

Berman, Sidney K. ; Leshota, Paul L. ; Kgalemang, Malebogo ; Dunbar, Ericka S

Editorial : Mother Earth, Mother Africa and Bible Studies

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I. EDITORIAL: MOTHER EARTH, MOTHER AFRICA AND BIBLE STUDIES

*Sidney K. Berman, Paul L Leshota,
Malebogo Kgalemang and Ericka S. Dunbar*

Introduction

At the time of doing the finishing touches of this book, many scholars of environmental conservation are saying that nature has struck back at humanity in a bid for survival (and/or recovery). Paital (2020:4), for example, is of the opinion that nature deliberately introduced Covid-19 to enforce social lockdowns as a means of self-regeneration after being ravaged by human beings. The world is reeling from the impact of Covid-19. The World Health Organisation has declared the virus outbreak a Global Public Health Emergency, with official worldwide infections exceeding 30 million, and deaths 1 million (Worldometer 2020). The devastating effects on human beings include psychological depression, fear, economic losses, disruption of educational and other social systems, and overwhelmed healthcare structures (El Zowalaty 2020). Nonetheless, ecological reports and measurements generally indicate a positive effect on the ecosystem. In the words of Musimbi Kanyoro, “The pandemic has been terrible for humans and good for the environment” (see the foreword above). For example, due to travel restrictions and lockdowns, some countries report cleaner air, cleaner water, less waste, very low noise levels, gradual repair of the ozone hole (The Hindu 2020). Due to reduced human mobility, wild animals, marine animals and birds have moved more freely and closer to human settlements and have possibly increased in number (Wikelski 2020; The Hindu 2020). This, he considers as natural selection in the same way that nature got rid of the unmanageable dinosaurs (*ibid.*).

Like Paital, the book project, “Mother Earth, Mother Africa and Biblical Studies,” unapologetically points a critical finger at anthropocentrism for the widely recognised devastation of the eco-system. In

other words, the biblical hermeneutics of this book is eco-friendly (Cf. the extensively referenced “Earth Bible” project by Norman Habel).¹ The unique strength of this book, in the context of the global discussion on environmental degradation, is its holistic examination of the mindset behind the ecological catastrophe. This examination is done by various African scholars and scholars from the African diaspora taking note of contextual anthropological culture, religious belief, indigenous African knowledge systems, historical and current biblical hermeneutics, gender-based power imbalances and racial, class and economic imbalances.

The project utilises the African and biblical perspective that recognises oppression as generic, multi-faceted and challengeable in all its domains in order to successfully uproot it. The contributors point out that from historical to contemporary mentality in social culture, religion, inter-human relationships and dealings with nature, human beings have been guilty of exploitation, power imbalances and oppression of fellow members of the Earth community (Dube 2015). From the afore-mentioned generic issues, the book “Mother Earth, Mother Africa and Biblical Studies” zooms in on oppressive racial and class relations, gender relations, ways of relating with Mother Earth and biblical hermeneutics.

Among other contributions to scholarship, the book adds African indigenous ways of doing hermeneutics. For example, Musa W. Dube employs an African folk story-telling method as she makes a theatrical presentation of creation in her paper, “Genesis 1: An Earth-Friendly Reading.” Another example, Mark S. Aidoo, adds an African-sage reading strategy in his use of Akan proverbs to present an earth-friendly interpretation in “‘Woe to You, O Land, when Your King Is a Child’ (Ecclesiastes 10:16-19): A Dialogical Study on Qoheleth’s Imagination of Ecology with African Proverbs.”

¹ Norman Habel has written and edited extensively using an ecojust biblical hermeneutical framework in works like *Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (2000), *Seven Songs of Creation: Liturgies for Celebrating and Healing Earth* (2004) and *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics* (2008).

Set within the African context, the book constantly evokes – and sometimes outrightly invokes – the African idea of interrelatedness that is identifiable in the Botho/Ubuntu worldview, which asserts that community includes “the living, the divine and the environmental community in an interconnected fashion” (Dube et. al 2016).² This all-empowering interrelatedness is arguably the original worldview of human societies before humanity erroneously supposed that technology was superior to nature. The book’s newness is to be found in this interrelational, multi-faceted deconstruction of the current environmental disaster. Indeed, *Still We Rise Together* as fellow members of the Earth community (Cf. the foreword above). Thus, the book’s contribution to scholarship is a hermeneutic that intersects issues of environmental conservation, gender equality, socio-cultural and racial relations and biblical interpretation. The book owes its gendered title (*Mother Earth, Mother Africa and Biblical Studies*) and gendered content to the Circle of Concerned African Theologians, an Africa-wide scholarly society of Women that specialises in a hermeneutic that seeks the liberation of women and other oppressed members of society. This project will be found to empower in various degrees the following historically disadvantaged members of Creation, namely: Earth and nature, Africa and the African diaspora, The two thirds world, and Women and the economically oppressed.

Bible, Earth, Gender and African Womanist Issues

The 30th anniversary of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in July 2019, at the University of Botswana marked an important milestone in the life of the Circle. As in an African palaver, the celebration of this anniversary, brought together in a Conference scholars from 17 African countries and other members that are located

² Dube, Musa W., Tirelo Modie-Moroka, Senzokuhle D. Setume, Seratwa Ntloedibe, Malebogo Kgalemang, Rosinah M. Gabaitse, Tshenolo Madigele, Sana Mmolai and Doreen Sesiro. (2016, Spring). *Botho/Ubuntu: Community building and gender constructions in Botswana*. Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Centre, 41, 1-20.

throughout the African diaspora, with close to eighty papers prepared and presented around the theme, “Mother Earth and Mother Africa in the Religious Imagination.” In the words of Musa Dube (2019), the thrust of this Conference and the attendant efforts was to “explore the link between gender, environment and religion” within the wider context of a marauding exploits of the destruction of the Earth by humans. The goal was to investigate and imagine positive perspectives from our religions, philosophies and literatures in reclaiming the Earth as a cradle of our existence and the basis of our continued survival. Towards this end, and for purposes of managing the Conference, papers presented were subdivided into thematic areas which informed the organisational design of this volume.

Though many of the papers that were grouped under the sub-theme, Mother Earth and Biblical Studies have found their way into this volume, a number of other papers fell through the cracks. Reflections done in this volume acknowledge the devastating effects of humans’ irresponsibility on Mother Earth through longstanding attachment to anthropocentric, patriarchal and androcentric interpretive tendencies (Habel 2004) of biblical texts as well as exploitative, oppressive and violent human behaviours on the Earth (Francis 2015:#104). All of this form part of a long legacy of ambiguous and half-hearted concerns if not outright complicity of Western Christian theologies with biblical interpretations underlying modern ecological crisis (White, 1967). Lynn White’s “The historical roots of our ecological crisis” represented a critique of a dominant view which saw Christianity, through its Bible reading tendencies, and Western technological advances, dancing together in their enchantment for a human mastery over nature (Conradie 2004:124). Though not well received by Christian academia, White’s book shook the entire Christian community from slumber and set the tone for a more critical appraisal of the relationship between biblical interpretation and oppressive attitude towards nature (Palmer, 1992; Berry, 2006; Ruether, 1992).

While not many Christian scholars agreed with White’s line of argument that Western Christian tradition had a role to play in the problems of modern ecological crisis, but that his article became a watershed in placing environment on the agenda of the Christian church in new ways could not be ignored. The technological advancements and the resultant exploitation of the natural resources by humans were too obvious to ignore (Horrell, 2014). These tendencies were all too often

legitimised by Christian ideas, concepts, symbols, liturgies and discourses (Conradie, 2004:125).

The Consultation on Religion and the Environment of November 1997, held in Adelaide in Australia – which led to the Adelaide declaration, The Earth Bible principles, the Guiding Ecojustice principles and the development of Ecological Hermeneutics – was one of the by-products of a longstanding debate on the relationship between Christian tradition and the environment and the former's role in the devaluation of the Earth and its relationship to humans. One of the most critical issues that emerged out of this consultation was the re-affirmation of religious people on the sacredness of the Earth and their commitment to the struggle for reclaiming justice for the Earth community. Equally critical was a shift from theology of environment in general to the need to read the biblical text in the light of ecological concerns in particular. It was this shift that catapulted Norman Habel and his Earth Bible Project, with its feature of "Earth Consciousness" onto the scene.

Despite its penchant for developing a form of reading that consciously subverts the anthropocentric, patriarchal and androcentric approaches, its status as a full fledged hermeneutical approach took time to develop distinct contours. The three subsequent consultations in 2004, 2005 and 2006 provided an opportunity for a more refined articulation of (what was to be known as) ecological hermeneutics with contributions from team members evenly spread out in terms of gender, race and geographical location. Contributions emanating from the Earth Bible Project team represented not only a radical departure from the manner in which Biblical scholars had always interacted with texts but also a change of attitude towards the Earth and all forms of life, human, non-human characters as indispensable players in the cycle of reciprocal beneficence.

With ideas gleaned from feminist hermeneutics and other forms of reading a solid foundation for a more distilled ecological hermeneutics was spotted and expanded by Habel (2008) and his team. Their creative use of the Earth Bible and Ecojustice principles as well as the interpretive lenses of suspicion, identification and retrieval opened the boundaries for a more resourceful, Earth-friendly and yet critical interaction with the text. Through the lens of suspicion, colonising ways of reading patent in anthropocentric and patriarchal ideologies are laid bare

and faced up to. Identification has created a space in which all elements of Earth could dance freely in a liberating interdependence (Dube2000:123) and kinship. From the Bible new insights have been made and novel features have been retrieved in the Biblical text as a result of the application of the ecojustice principles. Central to the ecological hermeneutics is, therefore, a radical change of posture from viewing Earth as a voiceless, topic and a human instrument to appreciating it as a relative, a dialogue partner and a subject with a voice.

Armed with these principles and gifted with the attitude, efforts have to be made to restore worth and value to the Earth; embrace it as our kith and kin and continually struggle together for justice. The Bible has always been an important book for Christianity. Its interpretation has however been very problematic given the contexts in which it was born and the new conditions to which it had to be related. New circumstances demand a reading and re-reading if the Bible is to be good news and a life-giving book to not only humanity but also to other non-human characters who have suffered immensely under the traditional Biblical interpretive methods. With new challenges, new questions emerge and new solutions have to be sought. The relationship between destruction on the environment and gender-based violence is more pronounced than ever before. Their cry for justice more demanded than ever before. It is under such conditions that the Bible has to be re-read in ways that restore life and worth to Earth as a dialogue partner than as a commodity to be exploited.

There are strong intersections between ecological, feminist, and womanist hermeneutics as the concept, "Mother Earth" indicates a gender component, necessitating gendered analysis of the role of the earth and environment in Judeo-Christian interpretations and traditions. The title of this book, "Mother Earth, Mother Africa, and Biblical Studies," reflects the intersection of Earth, Africa, gender issues, and the need for liberating interpretations of biblical texts. The reference to "Africa" specifically reflects the social-locatedness of the contributors and the centrality of Africa and African diasporan contexts in perspectives used by those authors.

Additional concerns of ecological, feminist, and womanist biblical scholars are the ways that other non-human objects are featured and gendered in biblical texts; how environmental issues intersect with other systems of oppression; the past, present, and future relation-

ships between women and the earth/land; and how environmental issues disproportionately affect African and other women and people of colour, persons of lower socio-economic status, and other marginalised, minoritised and colonised groups. These issues and relationships are investigated in order to depict, expose, interpret, theorise, and reimagine social categories and hierarchies, Judeo-Christian thought, the Bible, earth and female oppression, and in order to propose and embody eco-friendly and liberating biblical perspectives and hermeneutical approaches. It is imperative to note that the ancient communities that produced the sacred text did not know about existing environmental problems that are of major concern in our contemporary contexts. However, scholars of various disciplines but, especially biblical studies perceive that dialogue between the two contexts, ancient and contemporary, can produce critical and hopeful insights that will enable us to respond to environmental and human crises of our time.

Biblical scholars note the ways that biblical interpretations, most notably the Genesis creation narratives, have been traditionally anthropocentric and used to assert human domination of the earth/nature and male domination of women. Prominent member and recently appointed coordinator of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, Musa W. Dube engages in the combination of postcolonial, feminist, and ecological biblical hermeneutics. She offers socially-located ecological readings of biblical texts to expose the multiple and simultaneous ways that the earth and women are oppressed in biblical narratives. Dube affirms the intrinsic worth of the earth and of women, and charges readers to consider and value the ways that women and the earth offer assistance to members of the community as well as how women challenge oppressive systems through powerful actions and words. She challenges biblical interpreters to pay attention to imperialistic rhetoric inscribed in biblical texts and the universalising interpretations of these texts.³ One such universal interpretation is the domination or colonisation of the earth. The language of “domination” is rooted in imperialism and patriarchy. For Dube, these interpretations not only reinforce patriarchy and androcentrism, but also

³ Musa Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000).

they assert problematic Western feminist assumptions, perspectives, and imperialism⁴ which exacerbates the destruction of earth's resources.

Many biblical scholars understand issues of ecology, gender oppression, and violence as interlocking issues and have combined the crises under the terms *ecofeminism* and *ecowomanism*. Both terms reflect upon women's relation to the earth and their embodiments of and relation to both nature and the divine. The term *ecofeminism* was coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne and refers to a diverse range of women's environmental activity and ecological issues that impact women generally. It is a framework for examining the link between environmental and gender injustice and for determining solutions to eradicate these injustices.⁵ *Ecowomanism*, on the other hand, was coined by scholars Pamela Smith and Shamara Riley.⁶ Melanie Harris describes ecowomanism as a framework for "critical reflection and contemplation on environmental justice from the perspectives of women of African descent and other women of colour."⁷ While both frameworks recognise that environmental injustice intersects with multiple forms of oppression, Harris' framework focuses on how women of colour particularly "have often survived multiple forms of oppression when confronting racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism,"; that "androcentric attitudes devaluing the earth and privileging (particular) humans over the earth's wellbeing has resulted in the crisis in which we all find ourselves,"⁸; and the subsequent activism that women of colour engage in to eradicate environmental injustices. Harris' and other ecowomanist's frames recognise the connections between racial, gender, and environmental injustice. Harris notes, "ecowomanism stands in a prophetic tradition of speaking truth to power and cutting through

⁴ Ibid, 24.

⁵ Françoise d'Eaubonne, *Le Féminisme ou la Mort*, (Paris: P. Horay, 1974), 87.

⁶ Melanie Harris, "Ecowomanism: Black Women, Religion and the Environment," *The Black Scholar* 2016 46 (3):29.

⁷ Melanie Harris, *Ecowomanism, Religion, and Ecology*, (Brill, 2017), 1.

⁸ Ibid, 1; Harris maintains that Black women that embody a spiritual connection with the earth, lives, bodies, and intellectual contributions to environmental justice have been marginalised, devalued and abused by white scholars and intellectual practices based on white supremacists and patriarchal structures.

normative practices of white supremacy, hierarchal dualism, and patriarchy by validating and starting with black women's earth stories.”⁹

Both eco-feminism and eco-womanism enable scholars to recognise and critique intersectional oppressive systems such as racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, environmental injustice, colonialism, etc. and at the same time, challenge ideologies and social practices that lead to the abuse of the earth and women. Biblical scholars analyse biblical imagery and language to make claims about ecological and gender concerns. They note that implications of environmental injustice are rooted in systematically oppressive systems and reimagine biblical texts and oppression of women and other subordinate members within communities. Ecofeminist and ecowomanist biblical scholars assert that all are connected, human and non-human, and that we should act accordingly, to ensure the health and wellbeing of each member of the community, especially Mother Earth who Dube cites as co-creator with God that ensures the continuity of creation.¹⁰ Valuing the earth and engaging in ecological hermeneutics enable biblical scholars to recognise human destructive behaviours and imagine the potential, power, and contributions of the earth and nature to facilitate the sustainment of life and as a resource to improve the quality of life.

Abuse of the earth exacerbates the abuse of girls and women. For centuries, Mother Earth and Mother Africa have been exploited and abused by humans and colonisers, who took their most precious and valuable resources for capitalistic gain. In addition, African(a) girls and women have been physically and sexually abused and trafficked, and far too many continue to be taken, transported, and traded within and from Mother Africa all across the globe, deprived of their human rights and dignity. When humans pollute and disregard the earth, women and children's health are contaminated primarily. In fact, the entire community is contaminated since women literally birth communities. However, because of social hierarchies, privileges, and biases, and misuses and abuses of power, African(a) girls' and women's health and lives are disproportionately sabotaged. Therefore, an aim

⁹ Ibid, 2.

¹⁰ See Musa Dube, “And God Saw it was Very Good”: An Earth-friendly Theatrical Reading of Genesis” in *Black Theology an International Journal*, December 2015, 13 (3): 230-246.

of eco-womanism is reconciliation of the relationship between people and nature, and the achievement and maintenance of commonweal,¹¹ which Layli Phillips define as the state of collective well-being; the optimisation of well-being for all members of a community.¹²

Biblical scholars also note the material representativeness of the Bible. Ann Elvie writes, “words on a scroll, page, or screen are not possible without the plants from which paper of papyrus and ink are produced and fossils and ricks from which the plastics of a CD-ROM and the parts of a computer are formed.” She asserts that biblical readers and interpreters are supported by and need to recognise their dependence on the Earth community for their sustenance.¹³ Dube adds, “The core of the destruction of the earth is the failure of human beings to regard themselves as interconnected with other members of the Earth Community.”¹⁴ This includes the failure to perceive God as a member of the Earth community that dwells on Earth, which Dube maintains, is consistent with Genesis 1:2 which states that in the beginning, “the Spirit of God was hovering above the waters of the Earth.”¹⁵ In addition, Dube emphasises that the Earth remains the major custodian of creation through continued production of vegetation, animals and water creatures. As such, the earth is partner and co-creator with God, giving birth to both living creatures and vegetation. Dube points out however, that a legacy of the designation of earth as female and co-creator is that Mother Earth and women were made more susceptible to oppression and exploitation. Ironically, the representation of earth as female also subjected her to narrative erasure and marginalisation similar to the ways that biblical writers normalise the erasure of many of the female characters in biblical stories. Emphasising the interdependence of the earth and humans, scholars bring ecological and gender concerns, including race and class environmental health disparities and environmental toxicity, from the margins to the centres of our interpretive processes and, advocate for more ethically responsible

¹¹ Layli Phillips, *The Womanist Reader*, (New York & London: Routledge, 2006), xxix.

¹² Phillips, xxv.

¹³ Ann Elvie, “Ecofeminism and Biblical Interpretation,” *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, edited by Bron Taylor (2010: Continuum.

¹⁴ Dube, 234.

¹⁵ Ibid, 236.

readings that recognise the contributions of all of nature and reinforce earth ethics.

The Earth in African Biblical Studies

The popular African axiom, often attributed to great Sub-Saharan statesmen, captures how the connection to land was lost to the African: “When the white man came to Africa, he had the Bible and we had the land; the white man said let us pray; after the prayer, he had the land and we had the bible.” This axiom defines a critical time when colonised Sub-Saharan Africans lost their land to the ideologies of subjugation of colonialism, imperialism, land commodity and capitalism. However, this did not cease with colonial, capitalist and imperial practices for land degradation, the environment (or Earth), climate change and loss of biodiversity plague Africa and her citizens. Mother Earth Mother Africa notes the crisis Earth is plagued with. The fast paces of climate change and Earth’s citizen’s impacts on the environment and reduction of biodiversity has never been more urgent. Puleng LenkaBula contends that “ecological destruction, to a large extent, is related to hyper-capitalism” (2008:376). All, these have had effects on communities’ livelihoods. Mother Earth and Mother Africa’s relationship and concern to the African cosmology and land degradation calls forth Earth citizens to interrogate all the challenges Earth is embattled with.

Various African cultures have articulated indigenous practices in which the cosmos or earth, the universe, land and human life were all in unison. In their article, “Botho/Ubuntu: Community Building and Gender Construction in Botswana” (2016), Dube et al note that in African, Botho/Ubuntu social practices understands that “community is widely understood to include the living, the divine, and the environmental community in an interconnected fashion” (2016). Furthermore, the imperative question of land has a spiritual reverence and connection to the lives of people. LenkaBula (2008), Dube (2016) and others have discussed Africa’s ethnicities and clans’ relationship to

land and nature. One of the examples they discuss is the inter-connection to the environmental community which is demonstrated through the practice of totem. In this practice, both LenkaBula and Dube et al note, African communities self-identify with particular animals. There is an ethnicity that identifies with crocodile and another with the elephant. This, Dube et al noted “underlines that the botho/ubuntu understanding of community includes a web of relations that are not anthropocentric” (2016:3).

The origins of the degradation of Mother Earth was first articulated White’s classical essay, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis” (1967) in which he argued that the destruction of the universe is due to colonial, capitalist and imperial readings of the biblical Genesis imperative. White argued that “human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny that is, by religion” (1967:1205). White argued that the Genesis imperative gave the western worlds to subdue the non-western world.

In *The Earth Bible*, Norman Habel writes we are faced with a “new ecological crisis” Personalising and humanising Earth, Habel argues that citizens of Earth are beckoned to hear the groaning, utterings and gnashing of Earth’s teeth due to their own behaviour. Habel’s proposal of the Earth Bible is the “the rise of a new Earth awareness where all forms of life are seen as endlessly dependent on the new complex relationships that allow life to flourish on Earth” (2000). Habel’s the Earth Bible Project proposes six eco-justice principles of reading Earth through the intersection of biblical studies with the ecology, and environment.

Habel’s six eco-justice principles enable scholars to test the “validity of the text and contemporary culture” (2000) for our reading of Earth in biblical and religious texts. Some African scholars take issue with the principles, insisting that the principles are secular over and against their religiosity. Some argue that the Bible must also be appropriated to the modern context as the historical contexts of the Bible do not at all articulate ecological tenets or address ecological crises. However, three of the Habel’s eco-justice principles are important to the reading of Earth in African Biblical Studies.

- i. **The principle of interconnectedness:** Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival.
- ii. **The principle of voice:** Earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice.
- iii. **The principle of purpose:** the universe, Earth and all its components are part of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has a place in the overall goal of that design.

Habel and his cohorts have suggested that the Earth hears and feels the effects on its body. Boateng writes that “Earth is home to all. And if Earth is home to all, then we must engage in actions that lead to sustainable development for all Earth” (2020:162). The Earth in African Biblical Studies present a triad intersectionality of Earth and biblical studies exegesis and eisegesis. The Earth is signified as environment, African cosmology or land appears in African biblical studies.

In “Beyond Anthropocentricity: Botho/Ubuntu and the Quest for Economic and Ecological Justice in Africa”, LenkaBula argues that botho/ubuntu is an imperative norm in the drive for “ecological justice against exploitative human relations, economic systems and power issues, particularly in the use of and sharing of biological resources for South Africa and Africa is important” (2008:377). She argues that botho/ubuntu “demonstrates its ethical imperative for ecological justice” once it is linked to ecology. LenkaBula, however, notes and argues that for botho to be relevant, we first need to move beyond the “anthropocentric interpretative frameworks associated to botho” (2008:377). Botho/Ubuntu, is therefore, significant for “personal, political, socio-economic and ecological justice in African religious-cultural life” (2008).

In her article, “And God Saw that It Was very Good...” Dube offers a dramatized and Earth-centred reading against the grain of “anthropocentric perspectives” of Genesis 1 (2015:230). Dube argues that Genesis 1 beckons us to “re-think our relationship with the Earth” (2015:231). Dube notes that the reader of Genesis plays a vital role in “keeping the God standard for the Earth and all its members” (2015:232). The reader is summoned to “empathise with the creator

God” (2015:232). This reading proposes an ecological justice with focus on the “sacredness and goodness of all creation” (2015) and identifying and reinterpreting ideological perspectives that devalue the Earth.

Readings of Earth and Earth community continue in Ucheanwaji G. Josiah’s work. Josiah’s reading synthesises God, Earth and the Earth community as the basis for his exploration of “viewing biblical hermeneutics from an African Ecological lens” (2015). Josiah argues that the Bible “contains ecological narratives is an undeniable fact. And that the Bible could be ecological relevant to Africa and Africans is incontestable” (23). Engaging Hosea 4:3 “this is why your land is in mourning, and everyone is wasting away. Even the wild animals, the birds of the sky, and the fish of the sea are disappearing” (2015:23). Josiah argues that the Hosea text portrays the “earth as an actor who acts in bringing about certain consequences resulting from the Israelite misconduct” (2015:23) and Earth is “an actor in the ongoing relationship between Yahweh and Israel” (2015: 24).

However, reading Mother Earth Mother Africa should not be relegated to either religious institutions or contexts, but must also be politically and socially motivated. The political shaping and advocacy against the destruction of land and the Earth (or environment) is articulated in Ebenezer Yaw Blasus’s “The Bible and Caring for the Land: African Theocology as Christian Impulsion for Creation Care” (2020). For us to care for Mother Earth and Mother Africa, a “moral responsibility for creative care needs” (2020) must be insisted upon. Blasus proposes African Theocology as a form through which our moral responsibility and ethical care of the Earth will be deployed. African Theocology is the intersection and interaction “between God (the Supreme Being) as Creator and His Creations (human and nonhuman), particularly the role of humanity in these relationships from the perspectives of God, and conservative Science and in the context of African religiosity” (2020:4). Through African Theocology, we explore “conservation science, African religious worldviews, eco-regulations and rituals, interpreted as much as possible within biblical texts” (2020:5). But this doesn’t cease with Biblical studies and God’s interaction with creation, it takes cognisance of African theistic and precarious views of creation, their Africans sense of kinship with creation, and their African anthropocentric valuing of humanity” (5). Blasus suggests the African primal

theistic religious perspective the Sokpue-Eve and how it views “ecological sin” in “breaking the ecological taboos, incurring the wrath of mauu (God) which results in troku” (2020:5) has hope that anthropogenic degradation can transform Mother Earth and Mother Africa.

Arrangement of the book

The book has five divisions. The first section is called “The Landscape: Earth, Bible, Gender and the African Context,” and is an introductory survey. The second section, called “Mother Earth, Mother Africa and Hebrew Bible narratives,” interprets some Hebrew Bible narratives against the background of ecological justice, gender and the African cultural context. The third section is “Mother Earth, Mother Africa and Ancient Jewish Philosophical Worldview,” which deals with certain sagely, moral and priestly matters from the contemporary African worldview. The fourth section, namely “Mother Earth, Mother Africa and the New Testament,” consists of one chapter which interrogates practical problems that pertain to the African context, environmental conservation and gender justice. The final section, vis., Section E, is titled, “A Student’s Engagement”, and has a chapter by Seboifo M. Pabalinga. This chapter makes a survey of green literature and biblical theology. The book is structured as follows:

Section A:

The Landscape:

Earth, Bible, Gender and the African Context

This section lays the foundation for the book by exploring the historical and contemporary scholarly work on the interplay of biblical hermeneutical strategies, environmental preservation, gender justice and the African context. By so doing, it introduces the content, arguments and chapters of the book. It contains the following chapters: the editorial by the four editors of the project, namely Sidney K. Berman, Paul L. Leshota, Malebogo Kgalemang and Ericka Dunbar; the mapping chapter called “30 Years of African Women’s Biblical Studies” by Alice

Yafeh-Deigh, and Musa W. Dube's "Genesis 1: An Earth-Friendly Reading."

Section B:

Mother Earth, Mother Africa and Hebrew Bible narratives

The section presents interpretations of biblical texts from the Hebrew Bible within the contemporary African context from a gender liberative and ecojust perspective. The chapters in this section are "Stories we know: empire, land and gender in the book of Ruth" by Sidney K. Berman and "The Eco-feminist Reading of the Story of the Birth of Moses" by Paul L. Leshota.

Section C:

Mother Earth, Mother Africa and Ancient Jewish Philosophical Worldview

Section C presents texts from an ancient Jewish philosophical worldview, particularly in the areas of sage wisdom, morality and priestly rituals. The chapters apply gender empowering and eco-friendly interpretations to these sagely, moral and ritualistic issues within an African context in the texts of Ecclesiastes 10:16-19, Genesis 8:20-9:17 and Leviticus 25 respectively. They are as follows: Mark S. Aidoo's "Woe to You, O Land, when Your King Is a Child" (Ecclesiastes 10:16-19): A Dialogical Study on Qoheleth's Imagination of Ecology with African Proverbs' and; Kenosi Molato's and Musa W. Dube's "Towards a Setswana Ecological Biblical Hermeneutics: The Example of Genesis 8:20-9:17".

Section D:

Mother Earth, Mother Africa and the New Testament

There is only one chapter in this New Testament section. It is "Living Water: Quenching thirst in unexpected spaces" by Nina Muller van

Velden and it applies the person and mindset of Jesus Christ to contemporary ecological issues, the African context and gender imbalances.

Section E: A Student's Engagement

The chapter in this section, "Some Biblical Literature, Earth-Based Creation Stories and Ecological Justice" by Seboifo M. Pabalinga, generally surveys Bible-related literature on creation, especially which presents Paul's theology. Pabalinga's analytical survey takes a critical perspective that supports the preservation of Mother Earth and an eco-friendly hermeneutic.

Overview of the Content (Sections A – D)

In **Section A**, the chapter by Alice Yafeh-Deigh, "30 Years of African Women's Biblical Studies," lays the foundation by surveying the history of biblical interpretation by African women since the inception of the Circle of Concerned Africa Women Theologians thirty years ago. The author starts with the pioneers of African women's theology like Mercy Oduyoye from Ghana, Brigalia Bam from South Africa, Daisy Obi from Nigeria, Isabella Johnstone from Sierra Leone and many others. It discusses the reading strategies and the scholarly struggle for liberation by African women theologians until the present day. The next chapter of Section A, namely, "Genesis 1: An Earth-Friendly Reading," invites the reader to an ecojust theatre where the pleasurable drama of creation presents all members of the earth community – not only human beings – as highly valuable. Her hermeneutic takes aim at the traditional anthropocentric mindset and proposes an all-empowering ecological and gender-balanced perspective.

Section B starts with Sidney K. Berman's insightful chapter called "Stories We Know: Empire, Land and Gender in the Book of Ruth." The discussion revolves around the interplay of issues of empire, religion, land, environment and gender in the narrative of Ruth, as was

common in colonial contexts. From a gender empowering perspective, the chapter critiques and proposes an alternative to the colonialists' misguided sense of moral superiority over the indigenous. The false sense of moral superiority always escalated to a system of racial discrimination, the entitlement to dominate, abuse and massacre the indigenous, and to cruelly exploit the locals' natural resources and environment. Berman reconstructs a liberating hermeneutic for appropriate relationships with Mother Earth and with one another. Next follows the thought-provoking chapter by Paul L. Leshota titled "The Eco-feminist Reading of the Story of the Birth of Moses (Exodus 2:1-10)." The chapter's interpretation of Exodus 2:1-10 explores the story of the birth of Moses from the perspectives of land, environmental preservation as well as gender empowerment and liberation. The chapter evokes the person of Moses in connection with the topic of liberation both of the oppressed and the oppressor and its implications for gender justice, the struggle for land and the environment. Leshota discusses the ways in which such perspectives can help in reimagining relationships among people and between human beings and Mother Earth.

Section C opens with Mark S. Aidoo's culturally rich "Woe to You, O Land, when Your King Is a Child" (Ecclesiastes 10:16-19): A Dialogical Study on Qoheleth's Imagination of Ecology with African Proverbs." The African context is captivating in this chapter filled with proverbs from the Akan of Ghana which, when immersed into the text of Ecclesiastes 10:16-19, shed light on Qoheleth's imagination of ecological justice. The text proclaims that the land is blessed when leaders exercise their responsibilities with maturity but is cursed when immature persons are in control. How do Africans imagine leadership and its effects on land care? This question is tackled to yield Earth friendly insights into leadership in Africa. The second chapter of Section C, which focuses on Genesis 8:20-9:17, is co-authored by Kenosi Molato and Musa W. Dube. The authors tackle the human moral degeneration that led to God's punishment of all creation by the flood and rightly ascribes to it the current ecological disaster. They explore Earth-friendly approaches towards biblical interpretation and in particular, how some Setswana perspectives on the environment can lead to environmentally conservative ways of reading the Bible.

The chapter in **Section D**, written by Nina Muller Van Velden, deals with the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John

4:5-42. It is called “Living Water: Quenching thirst in unexpected spaces.” Muller Van Velden makes a gender-empowering reading in the light of chronic water shortage in Cape Town and other parts of Western Cape in South Africa. She recognises the gross disadvantage of women and low-income communities in contrast with males and the wealthy. The transgressive and transformative character of the dialogue is interpreted to encourage contemporary readers to reframe their identity in ecological terms that invoke care and concern for all of God’s creation. Thus, in this chapter, the complex intersection of power, gender, ecology, justice, and hermeneutics are placed on the table for creative exploration.

Conclusion

What emerges from all the contributions is that ecological concerns cannot be side-lined as they are central to all aspects of society: economic, social, political, and religious as attested in analyses of biblical texts in this volume. The book, therefore, provides an opportunity for researchers to venture into mutually inclusive projects in biblical studies, eco-justice, gender, and cultural studies in the quest to address the different catastrophes that plague the communities of Mother Earth.

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