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VI. **Woe to you, O Land, When Your King is a Child (Ecclesiastes 10:16-19):**

A Dialogical Study between Qoheleth's Imagination of Ecology and Akan Proverbs

Mark S. Aidoo

Summary

African interpreters see culture as providing the social context in which meaning thrives. The lived experiences and thought-forms serve as vital hermeneutical tools. One of such cultural tools in African oral literature, communication, and interpretation is the use of proverbs. It is said that a person who knows proverbs reconciles with difficulties. This paper discusses how a contextual study of African proverbs sheds light on Qoheleth's imagination of ecological crisis. It aims at exploring ways in which Africans can be effective in the midst of ecological challenges. Qoheleth draws a link between ecological crisis, young people and bad leadership. In Ecclesiastes 10:16-19, the text says there will be curses on the land if young leaders are in control. Such a view has implication for the social structure in Africa and for that matter the religious community that seeks to empower young people. The question considered here is "in what ways can African views about leadership inform Qoheleth's characterisation of the ecological crisis?" What are the implications for leadership and the church in approaching ecological problems? Using a dialogical approach, the paper then proposes that the ecological crisis does not happen simply because all young leaders are irresponsible. It takes a person who is keen on building knowledge, listens to counsel and values self-identity to address ecological issues rightly.

Introduction

This paper highlights the challenges of identity in addressing the ecological crisis by examining the views in Ecclesiastes in relation to the Ghanaian Mfantse traditional leadership concept. It employs a dialog-

ical study using Mfantse proverbs to shed light on Qoheleth's imagination of leadership and ecological crisis in Ecclesiastes 10:16-19. There is a general view that everything rises and falls with leadership. How leadership approaches and manages the ecological crisis in Africa is a matter of concern. The paper proposes that authentic leaders are those who, irrespective of age and status, take time to develop themselves, nurture positive traits and desire to add value to the concept of leadership and the life of the people. The churches cannot be left out since they have a crucial role to play in addressing Africa's ecological crisis. The argument is that it is ironic to find most religious leaders in Africa ascending to "the throne" by virtue of being noble persons or sons of noble persons and yet do next to nothing while the land continues to suffer woe. Leaders who are not conscious of their self-identity bring woe to a nation. When such leaders are in control, "it is impossible for 'life in abundance' to be enjoyed by the majority in a global context where the global environment has been so degraded as to threaten the survival of the larger proportion of humankind, and where global inequality increases in inverse proportion year after year" (Mugambi 2016:1118). Does what is achieved matter when a youth is in leadership or when a person of noble birth is in leadership? How do the Mfantse people view a young person in leadership, and how can such observations inform Qoheleth's understanding of the causes of the ecological crisis?

The Mfantse are a sub-group of the Akans in Ghana. Akan refers to (1) a people group found in the southern part of Ghana, Cote D'Ivoire and Togo, and (2) a language spoken (Wiredu 1996:157; Yankah 1989:19,20). The Akan speaking people are the largest ethnic group in Ghana, forming about 47.5%, and the language is predominant and understood by many people across the country (GSS 2012:5). There are about 15 dialects in the Akan language group but Asante Twi, Akwapim Twi and Mfantse are the major dialects widely spoken, sharing similar vocabulary, thought forms and worldviews (Agyekum 2016:165).

The approach in this paper is a dialogue between Akan thought and Qoheleth, specifically by drawing lessons from Mfantse proverbs and relating them to what Qoheleth says. As in most African cultures, the Akan perceive a proverb as an indispensable yet aesthetic device that

is vital in speech. Agyekum (2005:9) defines proverbs as “interpretations of traditional wisdom based on experiences and the socio-political life of our elders.” Proverbs season language; without them, the real power of the language is not felt. Proverbs lie deep in African oral tradition and display a people’s wisdom and philosophy of life, that is why it is said *tsetsekaaso mu, ofi kakyere* (lit. preservation of culture comes from oral traditions). They serve as analytic tools of thought and as the bedrock of philosophical reflections not only about the past but also about the future. When an issue comes up, proverbs become handy tools to bring out the meaning. Finnegan (2012:380) states that “in many African cultures, a feeling for language, for imagery, and for the expression of abstract ideas through compressed and allusive phraseology comes out particularly clearly in proverbs.” The meaning of a proverb is best seen in relevant contexts and intentions, bearing in mind the circumstances at stake (Yankah 1989:154,155). Through Akan proverbs we can learn how the people think.

African traditional ecological preservation is comprised of a wide range of understandings founded on community – human beings and nature in tandem. Africans believe in human responsibility for creation in a community, and not human-centredness in creation (MacKinnon 2007:339; Rolston 1988). That is why Mante (2004) advocates for theology to play a key role in discussions on ecology. To him, the non-human environment pervades all African symbolic thought and worldview. He sees a faulty protestant theological anthropology, which tends to separate human beings from nature and set the human being over and above nature, as not ideal for Africans. Mante then emphasises African traditions and thought-forms as an appropriate way to address ecological challenges. Awuah-Nyamekye (2014) also discusses the connection between traditional religio-cultural beliefs and practices as well as ecological problems in Ghana. He observes that in Ghana, conservation policies by political authorities often neglect the indigenous people’s ecological knowledge or worldview. Although various literature has examined the relationship between religion and the environment, not much on indigenous traditional belief or indigenous traditional ecological knowledge has been highlighted.

What the traditional indigenous people have been taught, from generation to generation, needs to be taken into account (2014:16). Elsewhere, I argued for African Ecotheology as an effective approach to addressing ecological issues in Africa because it is a pragmatic approach that hinges on African identity, stewardship and African spirituality (Aidoo 2019:41-58). Ernst M. Conradie (2013:114-117) has also proposed an African hermeneutic for addressing the ecological crisis focusing on social change theory which embodies education, marketing, effective management, punishment, responsibility, prophetic warnings and speaking to people's desires, dreams and aspirations for the future. Earlier, Conradie (2009:3-18) had called for a theology of place that not only deals with geographic location and ethical concerns but also emphasises the presence of the triune God, "with a dialectic between cross and resurrection, with creation *and* redemption" (2009:5; emphasis original). Such an approach, to him, will be ideal for South Africa because of their experiences in politics, violence, justice, worship, access to land, health, mobility and patriarchal structures. In a similar vein, Ebenezer Blasu (2019:70-93) argues from the context of the Ewe in Ghana and proposes a Bible-based African theology which can adequately motivate Christians towards ecological action. For him, the emphasis should be on African theology informing ecological studies. Others like Douglas Lawrie (2011:171-183) call for a creative kenosis in Africa that emphasises emptying oneself and serving the world using all fullness and strength to identify with the decay of creation.

In African religious traditions, Opoku (1978:52) explains how African ancestors used their own methods to preserve the environment. He believes that those traditional views about preservation of the natural environment are vital in contemporary times. It is an overstatement to say that African approaches to ecological challenges should differ from western approaches because western approaches are usually more philosophical and anthropocentric (Asamoah-Gyadu 2019:xi-xv; Dyke 2009:186-204; Conradie 2013:113-114). Africans have traditional religious practices that are essential in the preservation of the eco system. Yet these are constantly overlooked. In the view of Folarin (2013), some African leaders usually come into leadership by default including inheritance and election rigging. Their coming to power may be circumstantial. As such, they wait for crisis to set in before they seek

solutions because they have no pragmatic agenda, goals, or ambition, except to enjoy power. “What constitute achievements are rewarding efforts to the aspirant for getting there, the titular recognition, addition to or richness of his curriculum vitae, and of course, the spoils of office. The ‘position’ therefore is the focus of attention, not the results, the policies, actions and inactions” (2013:7). Ideally, leaders should be well prepared and set the agenda, goals and targets that are informed by a sound technical and knowledge basis, and leaders must serve and pursue their vision instead of thinking of the benefits that they can enjoy.

Youth, Leadership and Hope in Mfantse Thought

Akan traditional social structure generally follows an elaborate stratification system based on the recognition of hereditary status within the community. On each level is an advisory council where the central leader is supported by a group of leaders who exercise specialised political and administrative responsibilities. There are two main groupings: those who belong to the royal class, and those who do not. Royals are normally descendants of the ancestor who founded a land space or community; children as well as adults from that ancestor are included. In some cases, non-royals are adopted into royal families, though they have restricted privileges. The hierarchical arrangement, as in most ranked societies, gives recognition and honour to those who lead all the classes of people. Those who rule over the entire state have divisional chiefs heading subordinate regions, and then town chiefs, to sub-chiefs at the bottom of the administrative ladder. The royal is *odehye*, a compound word made up of *o* (‘s/he’) *de* (‘to bear/hold/own’) and *hye* (‘boundary’). Hence, *odehye* connotes one who owns the boundaries of a land, traditions, customs. The *odehye* who occupies the stool is the one to be approached when it comes to ascertaining the limits of land, traditions and custom. This means, if a child is an *odehye*, that child can claim ownership to land and be responsible for its value. Non-royals, thus, have limited rights over land.

The Mfantse, a subgroup of the Akan, subscribe to matrilineal descent. When a leadership position becomes vacant or is likely to be vacant, there is little or no contestation, for it is only the queen-mother who has the prerogative to nominate a successor. The queen-mother can nominate her own biological child to be a chief – whether old or young. It is said that *panyin wō hō na wōwoo ōhen* (lit. the elders were there before the chief was born). That is to say, being an adult does not necessarily give one the right to leadership. A Mfantse saying goes, *yamu mba nnsa a, wommfa wōfase ndzi adze* (lit. when biological children have not taken their share, nephews cannot inherit). Hence, preference is given to those who are closer to the throne than those who are far from it. In contemporary times, royalty is sometimes conferred on those who are not within the royal lineage and are allowed to ascend a throne. Such persons must be those who can add some economic value to the throne. It is said *Esiakyer akyer se: ‘Enyimnyam wōtō’* (lit. the ugly man from the town of Esiakyer says: ‘reputation can be bought’). Hence, some people of non-noble status in society can buy their way into leadership even if they are not qualified by birth.

A child or young person could be given the throne to rule, but must prove to be worthy before being considered. Being a royal is not enough grounds for ascending a throne; one must be seen to be well-prepared physically, psychologically and spiritually. A nominee must be morally upright, whether an adult or a child. In Africa, children are not accorded participatory rights in public gatherings. A child is not supposed to be present actively when elders gather and must not intercept the conversations of elderly people. A child does not have the right to share his or her opinion to adults, and cannot talk back when an elder speaks (Ackah, 1998:86). However, the Mfantse believe that, *sē abofra hun ne nsa ho hohor a, ōnye mpanyimfo dzidzi* (lit. when a child knows how to wash his/her hands, s/he can eat with elders). Knowing how to wash hands implies being able to contribute meaningfully to society. Humility is one of the virtues associated with such a concept of maturity. It is said, *nyia orohwehwē ōhen edzi no, wōma odzi kan som* (lit. the one who wants to be a chief must first serve). Through humility and service, a person develops experience, and can be given some status and considered among elders. According to Kwame Gyekye (1996:87), “Systematic or progressive development of the child is what is appreciated and urged and can yield satisfactory

results. When a person reaches a certain stage in his development, he will be able and expected to act like an elderly person and to rub shoulders with the elderly in the society.” Hence, a child or young person who shows signs of maturity in thinking and judgment can be qualified to be among the elderly or engage adults in all activities. Maturity, thus, is not only by age. A person could be advanced in age but not matured.

It is the experienced person who matters most in leadership. Experience is gained by staying close to adults and learning from them. However, confining oneself to one place is not enough. Hence, young people may be allowed to travel out of the home to gain more experience, but it is also believed that one who learns from home or from the old gains a better knowledge of the traditions. Even children who closely relate with adults usually learn a lot of wisdom. It is said, *akokōba a ōbēn ne na no na odzi abēbē ne srē* (lit. a chicken that is close to the mother eats the thigh of a grasshopper). In essence, a child or young person gets many privileges if s/he is close to the elders. That is why it is also said, *sē ēnye kōkōtse sian a, ēnnhwer woara* (lit. if you relate with the bush pig, you will not lose any of its nature).

It is assumed that children who want to aspire to be people of worth must have personal aspirations. Always listening from the streets will make one unworthy. A child must be interested in what goes on at home. Assimeng (2006:37) says, “Human beings are not born with aspirations. What to aspire for, and the efforts put in to gain the aspiration, are determined by the values of the social group in which one is immediately brought up.” Unfortunately, contemporary features of socialisation make the children of noble people to be less rooted in traditional norms and home-making. These children spend all their time acquiring formal education to the detriment of traditional wisdom, communicative power and management of the home. They are brought up in homes where house-helpers do everything for them while all that they do is concentrate on their formal education. Such alienation does not enable a person to fit well into society, but because of formal education and the status acquired from home, they easily advance to become leaders.

Leadership is not measured just by name and status. A person who cannot contribute meaningfully to society is considered to be *nyimpa hun* (“useless person”). The *nyimpa hun* is less than a child (Mfantse: *abofra*).¹ The *nyimpa hun* is ordinary, empty, and unfit to be counted upon. Conversely, a person of worth is described as *nyimpa tsitsir*, where *tsitsir* is a reduplicative adjective of *tsir* meaning “head”. The assumption is that, *nyimpa tsitsir* connotes a head of a group, a dependable one or prominent person. That is to say, moral responsibility towards society is very key to the definition of a prominent person or a leader. To be a leader is to seek the wellbeing of the home or society. Gyekye states that,

in African morality, there is an unrelenting preoccupation with human welfare. What is morally good is that which brings about – or is supposed, expected, or known to bring about – human wellbeing. This means, in a society that appreciates and thrives on harmonious social relationships, that what is morally good is what promotes social welfare, solidarity, and harmony in human relationships (1996:57).

Knowledge alone is not sufficient in leadership. A young person with good morals is likely to be successful than an adult with fewer morals. Hence, a status may be conferred on an individual with good morals as a “reward” for their efforts towards social wellbeing. Distinctions are made by virtue of the value of contributions a person makes to society; the lesser the contribution a person makes, the lesser the recognition given. Older people have the moral responsibility to add value to the life of young people. Notwithstanding, the Mfantse believe that *ōbra nye woara abō* (lit. “life is how you make it”). Personal initiative is highly recognised. It is said: *Abofra a ōbōhwē ne ho yie wō hō a, obi nkyerē wo* (lit. If a child who will educate himself or herself well is there, no one will show you). Conversely, an adult who is not morally good cannot be entrusted with inheritance. The Mfantse say, *wosoma oba nyansafo; wonnsoma anamon tsentsen* (lit. it is the wise child who is sent; not the one with long legs). Wisdom and character, therefore, play a key role in defining status.

¹ In Asante Twi and Akwapim Twi, a baby who is crawling is called *abofra*, while a child or young person is *akodaa*. However, in Mfantse, *akodaa* is an aged man.

Although personal traits in leadership have been challenged by scholars, they still play an important role in determining good leadership (Yulk 2010:43-75; DuBrin 2013:69-104). Personal traits of leaders influence them to exhibit high motivation for excellence and a high concern for moral power to build on the needs and hopes of their followers. Hence, the capabilities of an individual are vital to the concept of leadership. Moreover, it is the responsibility of kingmakers and elders to see to it that the one approved to be heir to a throne is nurtured until that individual is adequately fit to lead. Some of the virtues that a traditional leader has to learn include traditional history, the significance of the kinship structure, communication, mediation, folk wisdom, customs and traditions (including taboos) such as how to pour a drink, how to put on a cloth, how to sit down, where to sit, how to dance, and what kinds of relationships one must encourage. A Mfantse proverb says, *kotoku a hwee nni mu, onntumi nngyina ho* (lit. an empty sack cannot stand upright). Hence, a young person needs to be well prepared to lead a community successfully. Since this proverb means the one with an empty pocket cannot stand, it also connotes that wealth plays a key role in shaping life.

The position of the chief is a spiritual one; it deifies the individual who sits on the stool. In this case, one's identity does not really matter; the stool makes the occupant an ordained person. The moment a person sits on the stool, the spirit of the ancestors come to rest on him/her. Hence, the personality, speech, language, and demeanor of the person change. The Mfantse says, *ohen ba mpo, yentwa no powa* (lit. even the child of a chief cannot be insulted), and *ohen sua den ara, obaakofo nnsoa no* (lit. no matter how small a chief is, an individual cannot carry the chief). Disrespecting the chief means disrespecting the ancestors. More so, the councillors must provide good advice to a chief. It is said that *yenni ohen bon, ye wo mpanyimfo bon* (lit. there is no bad chief; rather there are bad councillors), and also *ohen nya ahotrafo pa a nna ne ber ye dwoodwo* (lit. "if a king has good councillors, his reign is peaceful"). Hence, the advisors play a key role in the decisions of the chief. A chief who does not listen to the advice of the councillors will end up in disgrace, for *ohen a onntsie ne mpanyimfo no, odze ne nantu bin ko bagua mu* (lit. a chief who does not listen to the elders will go to the public with faeces at the back of the heels).

their leader is a youth. As a king himself (cf 1:1,12), Qoheleth does not see the possibility of a youth contributing anything meaningful to leadership. It is rather a son of the noblemen (*ben chôrîm*) who is successful in leadership, and will attract blessings on the land.

The Hebrew *nā'ar* ("youth") is also translated as a boy (Judg 8:20; Prov 22:15; Jer 1:6; Lam 2:21), a little child (1 Kgs 3:7; Hos 11:1), a young assistant (Ex 33:11), a helper (Gen 37:2), and a servant (1 Sam 2:13). Unlike the slave who is bonded in the power of another, the *nā'ar* is a free person who serves as a matter of choice. The term is used in hyponymous relation to *'ebed* ("servant"), that is "a male, subordinate helper often with the notion of personal attachment (a) in some contexts, the word has more the meaning of *steward*. (b) in military contexts, the word means a *soldier*" (Eng 2011:71,82; emphasis original). Thus, *nā'ar* could be a young man, a stage where he can be allowed to assume responsibility for military duty (cf 1 Sam 17:33), can be married (Prov 2:17; 5:18; Mal 2:14-15), or pay tax (Walton 1979:119; Eng 2011:53), but it could also refer to a child (Gen 8:21), or metaphorically as a stage of rebellion (Ps 25:7) and sin (Job 13:26).

In Ecclesiastes, the *nā'ar* is set in contrast to the *ben chôrîm* ("son of noble people"), that is those who were the freemen, born-frees, and nobles (see Jer 39:6; Neh 6:17; 13:17). The term *ben chôrîm* represents persons who exercise some form of authority and leadership, or play an important role in government. They were influential people who acquired their noble status by birth (Olivier & Aitken, 1997:255-256). Others attain nobility by merit. They are frequently mentioned alongside elders (1 Kgs 21:8, 11) and "officials, governors and heads of communities" (Neh 4:8,13; 5:7; 7:5; 12:40; 13:11).

The nobles of Israel and Judah were frequently chastised for contributing in bringing chaos to the land and were also made to suffer exile alongside the kings (Is 34:12; Jer 39:1-7; 52:1-11; Ezek 17:12; Dan 1:1-6 cf Job 34:18-19). However, Qoheleth seeks to say that, "the land is blessed with a ruler who belongs to nobility by birth and thus is not consumed by a passion to abuse newfound power the way a slave might do who assumes control over the highest office of the land (cf. Prov 30:22)" (Crenshaw 1987:176). Moreover, Crenshaw explains that:

In ancient wisdom, poverty and youth were less desirable by far than maturity and kingship. Youth was vulnerable to sensual allurements, and poverty resulted (so the teaching went) from laziness. Age, by contrast, brought wisdom and honor, with kingship the ultimate reward for exemplary conduct. Of course, not every case of poverty and youth fitted the negative assessment, nor did every instance of kingship and age result in its opposite (1987:112).

Crenshaw is right because being born of noble birth does not guarantee wisdom and competence. A person of noble birth is not insulated from being consumed by passion. It stands to reason that Qoheleth was not necessarily comparing a young person with a noble but the inexperienced leader with one who is experienced. In Mfantse worldview, responsible and effective leadership is not about nobility. Knowing the duties to fulfil at the right time is a mark of leadership. Perhaps Qoheleth wants to say that immature leaders attract and nurture non-critical followers whose integrity can be questionable: the leader and councillors feast in the morning when they are expected to be working (v 16b). Such leaders are vulnerable because they are not well prepared to hold on to the values of society. Their agendas are unclear and vague because they follow their instincts rather than reason. When a leader does not know where s/he is leading the people to, there is disaster. Such leaders should rather be classified as immature leaders on the throne, and people who bring woe on the land.

The attitude of the young person or the son of a nobleman, according to Qoheleth, affects the land (*'ereš*; 10:16-17). The land either suffers woe or accrues blessings. The Hebrew word *'ereš*, usually translated "earth or "land," also refers to territory, country or underworld. Walter Brueggemann attests that land in the biblical sense usually refers to a physical space, but it is also symbolic, expressing "the wholeness of joy and well-being characterised by social coherence and personal ease in prosperity, security, and freedom" (1986:2). Pinker (2009:217) also observes that throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, *'ereš* is used to mean planet earth (1:4, 5:1, 8:14, 16); netherworld (3:21); country (5:9; 7:20, 10:16, 17, 11:2); and ground (10:7, 11:3, 12:7), with no clear preference of meaning. In this paper, I take *'ereš* "land" as synonymous with the ecology embodying the earth, water bodies and space. The well-being of the land or otherwise has repercussions on those who depend on it, which includes humanity, plants, animals and water

bodies. Among the Akan, land encompasses the image of a community, its people, plants, animals, and the environment. An ethic of land is also an ethic of the environment. In that respect, woe on the land connotes disaster for humanity and the environment. That is why the integrity of leadership matters.

Implications for Africans in Ecological Care

Ecology, here, is used interchangeably with environment. In African thought, the ecology is a creation of God, and is made up of all that make up the mother earth, sky and water bodies upon which humanity depends. The environment is not a creation of humanity. Human beings have been given the responsibility of stewardship. It is not to be domesticated for our intrinsic needs as some western people assume, putting the human being above creation and taking all to satisfy human need. For Africans, human beings are not above nature as life is dependent on the vital forces of nature. The environment has objective value in itself, and humanity must recognise such value and maintain it since the land and water bodies are all sacred. It is the lazy steward who is overtaken by events and allows the ecology to be destroyed, that is roof of the house (Heb: *bayith*) to sink in or leak (Eccl 10:18). Africans also have a similar concept of environment as a house, and in the sense Qoheleth uses “house” metaphorically as political dynasty (cf. 2 Sam 7:16). A person of character would not feast and get drunk when there are issues about a house to be addressed. Ecological crisis must not happen because leaders are thinking about themselves and feasting when there is work to do. Each person has a responsibility to care for the environment. Waiting for others to care for the environment should never be said of the African.

The key to effective leadership is strength and not drunkenness (v 16c). Elsewhere, Qoheleth consistently sees the youthful stage as unstable and lacking strength. It is a quickly passing stage which should rather be celebrated with responsible enjoyment – “Young people, it’s wonderful to be young! Enjoy every minute of it. Do everything you

want to do; take it all in” (Eccl 11:9a; ASB). The young person must refuse to worry because that would affect the body health (11:10). This is like saying, one step at a time. Allowing tomorrow to think of itself is a sure way to concentrate on the now. Nevertheless, all that the young person does will be brought before the judgment of God (11:9b). Ironically, Qoheleth says that the value of feasting is for strength (10:17c), for laughter (10:19a), to gladden life (10:19b), and not necessarily to result in drunkenness (10:17c). Effective leadership is not about status – whether one is a servant or not. Qoheleth earlier observed the subversion of social structure where nobles rather become followers of the youth and said it was unacceptable. It is evil and a great error for a fool to be set on a throne while the rich sit at a low place, or a slave to rule while princes become followers (10:5-9). This error is not self-inflicted, because everyone gets what s/he deserves. The one who digs a pit will fall into it (Eccl 10:8 cf. Prov 26:27). For the Mfantse, categorising every young person as unstable, lacking strength and prone to drunkenness is not acceptable. Effective leadership is not about age or being a servant but about wisdom, knowledge, and morality. That is why Africans involve the young people in the care and maintenance of the environment

In Africa, it is the one who knows how to do something that is given the task. That is why the Mfantse look at leadership differently from what we find in Ecclesiastes. It seems Qoheleth is talking about political structures where everything falls on the political leader. It is as if the councillors are there to feast in the morning when the king tells them so. The youth or servant analogy in this pericope also connotes an inexperienced person who totally neglects political responsibility and allows the deputies to do what they want (Wright 1991:1187). In African thought, the chief and the councillors are all responsible to the ancestors whom Mbiti refers to as the invincible police (Mbiti 1970:82), but the utmost responsibility lies with the chief. But when the chief makes an inappropriate speech or action, it is the duty of the councillors, especially the *Okyeame* to interpret what the chief said in the right way (see Aidoo 2018:104-5).⁴ The Akan believes that *sē ōhen*

⁴ The *Okyeame* is one of the elders/councillors who speaks for the chief, but not a chief.

annko a, akoa guan (lit. if the chief does not fight, the servants run away). Nevertheless, Akan traditional leadership is also a shared concept. If good leadership is what is at stake, then it is not all about a youth/servant vis-à-vis a noble person. Again, *ōhen nya mpanyimfō papa a, nna ose “menyim amanbu”* (lit. when a chief has good councillors, he says “I know how to reign”). This means, the responsibility for good governance also lies on the councillors. Ideal leadership is about surrounding oneself with persons of worth (*nyimpa tsitsir*) rather than useless persons (*nyimpa hun*) for, *panyin ntsena hō ma asafua mmfō* (lit. an elder does not sit unconcerned while the room gets wet). A good leader is one who is surrounded by good advisors.

Experience and knowledge are key in leadership when it comes to managing the ecology and not status. Hence it is said that, *asombēn wōhēn no nyia n’ano awo* (lit. only a talented person can blow the royal ivory horn). Experience and knowledge, therefore, would make leadership tilt on the adult against the young person. For it is said that *abofra bo nwaba, na onyē akyekyerē* (lit. a child can swallow a snail, but not a tortoise) and *dorbēn pae abofra nsa mu, na ompaa mpanyin nsa mu* (lit. the tapping reed breaks in children’s hands, but not in the hands of elders). These proverbs, among others, show the indispensability of adults. On the other hand, there seems to be an impression that the Mfantse see young people as more innovative and smarter. It is said: *ōhen akokora na wosisi no na nyē ababun* (lit. “A chief who is very old is the one who can be cheated and not the young one”). It is the young leader who has all the strength to repair a sinking roof and a leaking house. Perhaps, the old leader will rely on the proverb that “money answers everything” (10:19).

The youth in Africa cannot be overlooked in caring for the environment. In the Old Testament, some young kings were very successful. Josiah was eight years old when he began to rule over the land and was considered to be successful (1 Kgs 22:1-2; 2 Chron 24:2). The moral declension that characterised Israel and Judah also prompted the prophet to declare that God will cause young people and babies to rule instead of “warriors and soldiers, judge and prophet, diviner and elder, captain of fifty and dignitary, counsellor and skilful magician and expert charmer” (Isa 3:1-5). The leaders at that time were accused of misleading the people, using bad speech (Isa 3:8), and bringing

woe to the land by devouring the vineyard (Isa 3:14). Actually, the nobles were also to blame, and were heavily chastised by the prophets. Paul, in the New Testament, admonished Timothy that he should conduct himself well while leading the people of God, and teach so that no one despises him for being a youth (1 Tim 4:12).

In Africa, some organisations are using the youth to address ecological issues. The African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) is partnering with young people for conservation-friendly innovation and entrepreneurship to achieve its mission of wildlife and wildlands thriving. They are empowering the youth to take leadership and ownership of the challenges in the environment. The African Youth Initiative on Climate Change (AYICC) is another organisation that brings together youth organisations in Africa working on climate change under one umbrella to proactively get involved in the decision making process and the adoption of sustainable options towards a better climate and social equity. They see the youth as future leaders. Since the contemporary leaders are failing to give the best solutions to climate change, they have taken it upon themselves to redeem Africa from this predicament by falling on the youth. These examples show that African youth are capable of contributing meaningfully to ecological development.

Implications for the African Church

When Lynn White (1967:1203-7) accused Christianity to be the root cause of the world's environmental problems and that Christianity must bear a huge burden of guilt, one would have thought that decisive interventions would be made by the church. Yet very little has been done by the church in Ghana. In a recent study by Osei-Owusu (2018:156-210), it was found out that in the mainline churches, leaders have a wealth of theological resources about the preservation of the environment but there is very little awareness among the members of the church in the local communities. Only the Catholic Church in Ghana has embarked on a comprehensive education among the members and even that there is little to show. In 2018, eight Methodist ministers posted on their Facebook how rains have de-

stroyed their chapel buildings. A few lamented on how floods are affecting them on the church compounds. Ironically, they are all looking up to the political leaders to take action. The church must take advantage of wisdom, “to resolve ethical dilemmas, encourage economically productive lifestyles, build community and deepen the reader’s (or hearer’s) understanding of reality” (Bratton 2003:257).

The reasons why the church has done very little on care for the ecology is that it is looking up to others, especially the governments, to do everything about maintaining the environment. There is also an impression that stewardship is always about money and not the lands the churches own. It also pays very little attention to building the capacity of its members in terms of ecological care. To say that there is a general need for leaders in society, government, institutions, business and church is an overstatement. The African church has never been short of leaders – bishops, apostles, pastors, prophets, miracle workers, and evangelists. It is short of leaders who know what to do. Hence, the roof of the house is sinking in and leaking, and that is why “the people wander like sheep” (Zech. 10.2). In fact, a shortage of good leaders creates a shortage of good followers, and a shortage of good followers produces a shortage of future good leaders. Perhaps, the church has lost a vital force – wisdom – that makes ministry toward life in abundance become complete, and is not developing effective leaders. For the church to be of relevance in terms of ecological crisis, it does not need more pastors, but persons of wisdom, character and integrity. It does not need more sons and daughters of priests or persons of noble birth to take over from the parents. Effective leadership is about wise men and women adequately trained in a cultural ethos and value self-identity in community. It is not about the aged, nobles, young people or servants, but people with values, credibility, vision and respect for traditions. Persons who are well prepared and knowledgeable can take good care of God’s land, of which we are stewards.

What more can the African church do? First, the church must teach that all Christians are sons of a nobleman because it is through the blood of Jesus that all have become joint heirs of the kingdom of God. Christians are “children of God” (Jn 1:12-13) and “royals” (1 Pet 2:9),

and thus nobles. African Christians can enjoy better recognition as “nobles” when they appeal to traditional knowledge and potentials to add value to the throne. Ironically, if only nobles are the ones who make the difference and bring blessings on the land, then the church is yet to see such nobles who do what is right and hold fast to wisdom (Prov 8:15-16).

Second, effective leadership has more to do with what one contributes to society. Leadership is a platform where the leader, followers and situation dynamically influence the other. This means that leadership is a dynamic process where the agents of production influence each other’s actions toward achieving a particular goal. A leader’s personal qualities or the demonstration of extraordinary insight of a situation can inspire loyalty and obedience from followers, whereas the wits and counsel of followers can inspire transformation in the leader and a situation. The call for the youth in Africa to develop their capabilities to be persons of worth and translate their strength into productive ways for the betterment of society is apt.

Third, the church must teach all to accept that the spirituality attached to traditional and religious leadership is something to be honoured. The chief is ordained and has the support of ancestors and elders. Everyone has a role to play in managing the land. God can raise followers to initiate a movement that can transform the situation to the benefit of all (Aidoo 2017:365-367). Being proud of status is wrong. Emphasis on titles is not helpful. Leadership is not merely the ability to influence, incite and excite followers. It also includes harmony with the spiritual world and with the people around, as well as the ability to listen and the willingness to be led. When others provide guidance to functional leaders, it does not reduce the status of the leader. It rather enhances the leader’s spirituality. Inspirational motivation being a quality of leaders requires the empowerment of the followers to initiate actions. The ability to inspire and motivate oneself to perform at high levels, and to be committed to organisational initiatives makes the leader credible.

Fourth, the church must teach its members to be humble so that they could learn to grow in knowledge and wisdom. Although wisdom has its limitations and inadequacies, the one who ascends a throne with little wisdom only to drink and feast causes great harm to the land.

Incompetence brings lots of setbacks to the progress of a nation and its people, including the ecology. The knowledgeable person celebrates life as it comes, and feasts at the proper time (Eccl 10:17). There are instances where the king can be a fool, so a constant liaison with advisors is necessary: “Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice” (Eccl 4:13; ESV). The absurdity and unpredictability of life requires an experienced person, but more so, those with wisdom to navigate successfully.

Lastly, the church in Ghana, and Africa in general, has to admit young people into leadership, otherwise it will fail. Perhaps the church sees the young people as lazy, spending all their time in feasting. When young people are given leadership, they should not be overtaken by the moments of enjoyment as if that is the most important thing in life. If adults and nobles are not living up to expectation, then the young people must brace themselves to make a difference. The Akan say, *abofra nkotu mbire a wonnhu tu; mpanyin so nkotu a, woetsiatsia do* (lit. when a child is sent to pick mushrooms, he cannot do it well; when an adult is sent, he steps on it). After all, “it is for a man to bear the yoke while he is young” (Lam 3:27).

Conclusion

This paper has discussed Qoheleth’s views about the cause of ecological crisis through dialoguing with Mfantse proverbs. It has examined the role of the young person in leadership as compared to people of noble birth. For Qoheleth, there is woe on the land when young people or servants reign because they sit unconcerned when things go bad, bringing calamity on the land. Nobles rather use their strength to avert the ecological crisis. From the Mfantse context, however, responsible leadership is not about being a young person or a son of a noble person. Anyone who pursues knowledge and wisdom and possess good morals can be successful in leadership and will not sit unconcerned in the midst of the ecological crisis.

Chieftaincy in Mfantse thought belongs to the royal adults and young people who by blood ties belong to the royal family and are well prepared to lead. In contemporary times, non-nobles have worked their way to the throne by their wealth and power. So being a royal is not enough ground for ascending a throne. The potential leader must be worthy, dependable, competent, assertive and morally upright, and must contribute meaningfully to society. Young people can be allowed to ascend the throne when they have adequately prepared themselves to act with wisdom. In Africa, leadership is a shared concept that rests not only on the chief but more so on the councillors. As such, there must be a healthy interaction and balance between personal contributions and leadership competences, and between the chief and the councillors, although the buck stops with the chief.

For some positive impact to be made against the ecological crisis, five proposals have been made for the leadership of the church and society. Everything should not be left in the hands of nobles who lead yet the ecological crisis keeps worsening. The church must help to develop authentic leaders who take time to increase their knowledge, nurture positive qualities and are ready to add value to the system as well as the life of the people. It is character and integrity that guarantees success in leadership. Young people who are worthy and sit under the feet of traditional authority to develop their minds and strive for harmonious relationships are people of worth who can be successful leaders. Moreover, those who surround leaders must be people of worth, ready to do the right thing at the right time.

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