity and listening to those who have nothing to eat. In many of the African Initiated Churches fasting also plays a big and visible role in spiritual disciplines. The common fasting period of 40 days before Easter is currently experiencing a renaissance also in western Christianity, where different forms of fasting are practised to get rid of bad habits and to become less addicted to items which modern consumerism offers to people. Fasting is traditionally always related to repentance, to generosity, to prayer and other ways of strengthening inner spiritual disciplines (Berghuis 2007).

Increasingly there are initiatives and campaigns to link Christian fasting practices with ecological concerns, even with carbon-fasting ('A Lenten Fast, from Carbon and from Pride. Our Eco-Inspired Lenten Practices Can Save Souls and Eco Systems', 2017; see also <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/fast-2>). The international Fast for the Climate Movement started in 2013 and is gaining

more followers every year: people are fasting each first day of the month in order to stand in solidarity with vulnerable people who are most affected by dangerous climate impacts. 'By choosing not to eat on the first day of every month, a growing movement of fasters including many youth groups, environmentalists and faith communities, is calling for world leaders to act to stop the climate crisis' (www.climate-network.org/fastfortheclimate).

The Eucharist as a multidimensional earth healing process: healing of God, healing of human community, healing of the earth

Another meaningful development is reported mainly from Zimbabwe, where under the auspices of the Zimbabwean Institute of Religious Research and Ecological Conservation, two religiously distinct movements – the Association of Zimbabwean Traditionalist Ecologists and the Association of African Earth-keeping Churches – joined forces in the 1980s to wage a new *chimurenga*, a struggle for the liberation of creation, particularly the rehabilitation of the degraded environment of Zimbabwe's overcrowded communal lands, under the banner 'war of the trees' (Daneel 2006). In the early 1980s, the movement Daneel started in Zimbabwe planted around 15 million trees, produced 100,000 seedlings per year, and mobilised a 'green army' seeking to heal the land and the population after the devastation of war (Daneel, n.d.). This involved planting trees, conserving land, forging peace, seeking reconciliation and encouraging forgiveness. The earth-and-people-healing ministry provided new impetus and direction to church life and mission, as well as numerical church growth. These churches excel in developing original, contextualised theologies at the grass roots of African society (Daneel and Hill 2016). A 'Network of Earthkeeping Christian Communities in South Africa' emerged (Daneel 2007; Davies 2006).

This understanding has generated a tree-planting Eucharist in an attempt to integrate creation into the body of Christ.... The central argument among proponents of a tree-planting Eucharist is that the body of Christ is more than the church. The concept also includes relationships with all creation: 'For by him all things were created ... in him all things hold together ... and through him to reconcile to himself all things' (Colossians 1:16–20).

(Masika 2012)

Liturgically, the tree-planting accompanies the Eucharist, but does not replace the core of the sharing of the Eucharistic elements. The preparation of an earth-healing Eucharist begins with the digging of holes for planting trees in the church compound. The site is sometimes called 'The Lord's Acre'. The sacrament itself is introduced by public confessions of ecological sins, such as random tree-felling, causing soil erosion through riverbank cultivation and the use of sledges, etc., under the guidance of Spirit-filled prophets. Seedlings are placed on the communion table along with the bread and wine. After public confession of ecological sins, participants line up and file past the table picking up a

seedling and partaking of the elements. Each participant then proceeds to the prepared holes, where the bishop sprinkles holy water on the ground and says liturgical words of blessings for the seedlings, for the water and for the soil. Thus, elements of nature are organically integrated into an earth-healing Eucharistic service which is quite meaningful (Masika 2012, 3ff.).

We have no reliable information on how far this has spread and whether it is still continued (together with SAFCEI in South Africa several regional initiatives are known which support tree-planting initiatives, see <http://safcei.org/tag/tree-planting>). But there are reports that also the Baptist mission of Kenya has taken up some of these enlarged Eucharistic liturgies: seeing the rapid disappearance of indigenous trees and forests as an opportunity for churches it has developed a tree-planting culture across Kenya, in order to bring a Christian perspective to bear on environmental concerns in East Africa.

The tentative thesis presented here is the conviction that African Initiated Churches, while often not having a formal and visible focus on ecology yet, do have the potential for mobilising for new eco-theological awareness and ecological reformation of African Christianity. This is not only because their members are often on the frontline of those bearing the consequences of western or African waste disposal practices and environmental degradation, but also because in their liturgies, theologies as well as in some initiation rites, there are elements of traditional African wisdom embedded which point to a much closer relationship between nature and humankind than in other forms of western Christianity.

But we need more empirical research on the reality of African Initiated Churches in order to arrive at a more substantial assessment of their actual role with regard to establishing an ecological mind shift in African societies and churches in general: can the growth of African Initiated Churches particularly in Southern Africa be understood as a sign and symptom of the resistance of African Christianity to becoming submerged into the mindset of traditional western enlightenment worldviews and instrumentalist interpretation of the *dominium terrae*? Is the return to traditional spiritual worldviews and the perception of nature as a realm of the sacred, the spirits and the ancestors which is held in many of the African Initiated Churches, a relevant, a sufficient or even the only possible solution to the environmental crisis on the African continent? Or does it present at least a significant contribution for the Christian response to the environmental crisis in Africa? While we would assume that there are significant potentials and assets in terms of environmental ethics and responsible stewardship in African Initiated Churches, we ought to be careful not to romanticise and idealise just one type of African churches in this regard. What determines the life of young people in Africa today are not just traditional and indigenous African values, but with more powerful influence certainly also values of modernity, smartphone culture, and forces of individualisation and consumerism. It appears to be a more realistic assessment of the situation to argue that only the complementary role of common efforts of all African churches and the different types and denominational streams will be able to

achieve a solid and continent-wide impact in changing the value systems and strengthening ecological stewardship and responsibility for the future of African nations for the decades to come.

Theologising about what we leave behind: towards a prophetic–critical garbage theology

What is not yet really developed and might also be new in African contexts is the concern for a garbage theology. It is interesting to look at the state of our civilisation from the end of it, i.e. from the perspective of what ends in the waste disposal bags, in the landfills, in the dumpsites. It sheds light on our values, priorities and consumption patterns. In the garbage can or landfill we see evidence of our insatiable desire for convenience, our indifference to the other (both human and nonhuman), the reflection of our throwaway and short-use cycles culture and our personal laziness.

There is a growing awareness also in the political sector in African nations of the urgency for proper waste disposal management systems (Roberts 2014). Africa's pressing need for waste management is a topic which is being discussed (Kaledzi 2017). The phenomenon of plastic waste deposits which are carried by major streams into the world's oceans causing millions of animal deaths at sea is well known and increasingly researched (McGrath 2017).

While the difficulties for proper waste disposal management and garbage recycling are global, apparently there have been minimal efforts to develop a contextually relevant theology of waste disposal or an ecologically sensitive theology of recycling. It is in this area that the concern for ecology and the concern for the marginalised and urban poor are very closely linked with each other (see as an exception from African contexts De Beer 2014). There are some promising examples of prophetic theologians trying to do theology from the context of garbage dumping sites and in solidarity with those who have to work on garbage sites (Freund 2014).

Environmental implications of global meat production: towards a global nutrition transition

A final area where some imperatives for churches to become engaged in climate justice and ecological transformation needs to be reflected is the huge increase in global meat production, which has vast implications for the continuation of global climate change: worldwide meat production has tripled over the last four decades and increased 20 per cent in just the last ten years. Meanwhile, industrial countries are consuming growing amounts of meat, nearly double the quantity consumed in developing countries – this is one of the gravest areas in which injustice and inequality are obvious in today's economic systems. Large-scale meat production has serious implications for the world's climate. Animal waste releases methane and nitrous oxide, greenhouse gases that are 25 and 300 times more potent than carbon dioxide, respectively ('Global Meat Production

and Consumption Continue to Rise', n.d.). Thus the landscapes and data of global meat consumption and production is an area in which both the global threats of unhealthy nutritional standards as well as the grave injustices between some countries in the North and some countries in the South become apparent.

It is not just an average increase in meat production and consumption which is taking place, but there is evidence of a rising number of people suffering from overconsumption of meat and malnutrition, leading for example to obesity (DeCapua 2012).

The model of mirroring and repeating the development models and modernisation patterns of western countries by linking progress and well-being to excessive patterns of meat consumption is at work here with some fatal and disastrous consequences in the long run. The United Nations forecasts demand for meat, milk and eggs in Africa will almost quadruple by 2050, fuelled by a ballooning population – expected to double to 2.4 billion – and a growing appetite for high-protein foods driven by rising living standards. It is therefore asked by experts: 'Can Africa deal with an expected boom in demand for meat?' (Bacchi 2017).

Scholars and experts in WHO now speak of the global nutrition transition and the pandemic of obesity in developing countries (Popkin *et al.* 2012). Is there a way for the African development paradigm and model for a sustainable future to disconnect and delink the notion of progress and well-being or prosperity from excessive rates of meat consumption? This is an interesting topic as some tensions might also be faced where values of traditional African cultures might also clash with ecological considerations so that here we might have an area where in some cases also traditional African values and traditions are contrary to modern ecological imperatives. For instance, there are interesting debates about meat consumption and healthy lifestyles in Maasai ethnic communities (Berg Petersen 2012; Kuhnlein *et al.* 2009, ch. 11).

It has become clear that a change in nutritional values and attitudes will be required both in western and African countries, related to the envisioned global nutrition transition, some of which might be in conflict with traditional African values and customs. But it is the task and mandate of the churches to transform values, lifestyles and patterns of behaviour, even to the extent that this might clash with traditionally held perceptions so as to reflect properly the values of the Kingdom of God and life to be shared with all – including the future generations on this earth.

Note

- 1 The following is the abbreviated version of a longer lecture which was delivered during the 11th General Assembly of the All Africa Conference of Churches, July 2018 in Kigali, Rwanda, in its African Theological Institute.

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