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Nisbert Taisekwa Taringa

TOWARDS AN AFRICAN-CHRISTIAN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC

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Dedication

To my dear wife Beatrice,
"Her children rise up and call her blessed,
Her husband, also and he praises her" (Proverbs 31:28),
And to my beloved daughters,
Faith Tinashe and Praise Tafara,
And son Ngoni Nisbert Jr.

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FOREWORD

Nature as a religious and interreligious issue has gained momentum over the last few years. This is a good sign because it reiterates the view that the global environmental crisis, that threatens not only the future of human civilizations but also all life on earth, is fundamentally a moral and religious problem. It now calls for investigating what different religions have to say to one another today that may clarify what it means to have a proper respect for the earth in our personal and social and economic choices. This observation alone did not ignite me to embark on this book.

My interest in the subject of this book was aroused when I was reading P.F. Knitter's (1995) One Earth, Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility as a basic text of part of the course Theology of Intercultural Religious Dialogue, second semester 2004 Radboud University, Nijmegen, Netherlands. Knitter calls for interreligious dialogue that starts with ethics rather than particular religious beliefs. This acts as a guard against the dangers of incommensurability and the danger of one religion dominating the discourse. Much of the interreligious forums that the author attended in Zimbabwe always started with particular religious beliefs. The author remembers a conference organized by the United Nations representatives in Zimbabwe on Dialogue among Civilizations and Religions in 2001. Some Christians walked away because they felt they could not share a platform with representatives of African traditional religions, particularly traditional healers. On this and subsequent similar meetings it seems the case that African religions and Christianity are always on a collision course when dialogue revolves around particular religious beliefs.

In the light of this experience this book attempts to respond to Knitter's call that the best way to carry on a multifaith dialogue that will encourage all the participants to relate to each other in a conversation in which everyone genuinely speaks and listens to each other is to base such dialogue on a shared commitment to promoting the eco-human well-being of Earth and humanity. The book therefore attempts, through a critical comparative analysis of attitudes to nature, to clarify, at least more on the theoretical level problems and promises of an African (Shona)-Christian interreligious contribution to an environmental ethic.

On the journey through this book the author was struggling with intra-religiosity typical of Christian Africans. Being Christian is always annexed to a previous existence, in the author's case, to being an African religion adherent. This intra-religiosity might have tainted parts of the book.

1 Introduction

1.1. The Problem Addressed in the Book

This book is a critical comparative study of African (Shona) and Christian attitudes to nature. The purpose of initiating this discussion is to review the existing attitudes to nature in these two religions. This has important implications in an attempt to formulate a public environmental ethic in which traditional Shona and Christian adherents participate. This is crucial in the light of the growing ongoing inequity and ecological imbalance in Zimbabwe.

The problem addressed in this book is three-fold. First, there is an outline of the context of the problem focusing primarily on the environmental crisis in Zimbabwe. Second there is a discussion of what the book is proposing as a factor influencing the genesis of the problem. Last, there is a proposed way forward in terms of how the book seeks to go about remedying the problem. It is when stating the latter that the guiding questions are raised. The book refers to these questions as comparative questions because of the way forward proposed.

1.1.1. The Context of the Problem: The Environmental Crisis in Zimbabwe

If one visits most of Zimbabwe's rural areas one may despair at the sight of a wounded earth.[1] The ecological situation is deteriorating. In Marange, for example, the village in which I grew there are sights of overgrazing, soil erosion and deforestation. The government tends to believe that these problems can be resolved, as Daneel observes, by proper land husbandry, control of population growth and industrial development that would take pressure off the land.[2] This has not been the case. It therefore makes it possible to raise the issue that the environmental crisis in Zimbabwe as in many places throughout the world could be fundamentally a moral and religious problem.

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1 Marthinus L. Daneel (2001). *African Earthkeepers: Wholistic Interfaith Mission*, 9.

2 Ibid.

1.1.2. The problem of the Lack of Dialogue between Shona Religion and Christianity

Part of the environmental crisis, apart from socio-economic and political factors, has been explained by referring to the idea that the environment crisis can be coterminous with attitudes to nature found in Christianity and its scientific ideology. The consequence of this is then presumed to be that people must revert to traditional attitudes to nature in order to avert the crisis. Christians must support the traditional Shona attitudes to nature. This interpretation colours the traditional chiefs' treatment of Christians, asserting a special right of indigenous beliefs and practices in relation to nature and its resources over and above the beliefs of Christianity. Historically Christians have always been suspect of any attempts by traditionalists to intrude into their faith as they also look down upon those who mix the two sets of religious beliefs, and because of this there is no mutual dialogue between Christianity and African religion on the environmental crisis in Zimbabwe. This forces one to raise the question whether there are no resources in Christian attitudes to nature that the churches can use to speak credibly about nature in dialogue with traditional Shona attitudes. In other words are there resources in the two religions' attitudes to nature that can be a rallying point for Shona traditionalists and Christians towards a resolution of the environmental crisis in Zimbabwe?

In the light of this, the present book examines various beliefs and concerns central to attitudes to nature in the two religions paying close attention to Shona and Christian attitudes to nature. It does this in order to find out the possibility of reference points for an inter-religious discourse aimed at formulating a framework for an inter-religious environmental ethic. It is based on the following central comparative questions:

First, what do Shona religion and Christianity have to say to one another today that may clarify what it means, for the Shona in Zimbabwe to have proper respect for nature in their personal and social choices?

Secondly, do Shona attitudes to nature occupy a privileged position as a criterion against which Christian attitudes to nature are to be tested?

Thirdly, do the Shona and Christian attitudes to nature extend, corroborate, complicate, contradict, debate or criticise one another?

Since Shona attitudes to nature are plural and Christian attitudes even more so, no simple answer is possible. The comparative study in this book crosses a spectrum from conflict through complementarity to criticism. So the driving hypothesis is that there is a possibility of conflict, complementarities and criticism between Shona and Christianity as far as attitudes to nature are concerned.

The argument in this book is that Shona and Christian attitudes to nature criticise each other. Whereas Shona attitudes criticise Christian attitudes of picturing nature as purely material, mechanical and devoid of spirit, the Christian attitude criticises the Shona attitudes' discriminative picture of nature as, throughout, an extended family or society of living, ensouled beings. Further, whereas Christianity, because of its historical links with science-value based environmentalism can help provide a clearer vision to Shona attitude to nature consistent with contemporary environmental concern, Shona religion provides the foundation for ethical restraint in relation to non-human nature.

However the Shona cannot go back to animistic, superstitious folklore. Most contemporary Shona do not live in an enchanted world. So in terms of Shona contribution it is not likely that one can lift intact from Shona traditional religion any pre-scientific, mythological way of valuing nature. But as a result of the critical dialogue between the two attitudes to nature we may formulate a framework to accept our non-human neighbours on earth for what they are in themselves and hopefully infer a framework for making the environment issue in Zimbabwe an inter-religious one.

1.2. Aim, Objectives and Hypotheses

1.2.1. Aim

The overall aim of this book is to discuss, through the possibility of mutual criticism and enrichment between Shona and Christian attitudes to nature as framework for a shared environmental conservation ethic.

1.2.2. Objectives

The book achieves this broad goal by pursuing the following objectives:

- To identify and evaluate the distinctive attitudes to nature of devotees in Shona religion and Christianity respectively.
- To describe and analyse conflicts, complementarities and mutual criticism that exists between the two religions with respect to attitudes to nature.
- To identify a minimum common ground on which we can formulate an environmental ethic that traditional Shona adherents and Christians can share.

1.2.3. The Hypotheses of the Book

The objectives above and indeed the thesis of this book rest on the three hypotheses listed hereunder:

- That the Shona attitudes to nature picture some aspects of nature throughout as an extended family or society of living, ensouled beings.
- That Christianity tends to picture nature as material, mechanical and devoid of spirit that is reserved exclusively for humans.
- That Christian attitudes to nature challenge, through dialogue, the Shona attitudes more in the light of religious environmentalism.

1.3. Justification

The rationale for writing this book revolves around six issues each of which arises from six debates or contexts of debate discussed below.

1.3.1. The Context of Inter-religious Dialogue

First, until now the majority of inter-religious dialogue studies relating Shona religion and Christianity have primarily focused on religious beliefs and practices of the Shona that contribute to African concepts of God, Christology, Soteriology, eschatology and Theodicy.[3] Most scholars

[3] See for example Canaan S. Banana (1991). *Come and Share: An Introduction to Christian Theology*. Gweru: Mambo Press; Frans J. Verstraelen (1993). 'The Christian Bible and African Cultural Realities', in I. Mukonyora (et. al.)

usually take these issues to be the only context for Shona-Christian dialogue. But due to inter-religious dialogue's concern for Eco-well-being the dialogue between Shona and Christianity should take nature seriously. There has not been much focus on a critical comparison of beliefs and practices that may contribute to the development of a shared environmental conservation ethic in which Christians and Shona traditionalists co-operate.

1.3.2. The Context of the Ongoing Debate on a Global Environmental Ethic

Second, the book can contribute significantly to the ongoing debate about the possible contribution to the development of a framework for constructing a global environmental ethic by adding the voice of Shona religion found in Zimbabwe. So the book carries forward the inter-religious approach to this issue.

1.3.3. The Context of the Shona-Christian Religious Dialogue

Third, Shona-Christian dialogue in relation to the theme of care for nature has tended to be critical only about Christian attitude to nature. A critical position about Shona attitude to nature seems to have been ignored. This book carries the dialogue further by contributing a Shona-Christian dialogue about nature crossing a spectrum from conflict through complementarity to mutual criticism and fecundating. So in the critical phase the book shows what the two religions may offer to one another to the possible construction of an environmental ethic by correcting each other's liabilities and deficiencies.

1.3.4. The Context of the Paucity of Sources on the Distinction between Bio-divinity and Environmentalism

Fourth, it seems there is no work that deals with the Shona- Christian dialogue that assumes or recognises the distinction between bio-divinity and religious environmentalism, particularly as this distinction relates to Shona attitude to nature. So despite the strong assertion implied in the

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(eds.) 1993. *Rewriting the Bible: The Real Issues. Perspectives from within Biblical and Religious Studies in Zimbabwe*. Gweru: Mambo Press, 219-246; Frans J. Verstraelen (1995). Patterns of Missionary and Ecumenical Relationships in Zimbabwe', in *Exchange* (October 1995) Vol. 24:3, 189-221.

African theologies of creation and missiological literature reviewed below, that Shona traditional religion has always taught people to be environmentalists, the book questions the straight forward equation between recognition of bio-divinity and the concern for environmental sustainability. No work has engaged the observation made in this book, that the notion of conservation and an economically managed environment are not the main emphasis of Shona attitudes to nature.

1.3.5. The Context of Making a Global Contribution

Fifth, the present book makes a contribution by considering the Shona Christian dialogue and its potential contribution to an environmental ethic by shifting from making Zimbabwe and Shona communities the context to a context of an expanded horizon that consider both the local and the global context.

1.3.6. The Context of a Phenomenological Representation of Shona and Christian Attitudes towards Nature

Sixth, the book contributes a phenomenological representation of Shona and Christian attitudes to nature as foundational step towards engaging them in critical dialogue concerning the environment. Therefore, overall the book attempts to make up in some small measure for the lack reflected in these six contexts of debate and primarily this is its significance.

1.4. The State of Art in Ecology and Religion/inter-religious Dialogue

1.4.1. Preliminary Remarks

Because ecology and religion/inter-religious dialogue is very much extended, the book does not discuss all individual scholars in detail here, except where individual scholars have a great bearing on the argument of the book. The literature is grouped into two main schools of thought and summarises some of the schools' strength and weaknesses in the light of the goal of this book. The first school, which forms the broader context of theme of this book, is the one that discusses the environment as a religious and an interfaith dialogue issue. It calls for an inter-

religious contribution to an environmental conservation ethic. The second school consists of works of African theologians and western missiologists. This school sets the discussion in the context of African theology of creation in which one can discern two orientations regarding the relationship between African and Christian attitudes to nature, in general. The book does not review literature on Christian attitude to nature in this section because it forms the basis of chapter three.

1.4.2. The Call for an Inter-religious Contribution to Environmental Ethic

Ecology is one of the themes in the trends in inter-religious dialogue. Today there is a growing awareness that the problem of ecology has become a universal issue of importance for well-being, if not survival, of a growing population on the earth. A change of attitude towards creation and the resources of this earth and new forms of using them seem urgent. A central argument in the debate about ecology and religion is that;

> "...Since all religions contain reference to creation or other explanations of the origin of the earth combined with ethical demands to use the resources of the earth in a responsible way, to protect the different species of animals and plant life and to be aware of the fact that each generation is responsible for the next, there is a growing expectation that the different religions actively join the group of concerned people to work towards the creation of an ecological ethics".[4]

So it is not surprising that academic and religious practitioners are looking for aspects of the traditions they study and practice for resources that might help alleviating the environmental crisis.

This concern is consistent with Hans Küng's ideas of a 'Global Ethic'[5]. He emphasizes the ethical demands for reverence for life in all its forms. This spirit is also captured in the Assisi Declarations in 1986 and the declarations presented at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1993. The Assisi declaration marks the first interfaith dialogue involving representatives Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Judaism in Assisi, Italy. The World Wildlife Fund sponsored the meeting. Each

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4 Evers, G. (1997). "Trends and Conference in the Field of Interreligous Dialogue", in *Studies in Inter-religious Dialogue* 7 (1997) 2, 251.

5 See Hans Küng and Helmut Schmidt (1998). *A Global Ethic and Global Responsibilities: Two Declarations*. London: SCM Press.

faith was invited to come proud of what it had to offer.[6] In 1993 representatives of the world's religions gathered in Bangalore, India and Chicago to celebrate the first centenary of the first World's Parliament of Religions which was held in Chicago in 1893.[7] The issue of environmental ethics was high on the agenda.

These declarations refer to the need for developing a codex of duties with regard to the environment and creation. The spirit of these declarations has given rise to a general agreement among most representatives of various religions that a change in outlook and behaviour can only be brought when the religions actively promote respect for creation. For example, the first part of The Parliament of World's Religions Declaration of a Global Ethic states that,

> "We are interdependent. Each of us depends on the well-being of the whole, and so we have respect for the community of living beings, for people, animals and plants, and for the preservation of the earth, the air, water and soil".[8]

There is a call that religions must go back to those strands of their tradition that often have been forgotten or were pushed to the background.

1.4.3. The Call for Inter-religious Dialogue Based on Commitment to Human and Earth Well-being

It is in the context of the above background that in his book, One Earth Many Religions: Multi-faith Dialogue and Global Responsibility, Paul. F. Knitter (1995) links global responsibility with inter-religious dialogue. He sets out to lay the basis, primary context, starting point and goal of multi-faith dialogue. He argues that a pluralistic and correlational globally responsible dialogue involves responding to the suffering being inflicted upon people and upon planet earth. Religious persons must seek to understand and speak with each other on the basis of a common commitment to human and ecological well-being.

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6 For what exactly these faith declared and had to offer see *The Assisi Declarations: Messages on Man and Nature from Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism,* Basilica di S. Francesco, Assisi, Italy, London, WWF, 1986.

7 See Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes (2000). *The Study of Religion in an Age of Global Dialogue*, 197-199.

8 Ibid., 199.

By including a concern and attempt to resolve ecological suffering he seems to have moved a step further from traditional liberation theology's concern with only social, political and economic justice. Knitter therefore calls for the entire globe to be involved, nations and religions. The involvement of religions according to Knitter must be based on a correlational dialogue of religions. This form of dialogue affirms the plurality of religions. It does not require religions to be the same. It is an interreligious dialogue based on the idea that religions should be regarded as genuinely diverse, distinct.

The task of the partners is to convince each other of values found in their traditions and to be open to the values of the other's religion. Knitter calls this a mutual, back and forth correlation of speaking and listening, teaching and learning, witnessing and being witnessed to. This way he posits a new pluralist model that seeks to promote a truly correlational dialogue among religions where all sides listen and be challenged by others, speak and challenge others. This is accompanied by a theology that is comparative, meaning a theology that is in conversation with others.[9]

Knitter seems to be aware of works such as Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Wellbeing of Earth and Humans. This work forms part of a series of books on 'Religions of the World and Ecology, which, as Peterson A.L. observes, despite their five comparative overarching goals, rarely compare Christianity to other religions but concentrate on describing "ecological attitudes" inside a particular tradition, and identifying practical implications and areas for further study, also within a particular religion. This seems to leave the central goal of environmental ethics of encouraging critical thinking and constructive action about ecological crisis in which conversation and joint projects with religious people are vital.[10]

This book attempts to respond to Knitter's call by investigating the potential contribution of Shona religion found in Zimbabwe in seeking cooperation with Christianity to conserve the natural environment. Through a critical phenomenological- comparative analysis, the book

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9 P.F. Knitter (1995). *One Earth Many Religions*, 24.

10 Anna L. Peterson. 'Christianity and ecology', in *Environmental Ethics* (Spring 2002) Vol. 24:1, 105.

examines Shona attitude to nature in order to find out its impact on Christian attitude to nature so that one may understand how Shona attitude to nature may help develop a Christian environmental ethic built from the spiritual roots of the Shona. This may help Shona Christians to ground an environmental conservation ethic within their tradition rather than apart from it. This may result in a shared and more effective environmental conservation ethic.

1.4.4. African Theologians on African Religion and the Environment

In recent years works have emerged on this topic and one finds that African religions in general attach great importance to wildlife and protection of the environment. A few examples are selected to illustrate this point. African theologians like John Smith Mbiti assume the inevitability of the contradiction or conflict between African religions and Christianity. They argue that the major traits of African indigenous religions are embedded in environmental and cultural concerns. Mbiti, for example has this to say,

> "Another basic element of African religion concerns human relations with the world of nature. Humans are not masters over nature to exploit it without feeling or treat it without respect. Instead people are one with nature, responsible toward nature, able to communicate with nature, and the chief priests of nature".[11]

This fosters a recurring theme that African religions are uniquely pro-environment. So, writing in the context of creation theology, Mbiti, like most African theologians, tends to advance the controversial thesis about the clash of attitudes to nature. The thesis assumes that there are unavoidable conflicts between African religions and Christianity. They take an either or position and stress the thesis that the worldview typical of African religions includes and supports a positive environmental ethic, while that of Christianity has encouraged alienation from the natural environment and an exploitative relation with it.

From a phenomenological-comparative approach we argue that the divergence between African, in particular Shona, attitudes to nature is not based on Shona religion being truly environmental but on the fact that

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[11] John Smith Mbiti (2001). 'African Religion and the World Order', in P.M. Mische and M. Merkling, (eds.) (2001). *Towards a Global Civilization? The Contributions of Religions,* 368.

the Shona recognise bio divinity. There is need to distinguish this from religious environmentalism that involves the conscious application of religious ideas to modern concerns about the global environment. That is a conscious attempt to critically appraise and counteract the adverse by products of the scientific enterprise.[12]

So it is one of the tasks in this book to assess the extent of the claims that Shona religion is more environmental friendly than Christianity. The contention is that the anti-Christian leanings, usually in line with Lynn White's essay, 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis", in which he traces the roots of the environmental crisis to the Christian notions of humans as rulers of nature (Science, vol.155, March 1967, pp.1203-07), of those who accuse Christianity often let them speak more positively and romantically about Shona environmentalism than evidence would grand them. Recognising this danger Mbiti himself, writing about African religions in general remarks that; "But while appreciating the religious view of nature among tribal peoples, we cannot ignore activities among tribal peoples that may also be destructive and damaging to nature, especially in the human struggle for survival".[13]

However the actual beliefs and practices that are not exemplary are not mentioned. The reason could be that there is no specific phenomenological study on the meaning of nature from the perspective of African tradition per se. The primary focus is on the academic theology of inculturation in which 'African dialogue-and inculturation –theology use theocentric inclusivism'.[14] This book's position is that before engaging in dialogue one should first understand Shona attitudes to nature in their own traditional social, cultural and political perspectives than through the spectacles of western theology and potential ethnocentric bias of most African theologies.

This issue has not been taken up this way. This book takes up this issue and move the dialogue through to the spectrum of equally criticising

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12 Ian Harris. 'How Environmentalist is Buddhism?', in *Religion* (1991) 21, 111.

13 John S. Mbiti (2002). 'When The Bull is in a Strange Land, It Does Not Bellow: Tribal Religions and Globalization', in M.L. Stackhouse and D.B. Obenchain (2002). *God and Globalization*, 158.

14 Volker Kuester. 'Who, With Whom, About What? Exploring the Landscape of Interreligous Dialogue', in *Exchange* (2004) Vol. 33:1, 87.

Shona and Christian attitudes to nature. This enables one to engage Shona attitude to nature in dialogue with Christian attitude to nature not on the basis of a simplistic generalisation of Shona attitude to nature. It is, however, prudent not ignore the contribution African theology has made in terms of providing special insight into African peoples' relation with nature in general.

1.4.5. Western Missiologists on African Religion and the Environment

Some western missiologists also claim that African religions are congruent with Christian attitudes to nature and its framework of the findings of science and reason. Here one can think of the interfaith environmental project of M. L. Daneel. He succeeded to enlist the co-operation of Shona traditional chiefs and spirit mediums and African initiated churches in fighting environmental degradation in Zimbabwe by planting trees.[15]

One can understand Daneel's contribution in the context of 'the care for the creation as mission responsibility' theme reflected in the great ecumenical theme of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation,[16] particularly the themes that emerged out of the world conference on mission and evangelism in San Antonio. These are also closely related to the themes of the 7th Assembly of the World council of Churches in Canberra. The catch statement, 'Come Holy Spirit Renew The whole Creation', captures the themes.[17]

This like what is in the first school of thought also shows a growing concern with the environment. However the focus here is much on understanding of mission that is rooted in the Spirit that sustains all life. This is done in the backdrop of recognising that much of the church mission, in terms of thinking and practice had been too anthropocentric. Now there is a call to realise that the wholeness that the Spirit brings is earth embracing.[18] The central orientation is that Eco-justice and social justice

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15 See L.M. Daneel (2001). *African Earthkeepers: Wholistic Interfaith Mission*. New York: Orbis Books.

16 L. Newton Thurber. 'Care for the Creation as Mission Responsibility', in *International Review of Mission* (April 1990) Vol. lxxvix:314, 143.

17 See editorial section in *International Review of Mission* (April 1990) Vol. lxxxix:314, 138.

18 Ibid.

are inseparable and much of the aim is to explore practical ways of ecumenically expressing Christian response to ecological crisis.

Daneel focuses on a case study in Zimbabwe. He was involved for many years and worked closely with adherents of both traditional religion and independent churches in a practical specific environmental project. He witnessed the stimulation of a contextual ecological theology to undergird the ecological action. He sees Shona traditional not simply as background to the contextualisation of the Christian message but also as an ecological force with very specific implications for the development of a theology of the environment. This is where according to him Shona traditional religion can make its greatest contribution. He argues,

> "My contention is that this is precisely where traditional religion can make its greatest contribution. If we are to develop a realistic, praxis oriented Christian ethic aimed at the liberation of nature/creation, we have to probe the wisdom of Africa...."[19]

Daneel therefore highlights the role of indigenous Shona religion, in conjunction with Christian churches. He tells us that the aim of the study is to probe the cosmological roots and belief systems of the Shona people as a motivating force in the mobilisation of inculturated earthkeeping. It also generates insights that may be significant for the development of a relevant Eco-theology or environmental ethic in the global village.[20]

When Daneel formulates an African theology of the environment it is clear that for him Christianity must be modified in order to become compatible with Shona culture and religion and thus acceptable to the traditional Shona people. To us this approach to Shona-Christian dialogue on attitudes to nature is inadequate at least in two respects. First, due to ongoing development of Shona culture and the process of globalisation of cultural traditions, this approach of indigenising Christian theology through Africanisation is practically no longer a necessity for the development of a shared environmental ethic in Zimbabwe. This is because many modern Zimbabwean intellectuals are refuting Shona culture and religion and its influence among contemporary Shona is

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19 L.M. Daneel. 'The Liberation of Creation: African Traditional Religious and Independent Church Perspectives', in *Missionalia* (August 1991) 19:2, 100.

20 J.S. Mbiti. 'When the Bull Is in a Strange Country, It Does Not Bellow', in *God and Globalization*, Vol. 3, 157.

declining dramatically.[21] The recent process of globalisation and globalisation challenges the validity of every cultural tradition, including Shona. As the validity of Shona religion or its validity is waning one wonders whether it is either necessary or advisable to uncritically modify Christian attitudes to nature according to the basic beliefs and practices of Shona in order to win the acceptance of contemporary Shona.

Secondly, this kind of Shona-Christian dialogue tends to involve itself in a dialogue concentrating on the issues confined to demonstrate how Christianity is the fulfilment of Shona religions, overlooking the urgent need of an environmental ethic built in the light of environmentalism. In this sense the Shona- Christian dialogue becomes a form of intra-religious dialogue. This does not only appear to be irrelevant to outsiders but also to contradict the spirit of both religions.

So, this book calls for Shona-Christian dialogue that expands its horizon, taking the globe rather than Zimbabwe as the context for dialogue. It should take seriously the pressing issue of environmental crisis and the equal footing between Shona and Christianity as two religious forces on the globe. In this new approach to Shona-Christian dialogue the aim is not the missionary goal of evangelising to the Shona through the Shonanization of Christian theology but the mutual enrichment of the two traditions for the care for nature. This involves showing how Christian, science and rationally based, attitudes to nature challenge those of the Shona, showing how Shona attitude to nature should first be assessed in the light of environmentalism and how the two religions' attitudes to nature challenge each other in the light of the goals of environmentalism. These three endeavours are what we refer to as moving the dialogue through the spectrum of conflict through complementarity to criticism.

1.5. Point of Departure and Thesis of the Book

From the discussions above, one can isolate a number of points, which indeed supply both the framework and basic shape, as well as the colour of the point of departure of this book.

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[21] See Michael F.C. Bourdillon (1993). *Where Are The Ancestors? Changing Culture in Zimbabwe*. Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications.

First, the author agrees with the majority of scholars who may fall under the first school of thought. From that perspective the author supports the need to care for the environment. The author also agrees with their call for a new ethic, embracing plants and animals as well as people to live in harmony with the natural world on which they depend for survival and well-being. More important, the author takes heed to Knitter's call for formulating the ethic in the context of correlational dialogue of religions that involves various religions highlighting or even refashioning those elements that seem to resonate with secular environmental concerns. This is why one of the central questions of the book is whether or not in their personal and social choices personal the Shona and Christian religions respectively have anything to say to one another, and to the wider world, in terms of what it means to have proper respect for the earth.

The second school of thought also raises vital points that form essential ingredients of the thesis in this book. This school raises the need to reflect on the areas that are also crucial for in this book namely: an African theology of creation; Attitudes to nature and, how these may lead to practical interfaith engagements in fighting the environmental crisis. The author agrees wholesale with the contention of this school that indeed these are significant questions for developing an interfaith environmental ethic.

However, the first school of thought has a glaring weakness that this book seeks to repair before capitalising on its obvious strengths stated above. The conclusions of the school do not seem to derive from two exercises that for this work would have made the position of the school substantially concrete namely: a phenomenological representation of African religions; an examination of the relationship of African religions to secular environmental concerns based on eidetic intuition derived from the first exercise above.

The weakness of the second school of thought follows from that of the first school. The goal to formulate an environmental ethic that is an aggregate of aspects in the various religions that resonate environmental concerns is not only a noble goal but also a healthy one. However, the author contends as above, that the two processes above are essential before one comes up with a basket of uncooked simplistic generalisations about environmental concerns in the various religions. Therefore, this

book marks a three-fold point of departure from previous studies in that it seeks to examine:

From a phenomenological standpoint, what it is that the devotees in Shona traditional religion and Christianity respectively, have to say about the environment? What relationship exists between attitudes to nature in each of the two religions under study and similar environmental concerns in the secular world, and whether or not one can arrive at an informed environmental ethic that derives from a phenomenological examination and critical comparison of the two religions under study? This point of departure has several strengths that are apparent right from the onset. In the first place this stance helps one to avoid two simplistic sweeping generalisations that seem to come out of previous studies namely:

That African religion (represented by Shona traditional religion in our study) is more environmental friendly than Christianity; and that African and Christian attitudes to nature are compatible.

The author also avoids privileging either African religions or Christianity as criteria against which other religions are to be tested. As a result, one can move the inter-religious dialogue entailed here to the critical level and reach the conclusion that Shona and Christian religions, especially Shona and Christian attitudes to nature alike need to be revised and be formulated into a hybrid new environmental ethic. Therefore, the Shona -Christian dialogue about nature must expand its horizon by making 'true to life' the test of a conservation ethic. This is possible by first engaging traditional Shona beliefs with critical reflection on key terms relating to ecology and the environment such as environmentalism and bio-divinity and then engaging in a critical comparative phenomenological analysis of these traditional Shona beliefs with related beliefs in Christianity.

Therefore, the thesis in this book is that Shona and Christian attitudes to nature alike need to be revised and reformulated into a new environmental ethic that takes due cognisance of the essential contributions of each of the two religions understudy listed immediately below. On one hand, Christianity may help provide a clear vision consistent with secular environmental concerns because of its historical links with science and secular based environmentalism; while on the other hand, Shona

religion may provide the foundation for ethical restraint in relation to non-human nature.

1.6. Methodology

1.6.1. The Basic Theoretical Framework

A phenomenological approach, particularly the phenomenology of religion, underlies discussions in this book and the theoretical framework is formulated on the basis of this approach. It is not possible to give a universally agreed upon definition of phenomenology of religion. For example it may refer to an attitude toward or the study of religious phenomena in a broad sense, or to cross-cultural comparative study and classification of religious manifestation or a commitment to a specialised method of inquiry of religious expressions. Without entangling ourselves into the definitional problems and the history of the term this book takes it to refer to some of its generally agreed distinctives.

These are, firstly, its descriptive orientation that strives for accurate and appropriate interpretations of religious phenomena from the perspective of the practitioner. This involves as far as possible maintaining a descriptive outlook in gathering, sifting, comparing, and analysing data of the study. Second is its idea of seeking to discover motives and intentions in the particular environment of the phenomena under consideration. Third, there is the comparative and systematic approach. This book is inclined to its form of comparison that may not imply superiority or inferiority of one type of experience within a religious tradition as opposed to similar practice in another religion. The systematic approach helps one to assume that religious phenomena can best be understood not as isolated snapshots, but as belonging to a complex system of experiences all of which are related together. Fourthly the author is also guided by an empathetic understanding.[22]

The author uses these insights in the light of the knowledge of the general critique of the phenomenological approach. The most forceful ones are that epoche, empathy and objectivity are not realisable goals. Posi-

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[22] Allen Douglas. 'Phenomenology of Religion', in M. Eliade (1987). *Encyclopedia of Religion,* Vol. 11, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 272-284.

tion in this book is inclined with phenomenologists who have long recognised that phenomena come into view through the consciousness of the observers. So we recognise that perfect objectivity is impossible. The author assumes that the positive aspects of the phenomenological approach may be utilised profitably as starting point in understanding Shona and Christian attitudes to nature before engaging them in critical comparison.

1.6.2. Other Complementary Methods

The term method may, sometimes, be a little confusing since it is used in two senses. In one sense it is used to refer to a particular approach to research and in the other sense it is used to refer to various techniques of data collection. In terms of a particular approach the study assumes a phenomenological approach and its implied descriptive, historical and comparative approaches. It has already indicated this under theoretical framework. The phenomenological approach per se helps to lay bare the motives and intentions in holding a particular attitude to nature. The descriptive approach answers basic questions such as what and how about attitudes to nature in the two religions. The historical approach orients the study towards critically investigating the attitudes by assuming the attitudes cannot be understood outside their history. So it helps to explain how the attitudes may be influenced by specific historical, cultural, and socio-economic context within which the religion historically originated.

Concerning data, the book is based largely on secondary material got through library research. The part on Shona attitudes to nature is based on field material by anthropologists such as M.F.C. Bourdillon, missiologists such as M. L. Daneel and from unpublished university of Zimbabwe dissertations that focus on the significance of particular aspects of nature among the Shona. Further there is also use Shona literature regarding proverbs, idioms and poetry that portray Shona beliefs about their relation to nature. The part on Christian attitudes to nature involves mainly analysing opinions of prominent theological figures and biblically derived attitudes.

The book discusses first all of Shona attitudes to nature, then all of Christian attitudes to nature. It starts with Shona because it assumes that Christianity extends Shona in terms of being more consonant with environmentalism.

1.7. Definition of Terms

One of the pervasive problems in most works that deal with Shona attitudes to nature is the lack of critical reflection on key terms relating to ecology and the environment. Most works assume that these terms are unproblematic and that people commonly understand them. Scholars seem to be unaware of the growing terminological sophistication in this area. In order not to sacrifice clarity we identify and define some terms that underlie this study. Shona religion, Christianity, nature/ environment, attitudes to nature, bio divinity, religious environmentalism, and environmental ethic are terms with a vast breadth of characteristics, making it difficult to pin down to a single or even small set of essential ideas. It needs to be realised from the outset that there is no consensus on the precise meanings of these terms. The meanings given here and assumed in this book are therefore working meanings.

Shona traditional religion: refers to the religious beliefs and practices of the Shona people of Zimbabwe before the arrival of Christianity in Zimbabwe and to which some Shona people still adhere. This is distinguished from beliefs and practices of Shona peoples that may or may not be directly motivated by traditional Shona religion.

Christian attitudes to nature: attitudes to nature based on biblical Christianity and the various interpretations of the Bible reflected in current discussions on Christian attitudes to nature.

Nature/environment: the actual physical world including plants, insects and animals, landscapes and water sources contrasted with the world of people and its mental and social phenomenon.[23]

Attitudes to nature: the ways people think and feel and behave towards nature/environment.[24]

Bio-divinity: the teaching or belief that the environment is significant beyond its use value to people because it is sacred.[25]

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23 *The Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary*.

24 Ibid.

25 See Emma Tomalin (2004). 'Perspectives on Religion and Environmental Conservation', in *Numen,* Vol. 51, 266.

Religious environmentalism: the conscious application of religious beliefs and practices to contemporary concerns about an environmental crisis.[26]

Environmental ethic: a system of normative guidelines governing people's attitudes, behaviour and action towards the natural environment.[27]

1.8. Scope and Limitations of the Book

In the first place, there is no one thing that we can call Shona and Christian belief systems and attitudes to nature respectively. However recognising the diversity and variety of Shona and Christian attitudes to nature should not obscure a complementary unity to be found in each religion. So despite internal differences we assume that there are common characteristic attitude to nature, which unite Shona, and this is also true for Christians. As result, in cases where there is no empirical evidence the study will revert to a generalised comparison of Shona and Christian attitude to nature and be particular, where possible, about attitudes to, for example, particular animals. Otherwise the greatest limitation is that one cannot fully describe the attitudes to nature of traditional Shona people and Christians unless one goes to the people themselves to find out what those attitudes actually are.

Second, the book does not, with each religion, discuss attitudes to all aspects of nature. This is far beyond its scope. It focuses on attitudes to plants/trees/forests and animals and water sources. It refers to other parts of the earth's web of life in cases where they relate to plant life and animals.

Thirdly, Shona religion and culture were considered inferior during centuries of British colonialism in Zimbabwe. One may face the danger of over idealizing and romanticizing Shona religion through excessive and uncritical reaction to western influence. The author tries to overcome this danger by engaging in internal debate with own traditional and reli-

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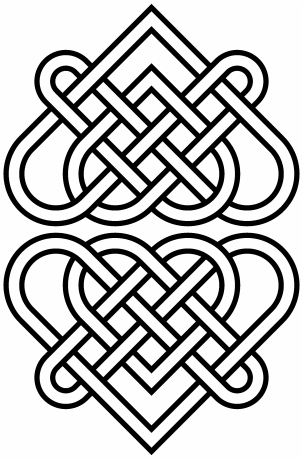
26 Ibid.

27 Charles Y. Deknatel (1980). 'Questions about Environmental Ethics- Towards a Research Agenda with Focus on Public Policy', in *Environmental Ethics* (Winter 1980) Vol. 2:4, 354.

gious and cultural background by developing a free and critical relation. There is prioritization of the author's own internal debate over views other cultures hold of Shona religion.



2 SHONA ATTITUDES TO NATURE

2.1. Introduction

This chapter examines some of the beliefs and practices underlying Shona attitudes to nature. After introductory remarks it gives an overview background about the Shona focusing on their socio-political organisation, worldview and religion. An examination of Shona attitudes to nature focusing on the land, animals, and plant life and water bodies follows. After this there is a reflection on the ethical consequences of Shona attitudes to nature. The main conclusion is that Shona attitudes to nature are discriminative and ambivalent. They can both be ecologically responsible and harmful. One can argue that Shona attitudes to nature are ultimately human-centred. Kinship with aspects of nature serves a soteriological purpose for human well-being and not necessarily for nature.

It was noted in the previous chapter, that there is a perception of African traditional religion and Shona religion in particular, that it is intrinsically environmental friendly. This attitude of romanticising African religion recurs within other works that refer to Shona religion and the environment. The following examples are noteworthy. First there is a view that;

> ... Traditional African ecology, like everything else in Shona society, is inseparably linked with traditional religion. Environmental protection is sanctioned by the creator God and the ancestors of the land.[28]

Second, Ranger says,

> African religious ideas were very much ideas about relationships, whether with other living people, or with spirits of the dead, or with animals, or with cleared land, or with the bush.[29]

Third there is also an observation that totemism (*mutupo*) among the Shona "is a principle which seeks to create a cosmology that takes the

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[28] Marthinus L. Daneel (2001). *African Earthkeepers: Wholistic Interfaith Mission*, 90.

[29] Terrance O. Ranger (1988). 'African Traditional Religion', in S. Sutherland et. al. (eds.), *The World's Religions*, 687.

existence of non-human seriously."[30] Finally, Mvududu states "Zimbabwe has long been known for traditional religious practices, which Schoffeleers has characterised as 'profoundly ecological' ..."[31]

The environmental friendliness implied in these statements is sometimes believed to be steadily weakening because of the coming of Christianity and western ideas. For example, Mvududu argues that the sacred control of woodlands is weakening. She draws her conclusions from the research of Matowanyika. Matowanyika found that 77% of his sample felt that the introduction of Christianity and western ideas has been the cause of the breakdown of indigenous attitudes to nature.[32] So there is a tendency for Shona religion to imply that the Shona were actually environmentalists but at some point during the course of history this environmentalist foundation became obscured.

Such perceptions may be idealistic and romantic and need to be re-examined. This is especially so if Shona religion is to re-emerge as a stronger environmental force in the global village. Contrary to these views, phenomenologically, traditional Shona beliefs and practices do not necessarily support religious environmentalism, and that traditional Shona worldview does not sit comfortably within worldview assumed in modern environmental discourses. The question how environmental is Shona traditional religion has not been critically pressed.[33]

Tomalin's observations about Hinduism holds true for Shona religion. She notes the attitude of romanticising the past as a recurring theme in most literature on religion and the environment. According to her this gives rise to a debate, which assumes that an eco-golden age existed at some point in the past. The discourse holds that ancient peoples had a less harmful impact upon the earth and that their religious literature sings and praises the natural world. Further the discourse tends to es-

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30 Tumani M. Nyanjeka (1996). 'Shona Women and The Mutupo Principle', in R.R. Ruether (1996), *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion*, 138.

31 Sara S. Mvududu (1996). 'Management of Indigenous Woodlands', in R.R. Ruether (1996), *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion*, 151.

32 Ibid.

33 The idea of this question is borrowed from Ian Harris'. 'How environmental is Buddhism?', in *Religion* (1991) 21, 101-114.

sentialise the lifestyle and values of contemporary non-industrial societies, particularly so-called tribal or peasant cultures as environmentalist.[34]

The examination of the Shona attitude to nature in this chapter assumes Tomalin's critical remarks one should consider when dealing with non-industrial people's attitudes towards nature. First is the idea that the environmental friendliness of non-industrial people should not lead us to assume that it is a result of the people holding environmental values. Secondly is the idea that while they prescribe behaviour that had the effect of conserving nature, the motivation behind this may not necessarily be attributed to environmental values.[35] As shall be shown, the Shona attitude to nature is ambivalent. It can be interpreted positively as well as negatively. But first a background about the Shona is necessary.

2.2. Who Are The Shona?[36]

The Shona are found in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe is land-locked between Zambia to the north, Malawi to the Northeast, Mozambique to the east, and Botswana to the west and South Africa to the south. Its capital city is Harare. Zimbabwe has a subtropical climate. Politically Zimbabwe was a British colony from 1890 to 1980. When Zimbabwe got independence in 1980 it changed its name from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe. The name of the capital also changed from Salisbury to Harare. The estimated population is 12.5 million. Approximately 60% of the population lives in the rural areas.

There are two major ethnic groups. These are the Shona and the Ndebele. The Shona tribe is about 77% of the population, with 17% Ndebele, and 1.4% whites and Asians. The official language is English, with Shona the largest indigenous language group. So the Shona form the majority of the indigenous population of Zimbabwe.

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34 Emma Tomalin (2002). 'The Limitations of Religious Environmentalism for India', in *Worldviews* 6, 13.

35 Ibid., 15.

36 For an extensive account of who the Shona are and their historical links with Bantu culture see M.F.C. Bourdillon (1987). *The Shona Peoples*, Gweru: Mambo Press (third revised edition).

The Shona rarely use the term 'Shona'. They tend to refer themselves by the name of the particular Shona-speaking group to which they belong.[37] The term refers to describe a group of dialects. These dialects are Karanga, Zezuru, Korekore, Manyika, and Ndau. The Karanga are found in the Southwest, with the Ndau and the Manyika to the east; the Zezuru in the centre; and the Korekore in the north.[38] So when we speak of Shona people we mean all those who speak dialects of Shona in Zimbabwe. When we talk of particular Shona subgroups, for example, the Karanga, we mean those who speak Karanga dialect and who live in a particular district of the Shona linguistic area.

2.3. The Socio-Political Background of the Shona

It is important to acquaint readers with the socio-political organisation of the Shona. It has an impact on the Shona peoples' attitudes to nature. This also enables readers to understand part of my argument in this chapter. The argument is that Shona attitudes to nature are primarily about power and relation with spirits than with ecological issues in the scientific sense. In their beliefs about well-being the Shona hold that there is a causal connection between the moral condition of the community and its physical environment. Among the Shona the real owner of the land and all on it is the tutelary spirit, *Mwari* and the various territorial ancestors spirits. So the environment belongs to the spirits. It is sacred (*kuyera*). Land is sanctified by its possession by the spirits whose remains are buried in it. So it is the spirits who look after their property. Ranger confirms this view. He writes:

> "The system of the spirit mediums expressed the common African idea of the increased power of the dead, of their ability to communicate more freely with the divine, and of their role as protector of the land and the people. The dead were thought of as forming ... 'the tender bridge' between the living and the divine".[39]

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37 Hubert Bucher (1980). *Spirits and Power: An Analysis of Shona Cosmology*, 21.

38 Ibid.

39 Terence O. Ranger (1967). Revolt in Southern Rhodesia 1896-7: A Study in African Resistance, 18.

One can identify a hierarchy of three interrelated units. These are village (*musha*), ward (*dunhu*) and chiefdom (*nyika*).[40]

2.3.1. The Village (*Musha/Bhuku*)

A village community consists of a number of extended families. It is in most cases a nuclear group of male family heads agnatically related to the village headman. (*samusha/sabhuku*). The headman represents one of the senior houses of the chief's lineage. There could also be foreigners (*vatorwa*). Because of a high percentage of agnatic kin the village community tends to support the headman's authority. The headman allocates land to family heads and other adults. He also settles domestic and other minor disputes. He is also responsible for seeing that traditional ritual obligations, such as keeping the day of rest in honour of ancestors (*chisi*). His function extends to rain thanksgiving ceremonies (*mutoro*) and addressing his ancestors on behalf of the village community.[41]

2.3.2. The Ward (*Dunhu)*

The ward consists of a number of villages. Rivers, hilltops and streams mark ward boundaries. These boundaries are well known. A headman called *sadunhu* heads the ward. He is a member of the senior homes of the chief's lineage. His functions are similar to those of the leader of the village. He also presides over the court (*dare*) and initiate rain asking rituals in consultation with the village headman.[42]

2.3.3. The Chiefdom/Territory (*Nyika)*

The chiefdom is the widest territorial and political unit. Bourdillon is right when he notes that the boundaries of chiefdom are clearly defined by natural features such as hills and rivers well known to its inhabitants.[43] For the Shona, like most people in Africa, land has primarily a value linked to a tribe, its chief and the spirits of their ancestors. This is why in Shona the chief *(mambo)* is called 'owner of the land' *(muridzi*

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40 For a detailed description of these units see Marthinus L. Daneel (1971). *Old and New in Shona Independent Churches*, Vol. 1, 32-38.

41 Ibid.

42 Marthinus L. Daneel (1971). *Old and New in Shona Independent Churches*, Vol. 1, 35-37.

43 Michael.F.C. Bourdillon (1987). Op.Cit., 103.

we nyika). *Nyika* is the Shona name commonly used for land.[44] This ownership of the land by the chief is a result of his supposed connections with mythological founder- ancestors of his chiefdom. It is the ancestors who are believed to have chosen him and gave power and authority over his subjects.[45] So the chief is in his position by virtue of his relationship with the ancestors, who appointed him and supports him.

The real owners of the land are however the ancestral spirits of the dead tribal rulers particularly those of the mythical founder- ancestors of the chiefdom. The chief is the senior descendent of the ancestral spirits who founded the chiefdom. He is both a political and a religious figure. The role of the chief is the same as those of village and ward headmen differing in the chief's greater authority. Traditionally he is the final court of appeal. He is responsible for propitiating his clan ancestors. He is at the apex of the tribe's ritual hierarchy. Overall the chief is sacred.[46] His authority is linked to the land and the spirits that own it.

2.4. The Shona Traditional Worldview

It is also important to understand Shona attitude to nature in the context of their traditional worldview. This enables one to understand the roots of the tendency to romanticise Shona attitudes to nature. The worldview shows how it is possible to claim that Shona religion is environmentally friendly. It shows how Shona ideas are regarded as "very much ideas about relationships, whether with other living people, or with spirits of the dead, or with animals, or with cleared land, or with the bush".[47] This worldview is used to argue that such relationships are primarily relationships with spirits and not necessarily scientific ecological relationships with nature. The issue is that for the Shona the universe is morally significant. They believe in immanent justice. Retribution of peoples' faults will fall upon people out of the universe, apart from policemen or parental spanking. Nature cares about peoples' moral behaviour. It is a moral

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44 Hubert Bucher (1980). Op.Cit., 31.

45 Ibid., 32.

46 Michael F.C. Bourdillon (1997). *Where Are the Ancestors: Changing Culture in Zimbabwe*, 58-64.

47 Terrance O. Ranger (1988). Op.Cit., 867.

agent. The appearance of a particular animal may indicate that something has gone morally wrong in the community.

The traditional Shona worldview is consistent with the general traditional African worldview. The author agrees with Mbiti who argues that one thing that the Africans have in common is their worldview.[48] This worldview is anthropocentric. Everything is seen in terms of its relation to human beings.[49] Mbiti categorises the African worldview into five parts. These are God, spirits, man[50], animals and non-biological life.[51] In representing Shona worldview it is conflated into three basic parts. These are the spiritual world, the world of human beings and the natural world. The reason is that the Shona look out upon a universe partaking at once of the qualities of man, nature and God/spirits. Although this scheme is consistent with comparing worldviews with reference to a triangle of these three conceptions- humanity, nature, God/spirits- the Shona worldview is one in which the triangle itself is not very apparent.

2.4.1. The Spiritual Worldview

His section examines the Shona spiritual worldview focusing on *Mwari* (God) and ancestral, avenging (*ngozi*) and alien (*shave*) spirits.

2.4.1.1. God/*Mwari*

First, the spiritual world consists of God (*Mwari*).[52] The Shona believe that *Mwari* created the world and all in it. *Mwari* is regarded as the Great Spirit whose voice people used to hear at Matopo hills.[53] This Great Spirit *Mwari* is sometimes referred to as *mudzimumukuru* (great ancestral spirit). Most Shona people believe that nature is a product of ances-

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48 John S. Mbiti (1969). *African Religions and Philosophy*, 15-16.

49 Ibid., 16.

50 I assume that Mbiti uses the term man in a generic sense. So where I use it instead of human beings I assume its generic sense.

51 Ibid.

52 There are other several names for God or Mwari. These are: Nyadenga (the great one of the sky), Musikavanhu (the creator of the people), Divaguru (giver of rain/the great pool), Mutangakugara (The one who existed in the beginning).

53 For the best account of this see M.L. Daneel (1969). *The God of the Matopo Hills*, The Hague: Mounton.

tral spirits, probably with *Mwari* at the top of the hierarchy. This belief is found in the Shona myth of creation.

The Shona myth of creation traces the origin of life and existence of nature to a great pool (*dzivaguru*). The myth begins with *Mwari* making the first human called *Mwedzi* (moon). This is at the bottom of the pool (*dziva*). *Mwari* gave *Mwedzi* a medicine horn (*gona*). *Mwedzi* asked to go out to the dry land. *Mwari* gave him a wife called *Masasi* to accompany him. The two lived in a cave. They gave birth to grass, bushes and trees. After this *Masasi* went back to the pool and *Mwari* gave *Mwedzi* another wife called *Morongo*. *Morongo* gave birth to all kinds of animals. Eventually she bore boys and girls. Because the children had grown up, *Morongo* refused to continue sleeping with *Mwedzi*. She asked him to sleep with his daughters. As a result he became chief (*mambo*) of a great people. *Masasi* chose to sleep with a snake that she hid under her bed. One day *Mwedzi* forced *Masasi* to sleep with him and the snake bit him. *Mwedzi* fell ill and there was drought. The children consulted a diviner about the persistent drought. They were told to send the sick chief back to the pool. After this they chose another man to be their king.[54]

Some aspects of this myth shall be used when discussing Shona attitudes to particular aspects of nature. At this point it serves to demonstrate the possible explanation of the Shona belief in nature as a product of *Mwari* and the archetypal ancestors.

2.4.1.2. Chiefs/Territorial Ancestral Spirits[55]

Secondly the spiritual world consists of ancestral spirits. Here there are two categories. These are family ancestral spirits (*midzimu*) and chiefs/territorial ancestral spirits (*mhondoro*). As has already been noted in the discussion of chiefdom the territorial ancestral spirits are often referred to as guardians of the land. Because of this they are the ones

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[54] For a detailed account of this myth see H. Bucher (1980). Op.Cit., 72.

[55] Although the focus of this discussion is on male ancestral spirits we should note that there are female ancestral spirits. Among the Shona mothers are believed to very influential as spirits responsible for women's childbearing capacity. The focus on male ancestors is a result of the Shona patriarchal system that believes that the most important spirit elder is the deceased head of a family, the father of grandfather.

usually associated with traditional African ecological religious beliefs.[56] The *mhondoro* is the spirit of the founder of a clan. The chief is in most cases the medium of the territorial spirit. The role of these spirits is to protect the fertility of the land and to control rainfall. The Shona perform rituals to them to get rid of pests, bless seeds before a new crop is sown to ensure a successful harvest and to thank and celebrate successful harvest seasons.[57] As noted above the *mhondoro* is the ultimate owner of *nyika*. *Nyika* also refers to the area associated with the history of the founder of the clan as the first person to settle in a particular area.

2.4.1.3. Family Ancestral Spirits

The family ancestral spirits are guardians of the extended family. They are spirits of each family or small extended family lineage. So they are mostly concerned with the peace and welfare of individual family units. The belief is that "every grown up person is attributed to releasing an ancestral spirit upon his death, and that this *mudzimu* is conceptually linked with the realm of nature."[58] What is important to note is that *mudzimu* is associated with frightening experiences such as lightning, hail, drought, animals harmful to people, livestock and crops and benevolent experiences such as rain, forest fruit, and the harvest, domesticated and friendly animals.[59]

Overall at both territorial and family level it means the human ancestors possess power and thus participate in sacred reality. Even though they inhabit the world of spirits they are still present in the human community as guardians of the family traditions, providers of fortune, and ones who punish those who break accepted mores. So, like in most African communities, among the Shona the ancestors are crucially important for the continued welfare of the family and the community.

2.4.1.4. Ngozi and Alien Spirits

At the family level there are also other spirits. One type is the angry spirit. Its Shona name is *ngozi*. These are usually angry spirits of people who

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56 See J.M. Schoffeleers (1979). *Guardians of the Land: Essays on Central African Territorial Cults*.

57 Michael. F.C. Bourdillon (1997). Op.Cit., 73.

58 Hubert Bucher (1980). Op.Cit., 57.

59 Ibid.

who are murdered. This spirit is the most terrifying among the Shona. Bourdillon has this to say about the *ngozi* spirit, "Such a spirit attacks suddenly and very harshly. It usually attacks an individual through his family causing a succession of death, or death followed by serious illness in other members of the family".[60]

Another type is the alien/stranger spirit (*shave*). These are spirits of dead people unknown to the Shona community in which they choose a host/medium. They can also be spirits of animals. The Shona believe that traditional arts such as singing, dancing, divining, healing and hunting are a result of appropriate shave spirit. For example dancing skills are attributed to the baboon spirit. The shave spirit is also accredited for the power to bring luck to hunters. This type of spirit does not play a direct part in upholding the moral code of Shona society as does the family ancestral spirits and the territorial ancestral spirits.[61]

2.4.2. The Human World

The myth of creation above shows that among the Shona the springs of human life comes from *Mwari* the supreme spirit/god and the ancestors. So the Shona confront their own nature as bearers of power associated with spirits. The human world consists of the living, the dead and those about to be born. There is therefore emphasis on obedience to hierarchical power, human and spiritual. Authority, old age and the spiritual are regarded as sacred. Human life is also one with the animals, the plants, and the rest of the world. The highest good is to live in harmony with all these sacred forces. In fact the primary concern of people is with fullness and wholeness in human existence as it is given from the sacred powers and from the ancestors.

Since the main concern is that of re-establishing contact and communion with the sources of power, the ancestors, there are a number of sacred practitioners. These are the elders, the chiefs, diviners, healers, and spirit mediums. These ensure that people recognise their place in the order of things, in family and community and to live according to the traditions that promote the welfare of all. This means honouring the ancestors, consult them about important decisions and observe impor-

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60 Michael. F. C. Bourdillon (1987). Op.Cit., 233.

61 Hubert Bucher (1980). Op.Cit., 89-104.

tant rituals and festivals. So like in most African societies, among the Shona the sacred assumes the form of a special personage. There is therefore the presence in the midst of the community a figure deeply imbued with the sacred. Human existence remains under the tutelage of the sacred. It is observed, regulated and promoted by the sacred.

2.4.2.1. Belief in Witchcraft

The Shona also hold a strong belief in witchcraft. Very often they explain disease and misfortune in terms of witchcraft. They believe that witches use animals, birds and snakes as familiars. Bourdillon confirms this observation. He writes,

> Witches are supposed to keep familiar beasts of the night or of stealth, such as hyenas, owls, ant bears and snakes, which they can ride and send on their errands: these beasts can be used to bewitch a victim...[62]

Most Shona people are afraid of killing these animals because of fear of witchcraft. Others kill them in the belief that witches may not frequent places where there are no familiars to use.

2.5. The Natural World

As in most African worldviews among the Shona the natural world consists of animals, plants and all biological life not classified as animals and plants. Nature also includes phenomena and objects without biological life.[63] Some of these aspects of the tangible world are believed to be imbued with the power of the Great Spirit (*Mwari*), ancestral spirits (*midzimu*), both family and territorial and are therefore spiritually connected. So it appears the Shona hold a paradoxical belief. This is the belief in ancestral spirits as creators and above all things and yet they are regarded to be within all things. For example the presence of certain animals, birds or snakes in the homestead may mean something. The Shona call this *shura*. *Shura* means a brief strange appearance of some rare animal. This signifies something good or bad, depending on appearance of a particular animal, to happen in the not so distant future.[64]

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62 Michael F.C. Bourdillon (1997). Op.Cit., 175.

63 John S. Mbiti (1969). Op.Cit., 16.

64 Interview with chief G.K. Mukanganwi, 05.08.2004, Harare, Zimbabwe.

Usually appearances of snakes signify death in the family.[65] This is why the Shona personify animals.

Animals are mostly personified in the principle of totem-animal (*mutupo*). This is a religious idea around which the Shona understand their relationship to each other and the rest of the world. A clan adopts a particular animal species as its progenitor or *mutupo*. For example, a clan may claim its primogenitor of totem- animal as hippo (*mvuu*). Others may claim theirs as fish (*hove*).[66]

Among the Shona rocks, bodies of water and mountains are also personified as living beings. For example before climbing particular mountains or entering particular forests one must ritually ask its permission. Most aspects of nature are perceived as kin, endowed with consciousness and the power of ancestral spirits. Trees, animals, insects and plants are all to be approached with caution and consideration. This is why Nyajeka using data among the Shona, argues that "life is an organic web. The living and the dead are united. The spiritual and the manifest worlds flow together in a circle".[67] The analysis in this book goes further and argues that while her observations are true, the primary goal is that of keeping right relations with ancestral spirits than a conscious goal to help nature remain in balance. The attitude to which Shona people confront is one of placation, or appeal or coercion and enjoyable association. Overall the Shona believe some aspects of nature to be pervaded by spirits.

2.6. Shona Religion

The basic elements of Shona religion are reflected in the above worldview. First we should note that Shona religion is an ancestral religion. Despite the general widespread belief in *Mwari* as a high god, Shona religious beliefs and practices concentrate on the role of ancestors as superhuman persons active in bestowing blessing as well as misfortune to their descendants. Every homestead head is responsible for performing domestic rituals such as thanks giving, healing, rites of passage, ini-

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65 Ibid.

66 Tumani S. Nyajeka (1996). Op.Cit., 137.

67 Ibid., 135-142.

tiation, marriage, death and birth. On a larger social scale rites of power are performed to reinforce the political order and power of chiefdom. These are done through rituals of rainmaking, fertility, or strengthening the power of chiefs. Sacred specialists, particularly diviners play important roles in Shona religion. They offer their services to individuals, homestead heads and chiefs. So consistent with the social organization described above there are three basic domains of power that operate in traditional Shona religion- the homestead, the chiefdom and the discipline of sacred practitioners.

The Shona worldview implies the African concept of pan-vitalism. This is the belief that everything in the universe has life. This means that the world is not lifeless and material.[68] For the Shona it is alive. As we have seen above the Shona affirm that there are spirits in the trees, forests, rivers, etc. This is consistent with the Shona basic assumptions about nature. For them life force permeates the whole universe and matter and spirit are almost inseparable reality. Behind the natural things and intimately coexisting with them is the non-material power. Although they see a distinction between different animals, this does not allow them to see things in isolation. The myth of origin showed how the Shona believe all things originated from the same ancestors. So the ideal is that like most Africans, the Shona are kin to all creatures, gods, spirits and nature.

All this suggests that at the heart of Shona self-understanding stand the question of ecology. For example writing about the Jindwi Shona T. Bishau argues that Shona religious beliefs play a vital role in determining positive values and attitudes towards nature and should be crucial components of any efficacious environmental policy involving Shona community. Religious taboos and restrictions could take the place of scientific explanation of environmental degradation[69] Theoretically

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[68] For an extensive discussion of the African concept of pan-vitalism see K.C. Anyanwu. 'The African Worldview and Theory of Knowledge', in E.A. Ruch and K.C. Anyanwu (1981*), African Philosophy: An Introduction to Main Philosophical Trends In Contemporary Africa*, 87-90.

[69] Tabitha Bishau (1997). 'Religion and the Natural Environment: An Investigation into the Role of Jindwi Traditional Beliefs and Practices in Environmental Protection' (unpublished Bachelor of Arts dissertation, University of Zimbabwe, Department of Religious Studies, Classics and Philosophy).

therefore one has the impression that the Shona are environmentally friendly in the scientific sense.

In this context the Shona look out upon the cosmos as partaking at once the qualities of human, nature and spirits. So the primary indistinction of the personal, natural and sacred qualities is the first characteristic to be asserted of the worldview and religion of the Shona. As a result Shona people under the influence of traditional religion do not set out to control or master or exploit nature. In Shona worldview human beings and nature are bound together by one moral order. The ultimate sanction for morality resides in sacred authority. This is conceived in a hierarchical pattern of, in descending order, the supreme god (*Mwari*), territorial ancestors, family ancestors and community elders. This moral order is human-centred. Though it has links to the sacred powers, to the ancestors and to nature, and indirectly leads to respect and conservation to some aspects of nature, the ultimate goal is that of serving human well-being only. This is why when a Shona acts practically towards nature his/her actions may be limited by moral considerations.

To find out the practical Shona attitudes to nature we consider Shona attitudes to particular aspects of nature.

2.7. Shona Attitudes to Nature

This section deals first with sacredness of the land. The reason is that land is believed to be the back (*musana*) of the ancestors on which nature and humanity are carried. It then moves to a discussion of attitudes to animals, trees, water bodies/wetlands forests and mountains. The main focus on each aspect is to show that despite the belief that people are kin to nature in practice the attitude is discriminative. Further it will also show how attitudes to a particular aspect may lead to a privileged access to natural resources. There is a different understanding of nature in terms of its sacredness. Some aspects are disregarded and treated with the least fear/care and reverence because, using Eliade's terminology, they are not hierophanic in any sense. Those treated as hierophanies or as ends in themselves suffer the least. This means that Shona attitudes to nature are ambivalent. Extreme attitudes coincide: ecologically responsible and ecologically harmful.

2.7.1. The Land

The Shona share with most Africans the belief in land as sacred. It is ancestral land. Land is sacred because it bears the remains of the ancestors particularly in the form of graves of the chiefs. Shona religion is based on the grave. In the central rituals of *kumutsa mudzimu* (rituals in honour of ancestors) the point of entry is the grave. In other rituals libations are poured on the ground. In the land is also buried the umbilical code of people. It is the abode of the dead. When counting members of the family the Shona always include *varipasi* (those who in underworld). As result land is personified in sayings such as *pasi ratsamwa, pasi panodya* (the land is angry, the land can kill). As we have noted above ancestral spirits and chiefs own the land. At the installation of the chief holds in a clenched fist soil mixed with the body fluids of the late chief/ just soil from his grave.[70] Primarily it is the chiefdom that stands in special relations with the land. It is the land bequeathed to chief by the ancestors. Land belongs to the living, the unborn and the dead.

The chief acts as the trustee. He allocates land to people. The land does not have a marketable value. Land rights are vested in co-operative groups that have overriding right over those of individuals. So it cannot be sold or transferred to another. The chief also ensures that people follow certain taboos. For example there is a taboo that forbids commoners to eat the flesh of an ant bear because it burrows the land. But the ant bear is a delicacy of the chief. Another example is that the chief's household reserves the flesh of the side of an elephant on which it lies when it drops dead for consumption.[71] Further the chief also authorises through ritual the gathering of wild fruits in forests regarded as sacred. He also, as we shall see in the discussion below prohibits the cutting of certain trees and the hunting of certain animals and the pollution of certain water bodies.[72] There is need to, however, note at the outset that each Shona group/chiefdom has its own restrictions and taboos towards particular animals, trees or water bodies according to its religious belief system and values related to its historical development.

A fundamental attitude to land can be drawn from the above. Land (*nyika*) with its natural resources is owned by the ancestral guardians of the

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70 Hubert Bucher (1980). Op.Cit., 31.

71 Ibid., 32

72 Marthinus L. Daneel (2001). Op.Cit., 20.

land (*varidzi venyika*). Attitudes are strong when attached to ancestral ownership of land and the belief in sacredness of the land serves as a common history that unite all generations of the same Shona subgroup. The Shona believe that if one does not relate to sacred aspects of nature according to prescribed taboos and restrictions the ancestors would be angry (*kutsamwa*) and as result some misfortune, such as drought and epidemics, might befall the community. So the fundamental attitude to land is a religious one and is based on fear of mystical sanction by the ancestors. This underlies all attitudes to other aspects of nature like animals.

There is also a discriminative attitude. The land outside a particular chiefdom may not be sacred for people of other chiefdoms. The chief's family may protect even some animals of religious significance for consumption only. So the chief and his family may have a privileged access to natural resources.

2.7.2. Animals

The Shona like many other African people recognise that spirits operate in the human world through animals, birds and fish. Each Shona subgroup has its own taboos and restrictions towards particular animals. Certain animals and birds like *mvuu* (hippo), *hove* (fish), *mheta* (water-python), *garwe* (crocodile), *hungwe* (fish-eagle), *mbiti* (otter), *soko* (monkey), *shava* (antelope), *beta* (termites), *humba* (wild-pig/warthog), *nzou* (elephant), *shumba* (lion), and *nyati* (buffalo) are considered totems. The animals related to aquatic life are associated with the beginning of the Karanga Shona. As a result the Mwedzi myth of creation described earlier on is often associated with the Karanga. They trace their origin from *dzivaguru* (the great pool). So each aquatic species is believed to be their progenitor (*mutupo*/totem – animal). Other Shona groups claim their beginnings in the terrestrial region. For example the Mbire Shona have a creation myth centred on the great monkey (*soko*). So the different clans derive their primogenitors/totem from terrestrial species.[73] The Shona believe that if totemic animals are killed mysterious diseases and wounds will catch up children.

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[73] Tumani M. Nyajeka (1996). Op.Cit., 137.

Furthermore Shona clan names are the name of the totemic animal. Members of the clan are forbidden to eat the flesh of the animal. In some cases there is taboo on some part of the animal. A person may not be allowed to eat, for example, the heart or trunk of an elephant or possibly some inedible part. If one breaks the taboo one may lose his/her teeth or experience some other harm. For example Pongweni confirms this. He writes:

> The totemic animal has a taboo attached to it or to parts of its carcass such that the totem bearer is forbidden to eat. Infringement of this taboo has certain concomitant magical sanctions, such as loss of teeth or leprosy (*maperembudz*i).[74]

This implies that most totemic animals by virtue of taboos attached to their parts are open to killing. The Shona kill them on special rituals or for using their skin for ceremonial dress for chiefs or when diviners perform rituals for public interest. Overall, however, the totem, in some sense, is more than names of animals. Events involving the animals are signs from ancestral spirits. Totemic animals have mythical and religious significance.[75] This is why they feature in Shona praise poetry.

The Shona associate other animals that are not totemic animals such as the owl, tortoise and hyena with bad omen. Killing such animals is believed to be bad omen because the Shona believe these animals to be familiars that witches use.[76] This leaves other species open to killing. Sometimes they are killed in large numbers. This is justified by the belief in hunting alien spirits talked about in the section on the spiritual world of the Shona. For example there is a hill forest called *Chinyamademo*. The name means anyone who went in the hill with an axe would come back with some meat. The Shona believed that the spirits of the area supplied the meat.[77] This was a place where many wild animals lived. A good hunter would kill many animals.

Looking at totemism as it relates to Shona relations with nature with a less critical eye than she does when relating it to the status of women

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74 Alec J.C Pongweni (1996). *Shona Praise Poetry as Role Negotiation: The Battles of the Clans and the Sexes*, 9.

75 See Michael. F.C. Bourdillon (1987). Op.Cit., 24-25.

76 See section on witchcraft beliefs above.

77 See Claude G. Mararike (1999). Survival Strategies in Rural Zimbabwe, 46-47.

Tumani reaches the conclusion that the romantic school subscribes to. Her statement is therefore worth quoting at length. She says,

> The *mutupo* (totemism) principle focuses on fostering the primary relationships between animals and humans, animals and the deity, humans and humans, deity and humans, nature and humans, the dead and the living. The *mutupo* principle attempts to enumerate or approximate the ideal mode of life which assures a sustainable future of all of existence. An analysis of the fundamental elements of the *mutupo* principle reveals that it is a principle which seeks to create a cosmology that takes the existence of non-human entities seriously.[78]

This ideal picture may need to be qualified in the light of the Shona practical attitudes to nature. One need to be wary of the risks involved in taking totemism as a rallying point for environmental ethic and should not put a blind trust in this principle.

The primary critical position that we must take is to note that everything connected with totemism is puzzling. Extreme opposites coincide: good and evil, accepted and forbidden practices. It has been seen above how the permitted and the prohibited is found in the treatment of certain totemic animals. Some animal species can be preserved for generations as a result of totemism while others will not. The situation is worse for those species that seem to be outside Shona system of religious values and beliefs. The positive attitude is more on animals that are identified as positive and vital part of religious life. The Shona discriminative attitude to nature persists in relation to animals. A redefinition of animal life's sacredness may be needed as much as it is need this in other aspects of nature such as plant life. This does not however mean that we underrate or do not appreciate the community function that totemism serves with respect to ecology and to natural conservation.

2.7.3. Trees/Forests/Mountain Forests

The Shona also believe that particular trees, forests and mountain forests are imbued with spirits. They develop, like in the case of animals, taboos around the cutting and destruction of certain trees, shrubs and forests. In this section much of the examples are from Daneel's extensive research on the significance and symbolism of trees among the Karanga Shona and also for some of the trees' scientific names.

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[78] Tumani M. Nyajeka (1996). Op.Cit., 137-138.

2.7.3.1. Forests/ Mountain Forests

There is strong belief among the Shona in sacred forest/mountain forests. In most cases these are sacred groves. This is where they have the burial sites of their chiefs. Daneel's finding is correct that sometimes sacred groves encompass large mountain ranges. These places are therefore the habitat of ancestral spirits. So all aspects of nature, plants, and wildlife and water bodies are under the mystical tutelage of ancestral spirits and guardian animals (*mhondoro*). These could be lions, baboons, leopards and snakes.[79] Chiefs, spirit mediums and ward headmen monitor this guardianship. Access to natural resources in these forests is a special prerogative of the chiefly house. Access not sanctioned through ritual is dangerous because it may result in death.

For example one of the weekly newspapers in Zimbabwe, The Manica Post of the week 6-12 August 2004, carried the story of 19-year-old Loveness Bhunu who disappeared in the sacred Nzunza Mountains. She had gone there to look for sweeping brooms. She was with her 8-year-old sister who survived death after falling down a slope. The story surrounding her disappearance is that she angered the spirits of the mountains by despising the size of the sweeping brooms. The villagers in this area believe and are convinced that the spirits of the mountains were angry and caused the girl's death.[80] Gelfand who did research among the Korekore Shona confirms this belief that time. He writes:

> So strong is this feeling among the Shona that one entering a strange area in a forest, a mountain or a beautiful spot is not allowed to comment on it least he upsets the ancestral spirits *(vadzimu*) of the region.[81]

Such sacred forests are traditionally called *rambatemwa*. This literally means 'woodlands that cannot be cut.'[82] The ancestral spirits rest here. They are passageway and habitat of *mhondoro* (ancestral spirits in the form of animals.[83] The Shona consider it morally wrong to cut trees in these places. Firewood and building material is fetched from places

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79 Marthinus L. Daneel (2001). Op.Cit., 90.

80 The Manica Post, Mutare 6-12 August 2004, 'Misssing Girl Found Dead in Sacred Mountain', 1.

81 Michael Gelfand (1972). *Shona Religion*, 54.

82 Sara C. Mvududu (1996). Op.Cit., 152.

83 Ibid.

other than these sacred places. So some animals and plant life are protected in this manner.

2.7.3.2. Trees

The Shona also have taboos in relation to cutting or destroying certain trees. There is a belief that all large trees belong to the ancestral spirits. For example Daneel found this among the Karanga Shona. He comments, "Virtually all large trees (*miti mikuru*) were protected as they belonged to the *samarombo* - ancestors who were believed to dwell in tree branches."[84] The belief in ancestral spirits living in tree branches is also implied in death rituals. In the bringing back home the ancestor ritual some Shona use the branches of certain big trees. They symbolically drag the branch from the deceased's grave to the homestead. The most commonly used branches are those of *muhacha/muchakata* (parinari *curatellifolia*) and *mutuwa* (*kirkia acuminata*) trees.[85]

Some trees with religious significance are *mubvumira* (*kirkia acuminata*) used to ritually ark the establishment of a new homestead, and *muzeze* (*peltoforum africanum*) whose branches are used for ritual purification after burial.[86] In his research Mukamuri found that the following trees also have religious significance. Fruit trees such as *mushavi* and *muonde* meeting places for rain-asking ritual (*mutoro/mukwerere*).[87]

The list of examples could be endless.[88] What is important to note with most sacred trees is that the Shona believe that some trees are imbued with spirits, particularly ancestral spirits. As a result these trees, like other sacred aspects of nature, are a vital part of religious life because they belong to ancestors. They can only be cut with the ritual permission

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84 Marthinus L. Daneel (2001). Op.Cit., 92.

85 See Hubert Bucher (1980). Op.Cit., 74-83 for details about the bringing back home ritual and the use of tree branches.

86 Marthinus L. Daneel (2001). Op.Cit., 93.

87 Mukamuri B.B. (1995). 'Local Environmental Conservation Strategies: Karanga Religion, Politics and Environmental Control', in *Environment and History* (1995) 1, 308-309.

88 For example Mvududu (1996). Op.Cit., 151, mentions *mupanda* trees that cannot be used for firewood because herbalists use them in exorcising avenging spirits, *muninu* is believed to cause family disputes if used for firewood.

of the chief. If one does not ask for permission it means one is fighting the ancestors. This invokes the wrath of both the chief and the ancestors. A chief may ask for a fine. This can be a sacrificial goat, sheep or cow for conciliatory ritual with the ancestors. So the cutting of certain trees is prohibited and guarded by ancestral spirits or certain trees are protected because of their significance in rituals. Some water bodies are protected in a similar manner.

2.8. Water Bodies/Wetlands

Water bodies/wetlands are sacred because they are the abode of animals associated with spirits. The Shona use the concept *kuyera* in relation with this. The closest English translation of *kuyera* is abstinence. These means people should approach sacred water bodies carefully and observe taboos. For example they should not use iron buckets to draw water from these places. They must use gourds, wooden or clay containers, which have not been used for cooking. The guardians of wetland are animals such as the python and *njuzu* (water sprites). The Shona believe that these animals keep these waters on behalf of *varipasi* (underworld). Wrong doers may be drowned in the pool by these animals.[89]

Water from such sources is used for ritual purposes. For example the Shona believe that it has healing powers, can be used by traditional healers to initiate spirit possession and cooling avenging spirits. Some water sources are associated with historical healing spirit medium.[90]

2.9. The Ethical Consequences of Shona Attitudes to Nature

Does the above analysis of Shona attitudes to nature suggest that at the heart of Shona religion stands the question of environmental conservation? Theoretically one can give an affirmative answer and argue that Shona religion necessarily serve environmental functions. This is the position of the romantic school. It tends to imply that the Shona plan to practice such attitudes in the way a religious environmentalist would do.

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89 B.B. Mukamuri (1995). Op.Cit., 304-305.

90 Ibid.

The problem is that while theoretically the Shona believe that they are kin to nature in practice their attitudes are ambivalent and discriminative.

Shona attitudes to nature show that not all animals, plant life and water sources are sacred. This means not all aspects of nature play a pivotal and vital role in their beliefs about salvation. So there is a different understanding of nature in terms of its sacredness. As a result some aspects are treated with least care and reverence. This is justified through hunting alien spirits. Regarding totemic animals the issue is even ambivalent as ecologically responsible and harmful attitudes coincide. In terms of environmental conservation it means the least revered species are more prone to destruction than those Shona believe are imbued with spirits. So this may lead to the problem of overexploitation and under utilisation of natural resources.

In light of this one can note three attitudes to nature. These are to maintain, obey and act on it. The first two are related to sacred aspects of nature. They are primarily based on fear of reprisal from powerful ancestral spirits. As we mentioned in the discussions above the attitudes are one of placation appeal and coercion. Sacred aspects are not indifferent. They are morally significant. They care. They are involved in conduct. So they constitute a system of moral consequences. This is why respect is based on fear rather than on environmental consciousness.

Reverence to some aspects of nature is a religious attitude that develops around social, political and economic spheres of life. The whole scheme is tied to expressing loyalty to the chief. It was shown how the chief is respected because of his connection with sovereignty over land (*nyika*). He holds land as a trustee of ancestral spirits who are the real owners. The spirits are approached trough the chief who works in close association with spirit mediums. The chief is the one who intercedes with their ancestors who are linked to the productivity of the land. Ecologically responsible attitudes are stronger when attached to traditional social, political and economic organization. This results in a privileged access to natural resources by the chief and his close kin.

The third attitude to nature, to act on it, is encouraged by hunting spirits and magical and divination rituals that use charms and fetishes of parts of animals. These are not imbued with spirits. So they are removed from

the realm of religious ethics and morality. People do not have obligations towards these. There is no need for restrains in dealing with them.

Further if one considers the attitudes to land one can infer a land ethic consistent with traditional African land ethics. With respect to ownership rights it is the social group that is considered as the owner of the land. This could be a clan, kingship group, or family. To have the right of ownership means a great responsibility from both the individual and the community, because the ultimate owner of the land is the great ancestral spirit, *Mwari*. So the Shona believe that ancestors gave the land to them. Land is therefore a communal property belonging to both the living and the dead. This could hold only at times when the Shona anticipated no change in the future of their communities.

2.10. The Limit to Romantic Views of Shona Attitudes to Nature

Those who tend to romanticise Shona attitude to nature argue as if nothing significant has changed. Something has changed that may not warrant romanticism. Since colonialism there has been the introduction of a cash economy and modern ways of farming. Administratively there are now district councils running parallel with traditional role of chiefs and sometimes taking over some such as legal and consultative matters. Where people used to fear ancestral spirits because they may with hold rain and productivity of land, now they can have successful harvests by using fertilisers. Many mission churches are providing agricultural education and extension services. As a result Christians tend to be more successful farmers than non-Christians.

So in some cases the chiefs are losing their political importance, and the same is happening to the spirits that have traditionally supported them. Christianity provides a religion that stretches beyond the limiting boundaries of kinship group or chiefdom. This does not however mean that the whole system collapses. Many Shona people still maintain traditional religious beliefs.[91]

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[91] For a detailed analysis of religious and cultural changes in Zimbabwe see Bourdillon's (1997). *Where Are the Ancestors,* Op.Cit.

In modern Zimbabwe where people are now constantly meeting people from other religious and cultural backgrounds, to hold uncritically to old and regionalised attitudes to nature is not likely to satisfy global environmental concerns. It may be possible to maintain at local level but we need something with a broad base in order to cope with global environmental problems. This is where dialogue with other religions such as Christianity comes in. Do the Shona and Christian attitudes to land necessarily clash?

2.11. Conclusion

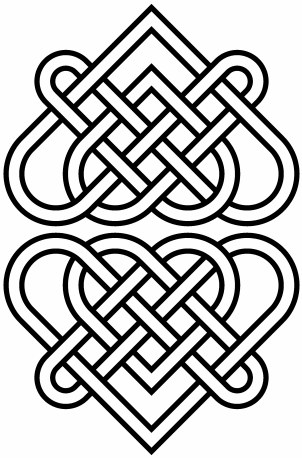
The purpose of the present chapter was to engage into a descriptive and critical analysis of Shona attitudes to nature. The examples of some animals, plant life and water sources were used to demonstrate the discriminative Shona attitudes based on a certain understanding sacredness of nature. A number of conclusions can be drawn from the foregoing discussions, reiterating the hypothesis that Shona attitudes to nature are discriminative and ambivalent.

Looking at Shona attitudes from a practical point of view it is possible to conclude that Shona attitudes to nature are both ecologically responsible and harmful. Reverence, responsibility and restraint in connection with interaction with sacred aspects of nature are based on the fear of ancestral spirits. This generates two attitudes to nature, to obey and to maintain nature. These attitudes are strongly linked to traditional religious, social, economic and political institutions that chiefs use to control people. These employ the idioms of taboos, totemism, *kuyera* (abstinence) and *rambatemwa* (sacred groves). On the other hand an attitude of acting on nature based on belief in alien spirits propounds the idea that some aspects are disenchanted. They do not play ethical religious significance.

The chapter also raised the issues of the resultant of overexploitation and underutilization of nature and the privileged access to some natural resources by the ruling lineage. It also highlighted the traditional Shona land ethic. Further it raised the issue that something is changing in the material background in which Shona attitudes to nature hold strongly.

The question remains how best to proceed with Shona attitudes to nature. Is it desirable to, in the light of the environmental crisis in Zimbabwe, proceed within the framework of traditional Shona religion and

institutions or should attempts be made to work within a secular framework like the one presupposed in current Christian discourse on attitudes to nature. Should the true impact of Shona attitudes to nature on global environmental problems be evaluated and redefined in the light of other religions such as Christianity? In order to answer this question there is need to, first, examine Christian attitudes to nature in the next chapter.



3 CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES TO NATURE

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter examined Shona attitudes to nature. It demonstrated that Shona attitudes to nature are ambivalent and discriminative. There it was indicated that it is not possible to evaluate and redefine Shona attitudes to nature in the light of Christianity before acquainting ourselves with Christian attitudes to nature.

Primarily this is the task of this chapter. The purpose of this chapter is to examine western/biblical Christian attitudes to nature. it explores these attitudes based on biblical Christianity and the various interpretations of the Bible in an attempt to recover attitudes to nature[92]. So the focus of this chapter is to describe and examine Christian attitudes to nature drawn from the Bible[93] and its interpretations.[94] The central question is what values and beliefs Christianity brings to bear upon various aspects of nature? This involves testing the hypothesis that Christianity pictures nature as material, mechanical and devoid of spirit that is reserved exclusively for humans.

The chapter begins by highlighting the nature of environmental crisis, the complexity of Christian attitudes to nature and the modern view of nature that current discourses on Christian attitudes to nature assume. After this it outlines the Christian worldview that informs Christian attitudes to nature. A discussion of Christian attitudes to nature focusing on

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92 I am aware that indeed there is a rich diversity of Christian attitudes to nature emerging from different beliefs about creation and humanity's place in it. R.S. Gottlieb (ed.)(2004). *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment.* New York and London: Routledge (second edition), for example has contributions representing the voices of the American Baptist Churches USA and Evangelical Lutheran church in America. Since I have not yet done an empirical research in Zimbabwe along this direction I take biblical Christianity as the first step since most churches use it as their authoritative sacred book.

93 'Bible' refers to the Christian Old and New Testaments.

94 Not withstanding exegetical and redactional interpretations that point to other directions, such as to Jesus or his disciples.

ecologically harmful and responsible attitudes to nature follows. After this it considers the ethical consequences of Christian attitudes to nature.

3.2. The Nature of Environmental Crisis and Christian Discourse on Nature

Current discussion on Christian attitudes to nature is in the context of environmental crisis created by industrial growth and technological manipulation fostered by the modern view nature. So discourse on Christian attitudes to nature clearly focus on

> ... Our modern concerns over the human degradation of creation, the deterioration of the ozone layer, the threats to life from global warming, the effects of massive garbage and toxic waste disposal, the problems of deforestation and desertification or the loss of biological bio-diversity.[95]

This means the discussions presuppose the finding of science. Further it is clear that pollution, the depletion of natural resources, the extinction of species and the destruction of wildernesses and the increase in population count as ecological problems. These are ecological problems in the sense that society will be better off without them.[96]

This background is important particularly when we discuss Christian attitudes to nature. The ideas of domination of nature, anthropocentrism, desacralisation and degradation of nature and matter form part of the critique of negative Christian attitudes to nature. The positive attitudes to nature aim at addressing the environmental problems we have just outlined.[97]

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[95] David Rhoads. 'Reading the New Testament in the Environmental Age', http//www.webofcreation.org/worship/resourcesrhoads.html, 18-4-2005, 1.

[96] John Passmore (1974). *Man's Responsibility for Nature: Ecological Problems and Western Traditions*, 43.

[97] This does not mean that we will find in the Bible these modern ecological problems.

3.3. The Complexity of Christian Attitudes to Nature

One should note from the outset that Christian attitudes to nature are complex and controversial. It is a complex picture in which one finds ecologically harmful and responsible attitudes to nature. Attfield argues,

> ... Christian attitudes to nature are often held to perpetuate these problems.[98] There is some evidence for these views, but there is much more evidence than is usually acknowledged for other, more beneficent Christian attitudes to the environment and to non-human nature ...[99]

Kinsley is concise on controversial positions regarding Christian attitudes to nature. He summarises four positions. First is the position that 'Christianity, and the Bible on which it is based, have had a negative effect on the development of ecological spirituality.'[100] Second is the position that the Bible and Christianity contain resources for constructing an ecological spirituality.[101] The third position is that the Bible and Christianity are vague on ecological issues.[102] The fourth position is of people whose aim is not to determine the actual position or positions of the Bible and Christianity on ecological issues, but rather argue that Christians select passages and themes from the Bible that support their views and disregard passages that do not.[103]

These positions are a result of the critic of Christianity constituting primarily negative attitudes to nature. The most ardent critic is Lynn White Jr. His thesis is that western Christianity is to blame for the ecological crisis we face today. It rejects the worldview in which spirits are associated with or inhabit, natural objects such as trees, animals, rivers, mountains and the planets permeate nature. He writes, "By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects."[104]

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98 'These problems' refers to ecological problems.

99 Robin Attfield (1983). 'Christian attitudes to nature', in *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1983) Vol. 44:3, 369.

100 David Kinsley (1995). *Ecology and Religion: Ecological Spirituality in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, 101.

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid.

103 Ibid.

104 Lynn White Jr. (1967). 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis', in *Science*, Vol. 155:3767, 1203.

When describing and analysing Christian attitudes to nature there is use of observations within this and current debates concerning Christian attitudes to nature. Instances where they cite and interpret evidence from the Bible and relate it to Christian beliefs or doctrines will be considered. This enables me to reconstruct both negative and positive attitudes. This is because when critically comparing the attitudes with those of Shona there is need to highlight what needs to be rejected. So a detailed evaluation of these positions lies beyond the scope of this chapter.

Since this discussion is inclined to western/biblical Christianity it is important to summarise the modern view of nature. This is the attitude to nature that Christianity tries to challenge. Moreover the negative Christian attitudes to nature seem to be more inclined to the modern view of nature.

3.4. Christian Attitudes to Nature and the Modern View of Nature

In current debates about the Christian attitudes to nature we tend to see the modern worldview as responsible for our ecological crisis. Sometimes we suppose that the modern view of the world is inspired by and dependent upon biblical or Christian view of reality. It seems also clear that Christianity adapted to the modern worldview and tends to support the modern project of mastering nature. There is also a tendency to define current positive Christian attitudes to nature in direct opposition to the modern worldview. It is therefore important to consider briefly the modern worldview as background to our discussion of Christian attitudes to nature. In many ways, today, it appears it is this worldview that Christians oppose and criticise.

3.4.1. The Modern View of Nature

The modern worldview has a tendency to view nature as disenchanted. It also inclines itself with asserting the complete mastery of human beings over all other aspects of nature. The modern view of nature revolves around the following: the pre-eminence and natural superiority of humans. This advocates the view that people are like god in their wisdom, inventiveness, creativity and intelligence. So it is human destiny and

nature to master creation.[105] Second is the issue of the disenchantment of nature. Here the view is that nature is not sacred. God created it but it is not divine. It is only human beings who are endowed with souls and made in the image of God. So creation is not animate in the sense of containing souls.[106] Thirdly there is the investigation and domination of nature. The spirit of this orientation is captured in the following words,

> The new man of science must not think that the inquisition of nature is in any way forbidden. Nature must be bound into service and made a slave, put in constraint and moulded by mechanical arts. The searchers and spies of nature are to discover her plots and secrets.[107]

The scientific analysis and experimentation implied in the latter quotation is related to a fourth idea. This is the idea of objectivity and aloofness. This position emphasises human beings are different and stand apart from the rest of the natural world. So it is not possible to think of nature as consisting of beings with whom one could establish rapport.[108] Fifth is the notion of infinity. This fosters the idea that reality consists of an open universe infinite in size.[109] The mastery of nature implied in the notions that have been mentioned so far presupposes a certain notion of progress. In the modern worldview progress means,

> Moving from a condition in which nature overwhelms, dominates, humbles, or confines human beings to a condition in which human beings conquer, control, and manipulate nature for their own purposes or for the well-being of the human race.[110]

As a result nature is viewed primarily as resource to be exploited in the human quest for progress.[111]

Considering this brief sketch of modern view of nature one would conclude that the roots of ecological crisis lie in the 'coalition of science and technology.'[112] But as has already been noted Lynn White Jr. argues that

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105 David Kinsley (1995). Op.Cit., 126.

106 Ibid., 127.

107 Ibid., 129.

108 Ibid., 130.

109 Ibid., 131.

110 Ibid., 132.

111 For a detailed examination of the modern view of nature implied in the notions I mentioned and others such as wilderness, the struggle for existence and technology and insulation of nature see David Kinsley. ibid., 125-140.

112 Robin Attfield (1983). Op.Cit., 370.

the worldview we have described above reflects an interpretation of the tradition inherited by the western world from the creation story in the book of Genesis. He argues,

> Christianity in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asian religions not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends.[113]

This according to White is the root of our ecological crisis[114]. Could this be consistent with the Christian worldview?

3.5. The Christian Worldview[115]

This section discusses the Christian worldview in general. This is not intended to be comprehensive. This is because there is a problem. There is a problem of the varieties of Christian worldviews.[116] Some elements of the Christian worldview are the context from which two issues stem. The first issue is the belief that negative attitudes can be traced in part to Christianity itself. Second, there is the belief that the Christian worldview supports positive attitudes to nature.

The discussion centres on God, human beings and nature. These themes are at the centre of Christian ecological thinking. They are the ones that are open for examination and reinterpretation. Most people are considering how to speak more meaningful of these themes in a world facing ecological challenges.[117] These broad themes are related to other themes. For example, Hessel and Ruether observe,

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113 Lynn White Jr. (1967). Op.Cit., 1205.

114 For the most ardent critique and modifier of White's position see John Passmore (1974). *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, London: Duckworth.

115 I assume that Christianity shares with Judaism not just its sacred books, but also its basic assumptions about the nature of God, creation and humanity's special role within creation.

116 The Christian worldview may vary according to denominational orientations and also according to whether one emphasizes God, creation, eschatology, salvation, etc.

117 See for example contributions to part three, 'Ecotheology in an Age of Environmental Crisis', in Roger S. Gottlieb (ed.)(2004). *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*. New York and London: Routledge, 189-381 (second edition).

> Now all those who do theology must reconsider how to speak more meaningfully of theological symbols, such as God, creation, soul body, Christ, sin, evil, salvation, and eschatology in a world facing deep environmental challenge.[118]

These and other themes will be considered within the broad themes of the nature of God, humanity and nature.

3.5.1. God

3.5.1.1. Old Testament: Genesis 1:1-2:4 and 2:4ff, Psalm 74:12-17 and 89:5-12, Proverbs 8:22-31, Job 38 and 39, Isaiah 42:5 and 66:1-2 and Jeremiah 10:12-13

It is important to focus on God because ideas of God and teachings about the relation between God humans shape Christian attitudes to nature. This enables one to examine how Christian theology can obstruct development of a respect for nature or foster it. The central idea in Christianity is the insistence on monotheism. There is one God, the creator of all that exists. So Christianity rejects all forms of polytheism or plurality of gods that control this world. God is almighty creator. No other divine power controls any aspect of the created world. But Christians also believe that God is transcendent, beyond creation, not part of it. So the perspective of monism or non-dualism is also rejected. Everything is not God. The world is not God but the good creation of God. Further God is personal. God acts in relation to humans as a partner working through people and events to carry out the sacred design for the world. Humans are there to assist God to care for this world fulfilling God's design.[119]

Christians derive this view from two creation stories in the book of Genesis. These are in Genesis 1:1-2:4 and 2:4ff. This is why Holm and Bowker argue that Christian attitudes to nature have been formed through the doctrine of creation.[120] One also finds God's power and re-

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118 Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (2000). 'Introduction Current Thought on Christianity and Ecology', in Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (2000). *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans,* xxxv-xxxvi.

119 Theodore M. Ludwig (1989). *The Sacred Paths: Understanding the Religions of the World,* 77-78.

120 Jean Holm and John Bowker (1994). *Attitudes to Nature,* 29.

sponsibility as creator in Psalm 74:12-17 and 89:5-12, Proverbs 8:22-31, Job 38 and 39, Isaiah 42:5 and 66:1-2 and Jeremiah 10:12-13. So the creation stories foster the belief that nature is a setting for human life.

3.5.1.2. New Testament: Colossians1:15-20, John1:3, 1 Corinthians 6:8

In the New Testament stories about God's creation of the world are only implicit. As Rhoads observes, '... there are no stories about God's creation of the world, stories that explicitly articulate conceptions of creation and the place of humans in creation'.[121] The importance of the New Testament in the Christian concept of God is that there are passages that talk about creation and new creation as the work of God and Christ. Rhoads elaborates that the New Testament assumes fundamental points of continuity with Old Testament views of creation. There are New Testament passages that assign a role for Christ in creation as well as a role in redeeming the whole creation, for example Colossians1: 15-20.[122] As a result of this observation God the creator ultimately means God the father of Jesus Christ is the creator of nature. Jesus is also one through whom all things were made. (John 1:3, 1 Corinthians 6:8) The Holy Spirit is the lord, the giver of life. So God is the one and triune God who creates the cosmos.[123]

Overall Christians believe in a clear distinction between God and creation. God stands over against the world he/she has created. Although God loves nature and sustains it God is absolutely demarcated from nature. So it seems important for God not to be equated with nature. In this sense God is transcendent. But God as the Holy Spirit relates to creation in an immanent way. The main idea is that God is transcendent, while lovingly sustaining each creature; and immanent, while wholly other than creation and not to be identified with it.

3.5.2. The Human World

3.5.2.1. Genesis 1:26-29, 9:1-3, Psalms 8:5-8, Col. 1:19-20

Christians believe that humans are the highest creation of God. God made human beings in his image. Their greatest good lies in fulfilling

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121 David Rhoads. Op.Cit., 1.

122 Ibid.

123 See Rogers S. Gottlieb (2004). Op.Cit., 215.

the will of the creator. Following the creation account in Genesis 2, God forms humanity from the dust of the ground. People are endowed with great power to master nature. The status of humanity is in Genesis 1:26-29, 9:1-3 and Psalms 8:5-8.[124] These passages as we shall note have been blamed for negative Christian attitudes to nature. For now they serve to show that there is a sense in which Christians view humanity as being above nature. Genesis 1:28 establishes that people have dominion over nature. However this text also clearly states the people are creations of God. So from the perspective of God's authority and control people and nature are in the same class. This is in the sense that all of creation including people must submit to God's plans and ways.

Through the fall humanity disturbs the harmony of creation. The story of the fall of humanity is in Genesis 3. So Christians believe that humans fell into sin. They rebelled against God. They therefore created estrangement from both God and creation. Prior to the fall God people and nature had close spiritual fellowship with each other. This is where, as shall be seen in later sections, one can draw a pessimistic view of humanity and its relationship with God and creation. However human beings have hope. God's image marred by sin can be remade through Jesus Christ.[125] God's purpose in Christ is to heal and bring wholeness not only to persons but the entire created order (Col. 1: 19-20).

3.5.3. The Natural World

3.5.3.1. Genesis 1:4,10,12,18,21,25, Psalm 146:6, Acts14: 15 and Revelation 4:11

Considering what has been said about God and the human world it is already clear that nature is a result of God's creation. Christians recognise that God created all things from Genesis 1, Psalm 146:6, Acts 14: 15 and Revelation 4:11. For example in Revelation 4:11 we read, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."[126] God creates aspects of nature before humanity and calls it aspects of creation good. (Gen 1:4,10,12,18,21,25).

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124 See David Kinsley (1995). Op.Cit., 105.

125 Roger S. Gottlieb (2004). Op.Cit., 217-222.

126 This and all subsequent Bible quotations are from the Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments, Cambridge University Press.

So just as is done to human beings God declares all creation good. God however places a higher value on people (Gen.1: 6-30). This means nature is not elevated above people. For example Romans1: 20-23 shows that people knew God but elevated nature to objects or idols of worship. For Christians worship of anything in nature violates the second commandment (Exod.20:4-5).

This does not mean that nature has no value. Gottlieb observes that God cares for everything. For example God cares for animals (Gen. 6-9), plants (Psalm 147:8), deserts and wastelands (Job 38:25-27).[127] God also allows people to use nature. Nature is created to help meet people's needs such as food and shelter.

In relation to what we described in the human world Christians believe that nature is subject to corruption by sin and ultimate redemption through Jesus Christ. This ties in well with the belief that God is linked to all creation through incarnation. In Jesus Christ God takes an earthly material[128] of human life. Through Christ God is reconciled to all things.

Overall the Christian worldview we have sketched here shows that there is a fundamental separation between God and creation including people. God is above people and nature and both people and elements of nature such as plants interact and live together. Within the physical world people are above nature. They are created in the image of God to have dominion over nature. This discrete distinction between God, nature and humanity form the basis of current debate on Christian and biblical attitudes to nature. The next section will show how these and the doctrines mentioned above are at play in the exploration of Christian attitudes to particular aspects of nature.

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127 Ibid., 216.

128 There is a controversy concerning the value of the material world. Gnosticism associated with first century Christian church taught that the spiritual world contains all that is good, and that everything in the physical or material world is bad. Under Gnosticism, nature would have a negative value and is something that should be disregarded in person's life.

3.6. Christian Attitudes to Nature

3.6.1. Genesis 1:1-2:4b and 2:4b-25, Genesis 9:1-3 and Psalm 8:5-8

This section presents and analyse Christian attitudes to nature. First it deals with the attitudes to nature in general as one can infer from the doctrine of creation. This is because the author agrees with Holm and Bowker who argue that Christian attitudes to nature have been formed through the doctrine of creation.[129] Within this context of creation the focus is on biblical evidence and evidence from current theological thinking that deal with Christian attitudes to specific aspects of nature. The hypothesis is that one can infer negative and positive attitudes to nature. The argument is that at the same time that Christianity shows positive attitudes to nature it does not endorse the idea that nature is sacred.

Generally one can infer both positive and negative attitudes to nature from creation accounts in the book of Genesis. These are the Priestly and Yahwist accounts in Genesis 1:1-2:4b and 2:4b-25 respectively. These are related to what we read in Genesis 9:1-3 and Psalm 8:5-8. In the context of these texts let us begin by dealing with the possible negative attitudes to nature that Lynn White criticises.

3.6.2. Ecologically Harmful Attitudes

3.6.2.1. Old Testament: Genesis1: 26, Genesis 9:1-3 and Psalm 8:5-8

Christians can infer possible attitudes to nature from the way one interprets the status and vocation of humanity in the order of creation. These issues largely stem from Genesis1:26. This is a key text worth quoting. It reads:

> And God said, Let s make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth (Gen. 1:26).

Genesis 9:1-3 and Psalm 8:5-8 echo the same sentiment. For example we read,

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[129] Jean Holm and John Bowker (1994). Op.Cit., 29.

> For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands: thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the path of the sea (Psalm 8:5-8).

Most commentators agree that these passages can lead to 'arrogance vis-à-vis the natural world.'[130] For example, Moore argues that the texts sound like a charter for imperialistic human behaviour. They imply a divinely granted mandate for human beings to do what they please with nature.[131] This is more so if we consider that human beings are made in the image of God. In the view of Tubbs Jr., humankind appears as the final act of divine creation and is given charge to have dominion over nature[132]. In the context of these and similar interpretations the general conclusion is that Christianity is strongly anthropocentric and teaches that human beings are divinely ordained to rule over and dominate nature.[133] This means that if Christians assume human beings' dominion over nature as simply a matter of despotic license to exploit this may result in devastating ecological consequences.

This attitude is worse when it is coupled with the Christian worldview. a view of the world that postulates a transcendent God who creates the world but remains a creator who does not invest himself in it in such a way to make it sacred has been described. This desacralised view of nature is sometimes assumed to be the basis for scientific and technological manipulation of nature. This is the matter that Lynn White emphasises.[134] He writes,

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130 David Kinsley (1995). Op.Cit., 105-106.

131 Robert J. Moore (1990). "A New Christian Reformation", in Ronald J. Engel and Joan G. Engel (eds.) (1990). *Ethics of Environment and Development: Global Challenge and International Response,* 105.

132 James B. Tubbs Jr. (1994). "Humble Dominion", in *Theology Today*, Vol. 50, 344.

133 I note that these passages are complex and have been interpreted in a variety of ways through out the centuries by Christians and Jews. I also note that this interpretation is inclined to that of Thomas Aquinas and Origen who seem to be influence by Stoic and other Greek philosophies.

134 There is a view that considers it likely that biblical and theological ideas about human dominion did not give rise to the development of Western technological power but instead were sought out and used in its defense after its development.

> To a Christian tree can be no more than a physical fact. The whole concept of the sacred grove is alien to Christianity and to the ethos of the West. For nearly two millennia Christian missionaries have been chopping down sacred groves which are idolatrous because they assume spirit in nature.[135]

This quote points to three arguments that support negative Christian attitudes to nature. As Kinsley observes, first is the issue that Christianity strips nature of its gods, goddesses, and spirits and ceases to be regarded as divine. Second, Christianity is strongly anthropocentric and teaches that people are divinely ordained to rule over and dominate nature. Third Christian theology[136] relegates nature and matter generally to a low status relative to the divine, which is equated with spirit alone.[137]

3.6.2.2. New Testament: Matthew 8:28, Mark 5:1-20, Luke 8:26-39, Mark 11:13f, 20-40

One can link the third observation with possible New Testament texts from which one can ascribe to Jesus Christ negative attitudes to nature. The texts that most scholars cite are Jesus' treatment of the Gadarene swine (Matthew 8:28; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39) and of the barren fig-tree (Mark 11: 13f, 20-40). In the light of this one can conclude that

> Christ himself shows no refrain from the killing of animal and the destroying of plants is the height of superstition for, judging that there are no common rights between us and the beasts and trees he sent the devils into herd of swine and with a curse withered the tree on which he found no fruit.[138]

According to Tubbs Jr., these texts can suggest to some a despotic or human-utility attitude toward plant and animal life.[139] We may also relate this attitude to the eschatological view that Jesus will soon return and heaven and earth will be transformed. (Revelation 21). We can interpret this eschatological belief as fostering negative attitudes to nature. As Rossing observes,

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135 Lynn White Jr. (1967). Op.Cit., 1207.

136 We can think here of the theologies of Origen, Thomas Aquinas, Luther and Calvin. In one way or another they reflect the view that the primary theological concern has to do with God and the salvation of o the soul.

137 David Kinsley (1995). Op.Cit., 103.

138 These are Augustine's words quoted in Robin Attfield (1983). Op.Cit., 29-30.

139 James B. Tubbs Jr. (1994). Op.Cit., 552.

> Some Christians, such as former secretary of the interior James Watt, have interpreted this eschatological belief as permission to cut down all the trees we can, to use up the world's resources.[140]

So in a sense we can talk of attitudes where nature is not included in the Christian soteriological and eschatological scheme. God will not redeem nature. It will be completely destroyed. This may stem from the belief that nature is fallen from an initial state of perfection as a result of God's curse on both human beings and their world (Genesis 3:14-19, Romans 8:19-22).

3.6.3. Ecologically Responsible Attitudes

The image of dominion is also the point of reference for possible ecologically responsible Christian attitudes to nature. Tubbs Jr. for example, argues that Christian theology and biblical interpretation also yield foundations for other very different understandings of human dominion.[141] He commits himself to the position that the large scriptural voice concerning our dominion indicates a condition of gratitude, and responsibility rather than one of freedom to exploit and destroy non-human nature.[142] It is the aim of this subsection to explore this voice.

As the exploration unfolds one need to note the underlying assumption. It is the desacralised view of nature. This entails that nature is not an object of awe or worship. It is not the abode of deities. But this does not mean that nature is simply regarded as unsacrosanct raw material. Nature has intrinsic value in as much as it reflects the work of the creator.[143] The main argument is that Christianity has a responsible attitude to nature.

3.6.3.1. Genesis 1:28 and Genesis 2:15

A possible starting point is the attempt to balance Genesis 1:28 by Genesis 2:15. Genesis 2:15 states: "And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it." In the light of

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140 Barbara R. Rossing (2000). "River of Life in God's New Jerusalem: An Eschatological Vision For Earth's Future", in D.T. Hessel and R.R. Ruether (eds.). Op.Cit., 206.

141 James B. Tubbs Jr. (1994). Op.Cit., 544.

142 Ibid.

143 Ibid., 547.

this text Christians first qualify the issue that humans alone are created in the image of God. They take this to imply a godlike responsibility for the natural world rather than warranting the use of nature without restriction. This is based on the observation that both human beings and nature depend on God. In fact the Yahwist account of creation stresses the creation of humans out of the earth and their subsequent obligation as caretakers. The distinction between nature and human beings is that human beings are able to reason and engage in purposive attitudes and actions towards other created beings.[144]

3.6.3.2. The Intrinsic Value of Nature: Job 38:26-27, Job 39:5-6, Ps 104:10-27, Matt 6:28-29, Matt 10:29, Lk 12:6

This line of interpretation boils down to an attitude of stewardship. This is reinforced by texts that may imply divine care and human limitations regarding uses of nature. Concerning divine care we can think of the Priestly creation account where God sees each and every part of creation as good. As a result God sends rain to areas with no human inhabitants (Job 38:26-27) and provides habitation, food, and drink for animals in the wild (Job 39:5-6, Ps 104:10-27). One also finds this theme in Jesus concern for sparrows (Matt. 10:29; Lk. 12:6) and lilies (Matt. 6: 28-29).[145] From these texts we one infer that nature has an intrinsic value. God places value on elements of nature independent of human use and human centred values.

3.6.3.3. Limitations regarding the uses of Nature: Deut. 20:19-20, Lev. 25:1-7

Concerning limitations regarding the uses of nature there are also texts that one can cite as examples. One may follow Kinsley's observations concerning this. This author demonstrates that there are restrictions on cutting down fruit trees (Deut. 20: 19-20), there is command to let the land lie fallow every seventh year (Lev. 25:1-7), people are forbidden to eat certain unclean animals, and many laws pertain dietary restrictions. Another law forbids killing a mother and the offspring, as in the exam-

144 James B. Tubbs Jr. (1994). Op.Cit., 249.

145 Ibid., 547.

ple of the bird's nest (Deut.22:6-7). Humane treatment of animals is implied in Deuteronomy 25:4.[146]

Considering Leviticus 25:1-7 in some detail, for example, one learns that it is connected to the issue of Sabbath. One can infer that humanity is not the crown of creation. This is reserved for Sabbath. On Sabbath God rested and celebrated creation. The Sabbath therefore may serve to remind human beings that nature does not exist primarily for their purposes but for God's. This may be why on the Sabbath the soil should not be tilled, the animals not worked.

3.6.3.4. Curses and Covenants: Gen. 6-7, Gen. 9:8-17, Col. 1:16-20, Rom. 8:19-22

Further one can also note that God curses and makes covenants with humanity and nature. For example in the story of the flood (Gen. 6-7), God directs anger to humankind and aspects of nature. Yet God preserves representatives of each species, human and animal. After the flood God makes a covenant of the rainbow with Noah and his descendants and "every creature of all flesh that is on earth" (Gen. 9:8-17). If we also visit the New Testament one can see the impression that includes all nature in God's redemptive purpose. For example one reads that in Christ all things were created and through Christ, God has reconciled all things to himself (Col. 1:16-20). This implies that the whole creation can hope to be freed from its bondage to decay (Rom. 8:19-22).[147]

3.7. The Ethical Consequences of Christian Attitudes to Nature

This section asks what contribution, or what difference can Christian attitudes to nature make in moral reasoning about ecological responsibility and treatment of various aspects of nature? It was noted at the beginning of this chapter that Christian attitudes to nature are complex and ambiguous. Christian attitude are favourable and unfavourable.

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146 David Kinsley (1995). Op.Cit., 117; J.B. Tubbs Jr. Op.Cit., makes a similar observation on page 548 and Robin Attfield. Op.Cit., notes these prohibitions on page 373.

147 James B. Tubbs Jr. (1994). Op.Cit., 548-549.

Which traditions are favourable is not self-evident. This is why one ends up with clearly opposing attitudes to nature. So one can reflect on the ethical implications of these attitudes under the perspectives that may be shaped by these two attitudes.

3.7.1. Perspectives Shaped by Negative Attitudes

In this perspective nature does not have a high value. It is not a positive and vital part of religious life. It has no ultimate part to play in the goal of religious existence. Overall in terms of negative attitudes to nature one can infer three orientations from some biblical texts and the way they have been interpreted in relation to ecology. These are desacralisation of nature, domination of nature and degradation of the body and matter.[148] These attitudes seem to square well with a Christian attitude to nature that Santmire captures in his idea of 'the spiritual motif'.

According to Santmire, the spiritual motif, if not outright hostile to the natural world, it is at the very least, unconcerned with its state of existence. This is based on a vision of the human spirit rising above nature in order to ascend to a super-mundane communion with God. The underlying belief is the one we noted in our discussion of the Christian worldview. This is the belief that God is a being separate from or transcendent to the world, and chooses to intervene in its affairs at will. Further this attitude tends to be biased towards only those beings that one considers rational, spiritual, or moral. This bias excludes non-human life and the material world from the Christian purview of soteriological and eschatological concern.[149] This may breed negative ecological consequences.

3.7.2. Perspectives Shaped by Positive Attitudes

Positive attitudes revolve around the issue of stewardship. One can find many similar texts and say more about positive Christian attitudes to nature. But the examples we have cited can be enough to overall suggest attitudes of responsible stewardship. This fosters the view that God created everything, all beings are created beings, nothing created is unnecessary-it is part of a divinely appointed harmony, humanity has inherited

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148 See David Kinsley (1995). Op.Cit., 115-118.

149 Paul H. Santmire (1985). *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology*, 9.

responsibility for the created world, humanity's responsibility lapsed at the Fall but is redeemed by Christ and that a purposeful symbiosis between humanity and nature fulfils God's purpose.[150]

In the light of this one can draw principles of a Christian environmental ethic. For example we can infer the principles of

(i) creation value which states that God created and therefore values all aspects of nature,

(ii) the principle of sustained order and purpose which states that God created and sustains all elements and systems in nature within particular orders to meet certain ongoing purposes and

(iii) the principle of universal corruption and redemption which states that everything created is subject to corruption by sin and ultimate redemption through Jesus Christ.[151]

These principles are more ecologically promising when one considers them in the light of stewardship. First it means that in relation to the principle of creation value nature is important and valuable to God. People have a special position because they are created in the image of God. God provide for people by allowing them to use aspects of nature to meet material needs. When using nature a Christian steward is aware that nature has an intrinsic value. So one respect and loves nature out of respect for the creator. But Godly love and care for nature should not lead to worship of nature.[152]

Concerning the principle of sustained order and purpose it means realising that exercising dominion does not mean despotic treatment and use of nature. One always takes care to maintain the original functions of elements of nature and natural systems. This means a wise and restrained steward.[153] Further in relating to the principle of universal cor-

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150 Ian Harris (1991). How Environmentalist is Buddhism?, in *Religion* (1991) 21, 103.

151 John C. Bergstrom. "Principles of a Christian Environmental Ethic: With Application to Agriculture, Natural Resources, and the Environment", http//www.leaderu.com//science/bergstrom-ennviroethics.html, 2.

152 Ibid., 8.

153 Ibid., 9.

ruption and redemption it means one needs to be aware of the potential sinfulness of humanity. So in dealing with the effects of sin on people it needs to be extended with sin involved in how people use and manage nature. This entails including nature into the soteriological scheme and in the eschatological view of a new heaven and a new earth.[154]

This attitude seems consistent with Santmire's 'ecological motif'. It assumes that human spirit is rooted in the world of nature. It celebrates God's presence in, with, and under the whole biophysical order, as the context in which the life of obedience to God is to be pursued. 'Ecological' in this attitude means a system of interrelationships between God, humanity and nature. It stresses the immanence of God as the power of life itself, which is a presence in nature, humanity and the rest of the cosmos.[155] This seems to foster benign attitudes to nature that encourage care and responsibility.

3.8. Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has examined Christian attitudes to nature. The presentation has demonstrated that Christian attitudes to nature are ambiguous and ambivalent. As a result we have both negative and positive attitudes stemming from the same overarching doctrine of creation. In both negative and positive attitudes nature is not identified with God. Further one does not find clear injunctions related to particular aspects of creation. Both positive and negative attitudes are non-discriminative.

The problems with Christian attitudes to nature lie in the negative perspectives. They tend to emphasise an anthropocentric approach nature. This may crystallise into what we have referred to as the spiritual motif. This motif regards nature as something without intrinsic value. As a result it may foster no imperative to revere and exercise restraint and responsibility towards nature. On the other hand the positive promises of Christian attitudes to nature lie in the ecological motif. This fosters a belief in the integrity of nature. It was noted that its basic axiom is the principle of creation value. Here nature has an inherent value that makes it possible to respecting and caring for nature without worship-

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154 Ibid., 10

155 Paul H. Santmire (1985). Op.Cit., 9.

ping it. It seems also clear that human beings must use nature as responsible stewards rather than giving it a museum protection. It remains the task of the next chapter, as indicated at the close of the previous chapter, to examine the encounter of Shona and Christian attitudes to nature.

4 SHONA ATTITUDES VERSUS CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES TO NATURE: A CRITICAL COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

4.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and analyse possible conflicts, complementarities that exist between Shona and Christian attitudes to nature. It aims to provide a clarifying analysis of the respective contributions of Shona and Christian attitudes to an environmental ethic. This involves demonstrating how Shona and Christian attitudes to nature sometimes conflict, sometimes complement, and sometimes criticise one another. By showing the dialectical and ambivalent character of these two sets of attitudes to nature the author refuses to adopt a pro or anti stance towards either. The question is rather what kind of Shona attitudes and what kind of Christian attitudes are most adequate as bases of a framework of thought for modern ecological issues. This book follows a spectrum from conflict through complementarity to criticism. As one goes through them one may be forced to reorient Shona and Christian attitudes to nature, ending with an overview suggesting that authentic inter-religious environmental ethic must revise both Shona and Christian attitudes to nature as presently understood.

While the two religions differ in their approach, sometimes radically, it seems clear that, in the light of modern ecological problems, one requires a selective transformation of both Shona and Christian attitudes to nature. This may necessitate the development of greater mutuality between them. The aim is to move beyond the insistence by each religion that it already has answers to our ecological crisis in quest of an inter-religious environmental ethic. There is hope that this may occur within the framework of creation spirituality/eco-spirituality.[156]

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[156] Peter Beyer (1994). *Religion and Globalization,* 217-219.

4.2. Conflict: Shona and Christian Attitudes to Nature Challenge each other

To start with it seems there is a clash in the worldviews that inform Shona and Christian attitudes to nature. In the Shona worldview we may infer that people look out upon cosmos partaking at once the qualities of human beings, nature and God/ancestors. That which the Shona confront seems not to be three separate things. But it is rather one thing with aspects, which, in the light of distinctions that have become much sharper since, one calls by these three terms. It was noted in chapter two that if one compares this worldview with a triangle of the three conceptions of human beings, nature and God/ancestors- the Shona worldview is one in which the triangle itself might not be very apparent. This unitary character of the cosmos in the case of Shona people is recognised when it is said that the world of the Shona is pervaded with sacredness. So there seems to be an aspect of primary unity.

It was also noted that in the light of this being already in nature the Shona person couldn't exactly confront it. The Shona do not, so much set out to control, master or exploit nature. They confront nature with an attitude of placation or appeal or coercion. As result it was seen in chapter two in the Shona worldview that human beings, at least with aspects of nature regarded as sacred, are bound together in one moral order. Some aspects of nature are morally significant. It cares. What the Shona sees out there, which is not human and yet in which human beings somehow participate is a great drama of conduct. The spirit-imbued aspects of nature were described in chapter two. Nature is spun of duty and ethical judgement. Overall nature is not an indifferent system. It is a system of moral consequence.

Christianity and scientific knowledge may fecundate this issue of nature as a system of moral consequences. The moral consequences for the Shona must not be just short-range survival of the human group. Its overall goal must help to be afraid of ecological problems such as deforestation, overpopulation etc. It must help everything to remain in balance including the ecosystem. Along these lines Shona attitudes to nature may be responsible towards the well-being of nature.

In relation to this the Shona idea of kinship with nature would call upon humans to respect every aspect of nature regardless of the status of the sacredness of specific aspects of nature. This is regardless, for example,

of whether an animal is totemic or not. This means the Shona discriminative attitudes to nature, attitudes informed by a religious conviction, a sacred understanding of nature calls for a redefinition of nature's sacredness. Instead of the traditional understanding of nature's sacredness in terms of a hierarchy of the less powerful, negligible spiritless nature and the powerful and harmful spirited nature there is need to redefine the sacredness of nature in terms of derived sacredness. The whole of nature must be understood as sacred because it derives its being from the creator. This way it may orient itself towards the idea of the integrity and intrinsic value of nature that Christian attitudes to nature assume. This means defining sacredness of nature as derived from its relationship with the creator. This may extend the Shona attitudes beyond the traditional social, political and economic conditionings that we noted in chapter two. So the Christian idea of creation value may act as a fecundating critique to Shona attitudes to nature.

If one compares this with the Christian worldview sketched in chapter three one may recognise some differences. The three characteristics that the Shona worldview emphasises tend to weaken. Human beings tend to come out from the unity with nature, which they are now, oriented as something separate from nature. They come to confront nature as something with physical qualities only. They can work their will upon nature. As this happens, nature loses its moral character and becomes to human beings indifferent, a system uncaring of human beings. As a result there are attitudes of stewardship premised on a worldview in which human beings and nature are both separated from God. This has led Christian attitudes to gravitate towards the modern view of nature. From this Christianity may need to be always wary of the tendency to regard the relation of human beings and nature as a relation of human beings to physical matter in which the application of physical science to human beings' material comfort may be humanity's paramount assignment on earth.

At another extreme Shona and Christian attitudes clash with animistic and nature worship tendencies in Shona attitudes. One can argue that Shona attitudes are grounded in animism. In a more pejorative way Shona exhibit superstition. In Shona religion and culture the ancestral, alien and witchcraft spirits associated or identified with certain aspects of nature pervade the world. The Shona view some water bodies, trees, forests, mountains, animals and birds as living beings. Specifically some

animals and birds like human beings have souls. They are not things. Neither are they humans. Yet they are conscious about the moral and material worldview of people and communicate these to people.

That Shona attitudes to nature are grounded in animism may have an impact on what constitutes sacred reality and beliefs about where the divine resides. Christianity may not be comfortable with the belief in animism, particularly when we take it to refer to the belief that many visible beings, objects and natural objects are imbued with consciousness and spiritual energy and may share their wisdom or power with people. This may impact on the Christian belief that sacred reality is usually invisible but occasionally appears visibly in human incarnations and not nature. May be since animism allows the Shona to talk about the nature of animals, birds, etc. in terms of taboos and totemism Christian incarnational theology may also need to spend time discussing both human nature and the nature of animals, plants and water sources. This means moving towards a position where there is a shift from being preoccupied with relations between human nature and divine nature within the one person of Jesus[157] towards discussing also the position of nature in this scheme.

Another issue noted about Shona attitudes is that some aspects of nature such as animals and birds often become active and disturbed when something in the relationship between the people and the land and ancestors is not right. Ancestors may show their displeasure by killing those who have not behaved properly and respectfully. It was noted that lions (*mhondoro*) guard forests and snakes such as the python guard water bodies. Unlike Christianity Shona attitudes can be interpreted in terms of life and death. In a sense premising attitudes to nature on belief in ancestral spirits can indeed be choosing death. Further explaining environmental crisis as ancestors' anger about violation of taboos rather than direct fluctuations of overgrazing and overpopulation may have little to offer modern resource management.

Further the Shona emphasise intense knowledge of the aspects of nature in the land in which one lives and have rapport with nature. Unlike

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[157] See Jean Holm and John Bowker (1994). *Attitudes to Nature*, 39ff., where they argue that Christianity has formally spent more time discussing human nature than it has the nature of animals, plants, or the cosmos.

Christian attitude to nature Shona attitudes may be confined to one geographical region. So it may be difficult to translate to other places where different aspects of nature do not necessarily hold the same religious significance. The underlying assumption is that the Shona identify some aspects of nature as positive and vital parts of religious life particularly providence and soteriology. Because there is kinship between ancestors, human beings and nature there is a sense in which the Shona worship nature. It was noted in the myth of creation that humans and nature descend from the same ancestors. So in relation to kinship the Shona emphasise appropriate restrictions or taboos for relating to nature.

In fact relationships with nature are primarily relations with ancestral spirits. Soteriological rituals of ancestral spirits that involve aspects of nature that the Shona regard as sacred are not directed to nature but only to the well-being of people. The central tenet of Shona religion is belief in ancestral spirits and their power to influence everyday life. The Shona do not believe that people should care about all aspects for nature, no matter how tiny, or seemingly useless. Nature seems to have no intrinsic value. The issue is because of the forests wild animals are found there. These are the sacred animals in which the spirits of the ancestors dwell. Because of the animals the forests are sacred. Further because they are sacred they must not be cleared, at least not completely. The sacredness of some aspects of nature is linked to ruling chiefdom and the fertility of the land. So life depends on nature. It is good to respect nature because only happy ancestors will send good rains.

So although Shona beliefs have conserved some aspects of nature until now it is not out of consciousness of the integrity of creation. It is out of fear of the ancestral spirits on which human well-being is based. Health and well- being IS primarily about human – beings and not nature. In fact nature is deemed sacred because of ancestral spirits that live within or near it. Ancestral spirits rather than their ecological housing are actually the object of deification. So restraints or taboos are not for trees, animals etc. themselves. This means the moral implication is not integrity of creation, which refers to the value of all creatures in themselves, for one another, and for God, and their interconnectedness in a diverse whole that has unique value for God. This may boil down, in a sense, to an anthropocentrism characteristic of Christian negative attitudes to nature.

The Shona view of the value of nature differs from that of Christianity in the sense that Christianity emphasises the idea of the integrity of nature. The idea of the integrity of nature is congruent with the principles of creation value, sustained order and purpose and that of universal corruption and redemption.[158] Christian attitudes to nature are more inclined to the view of the value of nature of a modern, educated scientist/. Human beings should care for nature because all aspects of nature have intrinsic value. This is based on the idea of creation value and stewardship. Christianity strives for attitudes that secure the well-being nature and humanity. It is also clear that from Christian perspective aspects of nature are not ensouled beings. They must not be worshipped.

In this context of conflicting views one may wonder whether the two views can come together for a common purpose of conservation. Considering the Shona and Christian worldview may convince us that Christian attitudes to nature are not easily compatible with Shona attitudes.

4.3. Complementarity: Shona and Christian Attitudes Reassessed in the Light of each other

Further along a spectrum from conflict to complementarity, consider again the belief in animism, widely present in Shona religions. Animism is a belief in the presence of souls/spirits in nature. Aspects of nature that are imbued with ancestral spirits are regarded as kin and share the vital force with human beings. This is why those who tend to romanticise Shona attitudes to nature say that all aspects of nature are kin.

A Christian will puzzle whether this is friend or foe. At first it seems to complement the Christian attitudes based on creation value. Christians find in the creation accounts that all aspects of creation are related. If Shona come to this belief from the belief in creation and intrinsic value of nature then Shona and Christian attitudes simply reinforce one another.

But as noted in chapter three Christians seem not to be really interested in valuing nature as imbued with souls or ancestral spirits. At least in

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158 See chapter 3, 12.

the light of the Christian worldview respect for a python or snake, for example, is not based on animistic belief or that some aspects of nature are spirit media. Christians want to value nature as the product of the creator not as guardians of ancestral morality. Christian attitudes are more oriented towards valuing nature intrinsically for what it is and various aspects for the role they play in ecosystems. Is it not an injustice to discriminately value nature by the role it plays in ancestor based soteriological rituals?

The Shona idea of kinship with nature is initially impressive. But when there is need to realise that religious restrictions, taboos and sacredness of nature, may command museum protection of nature, or what Beyer refers to as "the hugging of trees while children starve"[159]. The Shona way is an ethic of minimal intervention, *kuyera*, in the belief that nature takes care of itself under the guardianship of ancestral spirits. But in Zimbabwe today if environmental conservation is to succeed, we need active environmental managers and professionals. There is need to study how chemical gases affect nature.

The Shona may learn something from current discourse on Christian attitudes to nature. Christian attitudes to nature have less value that run contrary to the science based values. In chapter three the modern environmental issues that Christian attitudes aim to address were noted. So may be to survive Shona attitudes must also incline themselves to be complementary to the facts of science. This means acknowledging with Christianity that nature has an intrinsic value.

Indeed Christianity has lessons to learn from Shona. Shona attitude to nature is a model of restraint in the knowledge that not everything we can do we should do. The restrictions related to sacredness of nature, taboos and totemism might be helpful to Christian attitudes to nature. The idea of an attitude based on clear sense of prohibition and limits is important. Nature is sacred. People and nature are bound together by mutual limits and prohibitions. The interaction has ritual meaning. There is an intimate personal meaning as well. Shona people hear voices in sacred beings around them that guide them in living together for mutual benefit. This is based on the concept of *shura*.[160] However there is

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159 Peter Beyer (1994). Op.Cit., 219.

160 See chapter 2, 31.

need to shape Shona attitudes to move beyond attitudes to nature being a matter of human survival to a matter of steward for resource.

Further Christian attitudes may be strengthened by the pivotal conviction implied in Shona attitudes. What matters for Shona is the chaos that comes upon human beings when the harmony between nature and people is destroyed. This may improve an important element in Christian attitudes to nature, the consequence of the Fall. In this the ties that bind people to nature are shattered. However we may need to keep at bay the possible inclination that there is something perpetually problematic about nature itself. This is in relation to the extent to which nature leads to God, and to what extent it leads away from God. This enables us to avoid insisting on an opposition between God and nature. Shona religion has difficulty with this notion. in chapter two how the Shona tend to look out upon a cosmos partaking at once the qualities of human beings, nature and God/ancestors was noted. They do not confront three separate things.

4.4. Common Ground between Shona and Christian Attitudes to Nature

This section reflects on a possible moral basis for inter-religious dealing with nature. This means examining a moral basis that recognises positive attitudes to nature taught by Shona religion and Christianity. It was indicated in the introductory remarks of this chapter that the principles of Shona –Christian environmental ethic may be possible in the framework of the theory of eco-spirituality/creation spirituality not withstanding its Christian centredness. The author opts for it because of its inclination towards religious environmentalism and the potential within it of leading to new attitudes without merely revitalising traditional ones. In chapter one, religious environmentalism was defined as the conscious application of religious beliefs and practices to contemporary concerns about environmental crisis.

Eco-spirituality is part of a three typology of religious environmentalism. The typology consists of creation eco-spirituality, ecojustice, and stewardship. Eco-justice emphasises treating environmental issues more strictly in the context concerns with inequality and marginalisation of humans in society. Concerning stewardship ecological crisis is not a

cause for creating a new vision so much as it is for affirming the old one. Its axiom is that environmental crisis is result of straying from traditional religious message.[161] This may not be a suitable framework for Shona-Christian environmental ethic. It tends to insist that a particular religion's beliefs and practices already have the answer to ecological crisis.[162] It may therefore stifle mutual dialogue, criticism and fecundation.

Creation/eco-spirituality is distinct[163] from the other two because of its focus on holistic continuity between the human and natural worlds. People no longer hold their privileged position to become features in a larger organic and cosmic whole. The holistic interconnected and continuous meanings embedded in the notion of ecology shape the attitudes to nature. The meaning of an ecological spirituality is reflected in the following words,

> It springs from a deep-seated hope, not for utopia, but for a more just, sustainable, and spiritually satisfying world. It is shaped by a distinctive way of thinking and feeling: one that emphasises the interconnectedness of all things, the intrinsic value of all life, the continuity of human with non-human life, and the compassion of God for life...it employs a panentheistic way of imaging divine mystery, which means that it images divine mystery as the mind or heart of the universe, and the universe as the body of God.[164]

Knitter echoes the sentiments in these words. He argues for a truly sacramental awareness of the earth that enables us to feel the earth as the presence of or manifestation of or life of the sacred. The plants and animals have a dignity and value of their own as children of God and members, with us of the divine family.[165] What is important to note is that eco-spirituality offers what may amount to new attitudes to nature, although using a great deal of traditional beliefs and practices. Consider the Shona and Christian worldviews first. In the light of eco-spirituality there is need to picture the elements of these worldviews a circle of relationship rather than as triangle of hierarchy. This, on the one hand, means the Shona may need to reorient their hierarchical sacredness of

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161 Ibid., 217.

162 Ibid., 219.

163 The three types are not so much independent types as a matter of different emphasis.

164 Ibid.

165 Paul F. Knitter (1995). *One Earth Many Religions*, 123.

nature. This may lead to a holistic approach to sacredness of nature, one that is not discriminative. They may respect nature on the basis that nature derives its being from the great ancestral spirit. (Mwari). This would mean that to be kin with nature is to consciously accept responsibility towards the well-being of nature. On the other hand Christianity may need to struggle with the balance between immanence and transcendence of God and also the privileged status of humans in relation to nature implied in its creation accounts.

This way both religions may relate to nature in a less anthropocentric way. As a result the anthropocentric soteriology of Shona religion and the despotic attitudes of Christianity may lessen. This may result in Shona and Christian attitudes to nature striking common ground in respecting nature on the basis of its intrinsic value derived from the principle of creation value that can be inferred from Christian attitudes to nature. The push may, however, be more on Shona religion for further clarification, particularly on aspects of nature usually regarded as morally insignificant. It may be necessary for Shona religion to be open for further ethical evolution. Further the notion of panentheism in eco-spirituality may bridge the tension between animistic tendencies that result in worshipping nature and the role of the Holy Spirit as the giver of life to all creation. Panentheism is the concept that God and the universe are one, but that God is, at the same time greater than the universe. This means the world is in God but that God also exists beyond the world. This is distinct from pantheism, which sees God and the universe as absolutely identical.[166] This may also resolve the tension between immanence and transcendence implied in the two religions. This may work out well if the Shona idea of pan-vitalism and Christian notion of Holy Spirit complement in suggesting how we may conceive divine life force pervading both humans and nature.

The positive ethical consequences of Shona and Christian attitudes to nature and the necessary reorientation or redefinitions may be congruent in the light of creation/eco-spirituality. One can note from the definition of creation/eco-spirituality that its basic elements are the interconnectedness of all things, the intrinsic value of all life, compassion for God for all life and panentheism.

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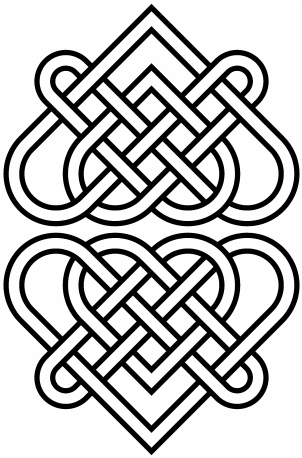
166 Rosemary Goring, (ed.) (1992). *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions,* 389.

In the light of this two general principles of a common Shona-Christian environmental ethic can revolve around the principles of creation value and sustained order and purpose and the principle of universal corruption and redemption. These seem to be consistent with a critical mutual fecundation between Shona and Christian attitudes to nature notwithstanding the fact one can get a picture in which Shona religion can do little more than acquiesce. One need may be that each religion increases knowledge of these principles from their respective traditions, scientific and practical nature management.

4.5. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to examine areas of conflict, complementarities and mutual criticisms between Shona and Christian attitudes to nature. It also aimed at suggesting a possible common framework for thinking about an inter-religious Shona-Christian environmental ethic. It has been shown that Shona and Christian attitudes to nature tend to differ considerably. The Shona are more inclined to discriminative attitudes, while Christianity adopts more holistic attitudes. In each case, the attitudes to nature can be traced back to fundamental presuppositions about basic elements of their worldviews. These are the spiritual, the human and the natural worlds. It has been also shown how the attitudes to nature of the two religions tend to mutually complement and criticise each other.

In the light of this a common framework for thinking about a Shona-Christian environmental ethic was suggested. This framework might be based on the principles of creation value, sustained order and purpose and universal corruption and redemption. These principles were put within the framework of the theory of creation spirituality/ eco-spirituality. The author argues that this framework has the potential to water down negative attitudes of both religions and at the same time remain in keeping with the best insights of both religions. Moreover it seems it is open to redefinition and reorientation of traditional attitudes and even to evolution of new attitudes to nature. This book therefore defends the possibility of complementarity between Shona and Christian attitudes to nature in the framework of eco-spirituality as a minimum common ground.



5 Shona Versus Christian Attitudes to Nature: Problems and Possibilities for Convergence

5.1. Introduction

The purpose of the book was to engage in a critical comparative analysis of Shona and Christian attitudes to nature. The book highlighted the distinctive attitudes to nature and ethical consequences of these religions' attitudes to nature. It also demonstrated the possible divergence/conflicts, criticism and mutual fecundation/complementarities that exist between the two religions. A number of conclusions have been drawn from the foregoing discussion, reiterating the hypothesis that Christian attitudes to nature challenge, through dialogue, the Shona attitudes more in the light of religious environmentalism. It is now possible to retrace footsteps in this book and draw some concluding remarks.

5.2. Retracing our Footsteps in this Book

After describing the scope of the study (chapter one) in chapter two examined Shona attitude to nature by focusing on the land, animals, and plant life and water bodies. The chapter demonstrated that at the theoretical level, assuming a romantic view of Shona attitudes to nature, it is possible to conclude that Shona traditional religion is necessarily environmental friendly. The strong beliefs in ancestral spirits, pan- vitalism, kinship, taboo and totems have the potential to bear testimony to this.

Upon casting a critical it was discovered that in fact Shona attitudes are discriminative and ambivalent. They can both be ecologically responsible and harmful. The discriminative attitudes to nature are a result of an understanding of the sacredness of nature. The Shona identify some aspects of nature, as positive and vital parts of the religious life while some aspects are not. For example we saw that the Shona do not regard all animals, plant life and water sources as sacred. This tends to be what is distinctive about Shona attitudes to nature. This reiterates the hypothesis that Shona attitudes to nature are discriminative and ambiva-

lent. The Shona attitudes to nature picture some aspects of nature as an extended family or society of living, ensouled beings.

Reverence, responsibility and restraint in connection with interaction with sacred aspect of nature are based on the fear of ancestral spirits. This generates two attitudes to nature, to obey and to maintain nature. It was noted how these attitudes are linked to traditional religious, social, economic and political institutions that chiefs use to control people. On the other hand we noted an attitude of acting on nature without restraint. This is based on beliefs in alien spirits. In terms of environmental conservation this means the least revered aspects of nature are more prone to destruction than those the Shona believe are imbued with spirits. It was stated that this might lead to the problem of overexploitation and under utilisation of natural resources.

In this chapter it was concluded that Shona positive attitudes to nature are ultimately human-centred. Reverence, restraint and responsibility towards some aspects of nature serve a soteriological purpose for human well-being in a hierarchical system and not necessarily for the well-being of nature.

Chapter three examined biblical Christian attitudes to nature. It showed the sense in which one can regard Christian attitudes to nature as ambiguous and ambivalent. Negative and positive attitudes stem from the same doctrine of creation. In both negative and positive attitudes nature is not identified with God. Further there seems to be no clear injunctions related to particular aspects nature. Both negative and positive attitudes are non-discriminative. In both cases nature is stripped of spirits and Christians seem not to regard it as divine. This reiterates the hypothesis that Christianity tends to picture nature throughout as material, mechanical and devoid of spirit that is reserved exclusively for humans.

It was also seen how Christian attitudes to nature tend to be anthropocentric. These are attitudes where human beings tend to be masters of nature. They view nature as dead matter to be manipulated by human beings. It was pointed out that this tends to crystallise into the spiritual motif. This motif regards nature as something without intrinsic value. It may foster no imperative to revere and exercise restraint and responsibility towards nature.

On the other hand it was emphasised that the positive promise of Christian attitudes to nature lies in the ecological motif because it fosters a

belief in the integrity of nature. Its basic axiom is the principle of creation value. This means nature has an inherent value that makes it possible to respect and care for nature without worshipping it. It was demonstrated how this makes clear that human beings must use nature as responsible stewards.

The critical comparative analysis to Shona and Christian attitudes to nature (chapter four) brought out into prominence the conflicts, criticisms and complementarities between the two religions' attitudes to nature. The Shona notion of hierarchy of sacredness of nature as opposed to the intrinsic value of nature forms a barrier to a possible reconciliation between Shona and Christian attitudes to nature. This is largely based on the belief that some aspects of nature in Shona are imbued with spirits. Although sacred aspects may be accidentally protected, there is a weakness in the discriminative attitudes that leaves other aspects vulnerable. It appears the Shona have yet to extricate themselves from an ethic based on fear of ancestral spirits to conscious assessment of scientific causes of ecological imbalances. Shona attitudes to nature fail to take account of the denial of the sacredness of some aspects of nature. This leads to the conclusion that something more than romantic and theoretical environmental friendliness of Shona attitudes is required to translate them into global environmental attitudes to nature. So just like Christianity Shona religion does not already have answers to ecological problems.

The Christian attitudes to nature on the other hand, propound the doctrine of the equal worth and equal integrity of all aspects of nature, rather than a discriminative sacredness of nature. The attitudes are, however, based on the assumption that nature is purely material. This position results, as noted in chapter three, into divergent attitudes to nature. These are ecologically harmful and positive attitudes. Attitudes to nature presented from a Christian perspective appear reluctant to identify divinity with natural phenomena. Christianity suggests the idea of creation value to bridge this gap. To this end, the creation value to which Christian attitudes tend to lend support, might well act as common denominator between Shona and Christian attitudes to nature particularly in the light of eco-spirituality.

5.3. Conclusion

This book has dealt mainly with a critical comparative correlational dialogue between Shona and Christian attitudes to nature. It has examined the nature of conflict, criticism and complementarity between the two religions. In the light of this it tried to make a case that the attitudes to nature of these religions can best complement each other in the framework of eco-spirituality as a minimum common ground. In this framework there is a possibility of an environmental ethic based on the intrinsic value of nature that traditional Shona adherents and Christians can share. The book argues that whereas Christianity, because it seems to be already saturated with, and acculturated to the dominant ideology of science can help provide a clearer vision of Shona attitudes to nature consistent with religious environmentalism, Shona religion may provide the foundation for ethical reverence, restraint and responsibility in relation to nature.

If as Knitter argues that an inter-religious contribution to an environmental ethics based on seeking the well-being of creation is necessary this book has, using the case study of Shona and Christian religions, demonstrated its possibility. It has also demonstrated the possible fruits of starting inter-religious dialogue with ethics rather than particular religious beliefs. What it has suggested is therefore an ethical springboard, or starting point for inter-religious conversation between Shona religion and Christianity concerning nature.

This book's effort has been to find a possible framework for a Shona-Christian inter-religious environmental ethic. For most Shona people the prospect of such a common framework raises all kinds of cultural and religious questions. How can traditional Shona worldview sustain the vision of eco-spirituality? It seems like the beginning of the erosion of traditional worldview and its replacement by Christian worldview acculturated to the ideology of science. The dangers of one religion dominating the other may always be lurking. Further how do we deal with out and out clashes such as the Shona insistence on nature as imbued with spirits and the Christian insistence on nature as purely material that seem to be prerequisites of a dialogue of equals? In this book these and many other questions might have been implicitly implied but have not been taken up adequately.

Such questions need to be taken up and wrestled with because they are part and parcel of the challenges that the necessity of an inter-religious environmental ethic presents, especially for traditional Shona beliefs about the status and value of nature in the goal of religious existence. The successes of a Shona-Christian inter-religious dialogue concerning nature may depend to some extent on how the Shona and Christians resolve these questions. This calls for a more empirically based study of Shona-Christian dialogue concerning nature. This may be a possible next step in carrying forward the present study.

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