Chapter 5
Healing Nature and Creation in the Anthropocene: A Reflection on the Role of Religion

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> *When creation is threatened by climate change we are called to speak out and act as an expression of our commitment to life, justice and love* (World Council of Churches, September 2007).

Abstract While religion is one of the greatest causes of conflict around the world, it has also been recognised as an effective instrument in peacebuilding. The influence religious leaders and the teachings of the various religious scriptures—on peace and good neighbourliness—have over their followers have been tremendous resources for creating peace. Secular organisations such as the United States Institute for Peace (USIP) have helped to bring religion into mainstream peacebuilding. With the move to include earth care in the peacebuilding agenda, the role of religion in environmental conservation and climate change has come under the spotlight. This chapter explores the potential of religion to influence the climate change agenda positively. It discusses how the various world religions' scriptures treat ecological issues and how the religious leaders, of each of these religions, have sought to interpret them, in light of the climate change debate. The focus of the chapter is to encourage African peace practitioners to seriously consider including the healing of nature and creation in their peacebuilding agenda and how they could use religion (religion has a stronghold in Africa) to encourage communities to play an active role in addressing the negative effects of climate change. The case of the African Initiated Churches (AICs) in Zimbabwe, is used to illustrate how one organisation effectively used religion in its 'earthkeeping' efforts.

Keywords Peacebuilding · Earthkeeping · Religion · Climate change · Healing · Ecology

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5.1 Introduction

From time immemorial, people have always understood themselves to be inextricably connected to the earth, and for Africans, in particular, it is only a few generations ago when this notion was fully embraced. However, due to industrialisation and globalisation, human beings have increasingly become disconnected from nature—with disastrous consequences. In Africa, the evidence of the adverse effects of climate change is becoming more pronounced with time. From the receding water levels in lakes, to the increased rate of desertification, unpredictable weather patterns, frequent and longer periods of drought, and severe storms and floods when it rains, it has become difficult to ignore the signs. Climate change has social, political and economic consequences which may contribute to violent conflict. Inter-communal and cross-border violent conflicts may result from competition over availability of renewable resources such as water. For example, conflicts between pastoralists and farmers in some Eastern and Western African countries are common and most likely to escalate as the effects of climate change increase (van Baalen/Mobjőrk 2017; Raleigh 2010; Furini 2019). Extreme droughts and flooding increase poverty levels and affect communities' well-being, resulting in unpeaceful situations (Dube/Phiri 2013). It is incumbent upon us, as peacebuilders, to play a role in making peace with the nature and creation – what Daneel (2011) refers to as 'earthkeeping'– that we, as people, have so badly abused.

As a person of faith and a peacebuilder, I see religion as having a role to play in combating the anthropogenic climate change the world is currently facing. Most world religions, from the Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), and others such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Bahai faith and Confucianism, including African traditional religions (ATR), to varying degrees believe in the sacredness of the earth and emphasise the interrelatedness and interdependence of humankind and the rest of creation (Branton 2006). We also learn from the religions of the need to care for the earth for its own sake.

This short chapter seeks to provoke peacebuilders to consider their peacebuilding responsibilities as extending beyond the traditional peacebuilding mandates of healing human relations, to healing nature and creation, which has suffered violently at the hands of human beings. It is not meant to offer definitive answers but to spark a discussion about how we, as African peacebuilders, in particular, can start to think about our individual responsibilities to care for nature and creation as part of building peace in our continent and globally as well. This is not something that is at the grand and complex scale of environmental peacebuilding, but a call to examine whether we are good stewards of what has been entrusted to us, and how we as peacebuilders can contribute at a personal level to 'earthkeeping'.

5.2 World Religions' View of Human and Ecology Relationships

As noted above, religions of the world, in their scriptures, do speak, in one way or another, to the relationship between ecology and human beings. In this section I briefly survey some of them and their teachings related to their ecological views. I acknowledge that even within some of the religions discussed here, there are varying degrees of ecological beliefs and thoughts, but due to space constraints, this chapter will not dwell much on the nuances of these internal divergences. The purpose of this survey of the religions' cosmological and ecological perspectives is to show that every major religious belief offers opportunities that can help peacebuilders to think about their peacebuilding philosophy towards nature and creation.

5.2.1 Eastern Religions

5.2.1.1 Buddhist Approaches to Ecology

According to Buddhist teachings, the environment – that is inhabited, or the inhabitants – are both composed of basic elements: earth, wind, fire, water and vacuum, that is space. It is, therefore, "on the basis of these five basic elements that there is a very close inter-relatedness or interrelation between the habitat, that is the natural environment, and inhabitants, the sentient beings living within it" (Dalai Lama 1992). This emphasis on the interrelatedness of humans and nature seems to indicate that within Buddhism there is an inherent awareness of and responsibility to one's surroundings. According to Branton (2006, p. 213), it includes "an ecological vision and principle of interdependence that integrates all aspects of the ecosphere". The religion encourages its followers to extend love to all of nature and to avoid being cruel to other living beings. Earth is viewed as being sentient – that is, being alive and having feelings and awareness (Yŭ 2014, p. 484). According to Rakkhit (2014), a monk from Bangladesh, the *Vinaya* one of the Buddhist scriptures, requires monastics, as much as possible, to avoid harming nature. "Even when urinating in a remote area, he/she is advised to find a place that has no fresh grass or fresh leaves". He further suggests that one of the reasons for the establishment of the Buddhist rainy season retreats was to minimise destruction to the environment. This practice encouraged the monks to stay at the temple during the rainy season because during this time, in the rural areas, there was too much movement from the religious mendicants, which could result in agricultural damage.

It is out of this consciousness and realisation of the interdependence of human beings and nature that "Buddhist environmentalists demonstrate their concern for the total living environment, by extending lovingkindness and compassion beyond people and animals to include plants and the earth itself" (Branton 2016, p. 213).

5.2.1.2 Hinduism

Much like other Eastern religions, Hinduism also believes in the inextricable relationship between human beings and the environment. For most Hindus, all living things are sacred because they are part of God and the principle of *ahimsa*, nonviolence, means showing respect for all living things, humans, animals and plants. Nature cannot be destroyed without humans also being destroyed, because we need the natural world in order to survive (BBC Bitesize 2022). In the Hindu writings, the universe is described as an interconnected whole in which each part is interdependent with every other part. It is a living organism. The universe is understood by some to be God's body (Coward 1997). The mythology is deeply rooted in an ecological vision, where the human-nature relationship is at its core. The Hindu scriptures have been summarised by Kapila Vatsyanan (1992) thus,

> Man's (*sic*) life depends upon and is conditioned by all that surrounds him and sustains him, namely, inanimate, mineral and animate, aquatic, vegetative, animal and gaseous life. It is, therefore, Man's duty to constantly remind himself—in individual and collective life—of the environment and the ecology (cited in Coward 1997, p. 51).

Therefore, this vision permeates the biological, physical and spiritual dimensions of life. For Hindus, taking care of nature and creation is taking care of oneself and their community. One cannot survive without the other. Respecting the universe well and treating it well is an act of worship because God is the universe, and the universe is God.

5.2.1.3 Confucianism

According to Confucian thought, human beings exist in a harmonious relationship with nature. Even though people play a unique role in the environment, they must not become separated from nature, for, all the achievements of human culture have their foundation in nature (Christensen 2014). This view of a unified, interconnected, and interpenetrating universe emphasises an intricate awareness and deep reciprocity between humans and the natural world. Confucian practitioners appreciate nature as "intrinsically valuable and rely on history as a way of maintaining continuity and collective memory" (Branton 2006, p. 213). There is a harmonious existence and people are at the centre of this 'organic whole' with no separation between the natural world and humans. As Christensen puts it, "[if] humans do not fully realize that we are only one species among others, and that the whole ecological system exists in a mutually dependent relationship, then the result in the end will be obstruction of harmony between humans and the environment" (Christensen 2014, p. 283). He concludes by noting that,

> Human civilization should not be an enemy of nature, but should be seen as a part of the development of the world. Since people are considered to be a part of the natural environment as a whole, the action of not harming this 'whole' also implies an act of taking care of the people. As soon as the natural environment has been harmed, the natural resources available

> for future human generations will be reduced, and so their lives will be faced with dangers. This is contrary to the demand that we take care of the people's lives. Thus, one may say that taking care of the people must have protection of the natural environment as a prerequisite requirement (Christensen 2014, p. 283).

5.2.2 The Abrahamic Religions and the Environment

Judaism, Christianity and Islam are often referred to as the Abrahamic faiths because of their common belief in Abraham as the forefather of their respective religions. The perspectives of these religions on the relationship between human beings and the environment is different from the other faiths in that, although there is an interdependent relationship between nature and humankind, they are, nevertheless, different from each other. Be that as it may, the existence of humanity is intertwined with the existence of nature. In the same vein, God is above his creation, he is not nature and nature is not God.

5.2.2.1 Judaism

In terms of the Jewish traditional view of the environment, God is the originating power and unifying force of the universe. Creation is seen as a closed system which is complete, self-sustaining and dynamic. All actions in the universe are integrated and their impact can affect the balance and rhythm of life positively or negatively (Kopstein/Salinger 2001, p. 63). The Jewish Scriptures, the Torah, are written in the context of an agrarian society and many of the festivals the Jewish community is commanded to observe, are agricultural celebrations (Halpert 2012).

In the story of creation in Genesis 1 and 2, human beings are put in the garden to be 'stewards' of the earth. This idea carries with it a "notion of responsibility, that the human is responsible for the well-being of the earth". This concept is "founded on the conviction that the way humans till the earth relates to moral integrity" (Halpert 2012). Therefore, the misuse or lack of care for the environment is an indication of the loss of that moral compass. Furthermore, creation, as an act of God, is set apart (holy) and follows the law of God; and these laws, like the laws of physics, affect all without preference. Creation is intertwined in the web of life, and while how humans behave may affect the environment in ways that create changes, these changes are also felt within the larger scheme of things, resulting in repercussions that go beyond the immediate (Kopsten/Salinger 2001). According to the ancient commentary of the Hebrew Bible, the Qohelet Rabbah 7:28,

> When God created Adam, he showed him all of the trees of the garden of Eden and said to him: "See my works, how lovely they are, how fine they are. All I have created, I have created for you. Take care not to corrupt and destroy my universe, for if you destroy it, no one will come after you to put it right" (cited in Rakover 2003).

The responsibility to care for nature falls squarely on humans' shoulders. For they have been designated as its caretakers on behalf of God. It is within this context that the commandment to give the earth a rest every seven years (Leviticus 25–26; Deuteronomy 15) may be understood. It is necessary, according to the laws of the Sabbath, Sabbatical and Jubilee, for the earth to be allowed to rest from human interference. In the Rabbinic letter on climate crisis (2015), the seventh year of release (*Shmittah*, *Shabbat Shabbaton*), the Rabbis argue this point persuasively. The argument is best summed up by Rabbi Green (1998, pp. 102–103),

> We acknowledge the presence of God in the natural rhythms of past seasons. Our awareness of wind, rain, and dew, as daily miracles also serves to remind us that the purity of these gifts, so vital for our survival, must be maintained by human watchfulness. In thanking God for air, we assert our commitment to preserving them as sources of life and protecting them from life-destroying pollution.

The humans' responsibility to the environment, according to the *Talmudic* laws, is three-fold: *Ba'al taschit*, do not destroy—avoid plundering the earth, through reducing, reusing and recycling; *Shomrei Adamah*, guard the earth—from destructive human behaviour, and *Tikkun Olam*, repair the earth—repair harm done to earth and restore nature's balance (Kopstein/Salinger 2001, p. 71).

5.2.2.2 Christianity

There are varying and sometimes opposing schools of thought in the Christian world, on spirituality and ecology. This is especially true within the Evangelical branch of the Christian church. The evangelical church in America, is particularly divided on this issue with some supporting the ecological cause while others oppose it on the basis that the earth is there to serve human needs and human beings have dominion over it (Ronan 2017). Other branches of Christianity, such as the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox churches, have a more monolithic approach to eco-theology. This is because of the role their leaders have played in pushing for the inclusion of the environment as a spiritual issue. Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew, in particular, have contributed significantly to the debate – even direction – through their letters to their followers.

This discussion will focus on those parts of the Christian church which support the proactive role in climate change mitigation efforts—what I might term 'ecologically friendly' Christianity. However, this approach does not diminish the views of the Christian groups that advance the notion that the earth is there to serve human needs and human beings have dominion over it. The importance of the earth is not in question, but rather the manner of its exploitation without regard to its preservation for generations.

The ecologically friendly church views environmental degradation as a moral failure on the part of human beings and strongly links ecological awareness to the idea of stewardship; seen as a sacred obligation to safeguard and preserve the earth (Ronan 2017). As Pope Francis (2015) has said in his *Laudato si'*, the damage to the

environment is a reflection of the depravity of human beings' hearts. The Patriarch Bartholomew (1997 cited in Francis 2015, p. 8) put it more strongly and equated it to sin:

> For human beings… to destroy the biological diversity of God's creation; for human beings to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands; for human beings to contaminate the earth's waters, its land, its air, and its life – these are sins… For, to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God (see also Bennett 2008, p. 20).

As in Judaism, Christian theology on the environment starts with the creation story as stated in Genesis 1 and 2. God created the earth and gave it to humankind for their sustenance and he expected them to care for it in return. According to Genesis 1 v26-30, God entrusted human beings with the responsibility of caring for the earth which he had painstakingly created for them. The charge to fill, subdue and have dominion over the earth was not so that people could do as they pleased with it, but it was a charge to be stewards, to use it wisely on His behalf.

It is the responsibility of humans to look after the earth and everything in it, to take care of it, for its existence is not merely for humankind's use but it has intrinsic value in and of itself. "The ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things" (Francis 2015, p. 61).

First and foremost, nature reveals God's glory. "… his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made" (Romans 1:20; *cf* Psalm 8; Psalm 148: 3–5). In its pristine condition, nature shows the greatness of its creator. "Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection… Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness. Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things" (Roman Catholic Catechism, p. 339). Therefore, the destruction of the environment, the extinction of a myriad of species, "means they can no longer give God the glory nor convey their message to us" (Francis 2015, p. 25). As nature reveals God's glory, so does He command that human nurture it to preserve His infinite glory.

Secondly, all of creation (including humans) has been created in such a way that it is all dependent on each other "to complete each other, in the service of each other" (Roman Catholic Church Catechism). "God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil, almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement" (Francis 2015, p. 66). Thirdly, God actually cares about all of His creation – of His omnipotence and benevolence. God's command to give the earth rest every seventh year (Leviticus 25–26; Deuteronomy 15), is to avoid misuse and overuse, and so the earth can regenerate itself. Refusal to obey this command would result in forceful Sabbath rest for the land, through the children of Israel being taken into exile in foreign lands (Lev. 26: 33–35). In the New Testament, Jesus also highlighted God's care even for the "most

insignificant creatures". In Luke 12:6 Jesus says, "are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God", and again in Matthew 6:26, "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them…".

Therefore, human beings' relationships are not just among themselves and God and with their neighbours, but include a third dimension—between them and nature (Francis 2015). The Patriarch Bartholomew (2012) sees an even closer relationship. He urges people "to accept the world as a sacrament of communion, as a way of sharing with God and our neighbours on a global scale". Furthermore, it is his 'humble conviction that the divine and the human meet in the slightest details of seamless garment of God's creation, in the last speck of dust of our planet".

The World Council of Churches (WCC), and its individual member churches, have been advocating for action on climate change as far back as the 1980s (Toroitich/Kerber 2014; Hallman 1997). The theological underpinnings of the WCC's actions are very similar to those mentioned above. According to a 29-member consultation convened by the WCC to complete a study paper entitled "Accelerated Climate Change: Sign of Peril, Test of Faith", the evidence of global warming and distraction of the environment are not only a sign of peril but of test of the faith, and as such,

> [God as] Creator-Redeemer asks all who can see to read the sign of the peril that looms before the planet. Response to the peril becomes a matter of renewed faithfulness to "God [who] calls us to participate with God in God's own work of stopping the degradation of Earth's protective mantle and engaging in the other tasks of protecting and restoring the creation, human and nonhuman." From theological affirmation of God as Creator-Redeemer in the context of imminent peril, come urgent ethical imperatives, including among others: that we (1) "cherish the whole of creation"; (2) build communities in which all may "participate in obtaining and enjoying sufficient and sustainable sustenance from nature"; and (3) "protect this earthly habitat ... [for] our children's children's children, together with other life, on into the indefinite future" (Gibson 1994, p. 11.).

The WCC central committee statement of January 1994, released in Johannesburg, South Africa, affirmed that global warming and accelerated climate change were visible signs of the crisis being experienced by civilisation, and were rooted in the refusal to accept the boundaries of God's creation. It further noted that the social and environmental degradation caused by accelerated climate change was sin against God and a violation of creation. It called for the protection of the atmosphere as an essential and invaluable common good for current and future generations. Just like the other branches of Christianity, it proclaimed that radical change was only possible through repentance and changed life-styles. It then called on all Christians "to recognise the challenge to the life and witness of Christians that the crisis from accelerated climate change presents", and "to reinterpret Christian responsibility towards creation and to respond in faith and action to the peril in their own situation" (WCC 1994, pp. 247–8).

5.2.2.3 Islam

Much like the other two Abrahamic faiths, Islamic eco-theology also believes that earth and all of nature, has a higher purpose than simply to serve the needs of human beings. Creation exists to manifest the glory of God, as the 2015 Islamic declaration on global climate change says:

> God—Whom we know as Allah—has created the universe in all its diversity, richness and vitality: the stars, the sun and moon, the earth and all its communities of living beings. All these reflect and manifest the boundless glory and mercy of their Creator. All created beings by nature serve and glorify their Maker, all bow to their Lord's will. We human beings are created to serve the Lord of all beings, to work the greatest good we can for all the species, individuals, and generations of God's creatures (cited in Schaefer 2016, p. 11).

Furthermore, human beings and the environment are interdependent. This was affirmed by the organisers of the 'Islam and the Environment' conference held in Dubai in 2013, when they stated that,

> The environment lies at the core of the Islamic faith, and the underlying principal that forms the foundation of the Prophet Mohammed's […] holistic environmental vision is the belief in the interdependency between all natural elements, and the premise that if humans abuse or exhaust one element, the natural world as a whole will suffer (cited in Reuter 2015, p. 1224).

Therefore, the environment is viewed as being sacred, and according to Bilal (2017), it might even be equated to other forms of worship (*ibadah*) such as prayer and fasting. He further argues that, even if there was no threat of a resource crisis, Muslims are still expected to take good care of the earth and its resources, and to improve conditions of life on earth through due consideration towards "the environment with a sense of both duty as well as morality". Humans are to be the caretakers "of Earth, they are intended to savour the 'gifts' of Earth, and they are accountable to God for their actions" (Schaefer 2016, p. 12). As Torabi/Nori (2019, p. 346) have pointed out, "the environment offers humans profound and constant opportunities to be aware of God's presence"; therefore, any "maltreatment of the environmental factors would be tantamount to human neglect of giving due respect to God's clear signs". Human beings "as the guardians of Allah's creation, … have a responsibility to protect the environment" (Torabi/Nori 2019, p. 348).

5.2.3 African Traditional Religions

Although African Traditional Religions (ATRs) are not homogeneous, nevertheless, they have certain cosmological beliefs, rituals, and practices in common. According to Tarusarira Tarusarira (2017, p. 400), the African world usually,

> … exists in two spheres – the visible, tangible, and concrete world of humans, animals, vegetation, and other natural elements; and the invisible world of the spirits, ancestors, divinities, and the supreme deity. Yet it is one world, indivisible, with one sphere touching on the other. Its specific elements are basically the belief in the existence of God and/or

gods; the belief in spirits, both good and bad; and the belief in cultic prohibitions (taboos) and moral violations.

Indeed, animism is a common thread in all ATRs, as a result of this, certain animals, vegetation and natural phenomena such as hills, or rivers are deified (Mwale 2014–2015; Tarusarira 2017). In African cosmology, "the relationships between humans and nature, and spirit and nature" are not dual but are intertwined "into an interdependent system of existence" that is held together by spiritual interactions (Tarusarira 2017, p. 407). Therefore, African spirituality is inextricably linked to nature and, to a large extent, depends on it for religious rituals and people's everyday existence. Furthermore, trees are a source of fuel, building material, and used for medicinal purposes. Therefore, conservation of the environment is in the best interest of the spirituality, health, wealth, livelihoods and wellbeing of the community. There is a deep respect and reverence for the environment, and community members, from an early age, are taught to protect the natural environment. Trees should not be cut down willy-nilly and certain sacred ones should not be cut down at all or used as firewood, even if they were dry. Domestic animals and people were prohibited from exploiting or frequenting certain sacred places such as specified mountains and water pools.

As can be noted from the above discussion, most religions, at their core, have the inextricable and symbiotic interdependent relationship between human beings and nature. Nature is deemed to be important, and having a right to exist in its own right. Nature sustains human life, and humanity has a responsibility to care for, and use it responsibly for the sake of future generations. Furthermore, nature plays an important spiritual role in the cosmology of most major religions; either as reflecting the glory of the Creator—magnifying His greatness, as in the Abrahamic religions, or as embodying the Divine and being the dwelling place of the spirits, as in the Eastern and African traditional religions. Religion plays an important role in African lives, and bears influence over the vast majority of the population, and has often been used in peacebuilding efforts to address human conflicts. In the same manner, it could be drawn upon to assist the efforts of healing nature and creation.

5.2.4 Earthkeeping by Communities of Faith in Zimbabwe

A fascinating example of the use of religion to address climate change is the work of M. L. Daneel, professor Emeritus of Missiology at UNISA, through his organisation, the Zimbabwean Institute of Religious Research and Ecological Conservation (ZIRRCON), in the Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe, between 1988 and 2003 (Daneel 1998, 2011). He worked with both the traditionalists, under the banner of the Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists, and the African Initiated Churches (AIC), under the Association of African Earthkeeping Churches (AAEC). According to Daneel (2011, p. 130), the achievements of this project included 15000–18000 mother nurseries, some of which cultivated as many as 100 000 seedlings each year. Schools and women's groups also ran their own small nurseries, and during

this period 12 to 15 million trees were planted throughout the province. A variety of tree species were planted which included:

- fruit trees in orchards for personal and commercial use;
- exotics such as eucalyptus for building operationsindigenous trees for firewood and the restoration of denuded land;
- leucaena for cattle fodder, firewood, and nitrate-fixing in arable lands; and
- indigenous hardwood, such as kiaat and pod mahogany, as a long-term investment for future generations (Daneel 2011, p. 130).

The earthkeepers became known for cultivating indigenous fruit tree seedlings, mountain acacia, thorn trees, etc, more than any other organisation in the country. Daneel avers that government officials, including President Robert Mugabe, used to attend and participate in their annual tree-planting ceremonies.

Conservation clubs were involved in the struggle against soil erosion by filling erosion gullies with stones and planting vetiver grass in the affected areas. Pupils from some 30 clubs in rural schools were taken on trips to learn about trees and birds, and from time to time, Parks and Wildlife officials would accompany the children to the national parks to teach them about big game and species that were no longer found in communal lands. On the other hand, spirit mediums and the elders assisted the chiefs by restoring the customary laws on the protection of trees and wildlife in the ancestral holy groves. Offenders were heavily fined and made to plant trees in denuded areas.

Another aspect of this project involved the ritualisation of the tree planting ceremonies, which took a traditional or Christian form depending on which group was leading the ceremony. For the AZTREC, the rituals resembled the rain-making ceremonies, which included ancestral beer and sacrificial addresses to the ancestors on the basis of the traditional cosmology. The seedlings were entrusted into the protective care of the guardian ancestors, after which, tree planting would take place. Although the Christian earthkeepers were present during these ceremonies, they would not participate in them and only joined the traditional earthkeeper for the actual tree planting activity (see Daneel 1998 for more details on the ceremonies).

The church earthkeepers held what Daneel calls the ‘tree-planting Eucharist’. This ceremony integrated the earthkeeping ministry with the traditional Christian sacrament of Holy Communion. As he points out, “this development was of pivotal importance, for it brought environmental stewardship right into the heartbeat of church life and biblically based spirituality” (Daneel 2011, p. 131). The AAEC’s ceremonies involved,

- Preparations of the woodlots, that is, the digging of the holes for the seedlings, fencing and naming the woodlots the ‘Lord’s Acre’, the equivalent of the traditional sacred groves.
- Dancing and singing around the seedlings to praise God, the great Earthkeeper.
- Sermons by the AIC bishops, speeches by representatives from the Forestry Commission, Parks and Wildlife and other government officials.

- Christian participants' public confession of their ecological sins of tree felling without replanting, poaching and promoting soil erosion.
- Confession followed by each member picking up the seedlings and going to the table where bread and wine were administered. This act symbolised the drawing of nature into the inner circle of communion with Christ the Redeemer, the head of the church and of all creation (Daneel 2011, p. 131).

After communion, the Christians would then be joined in the tree planting activity by the traditionalists, who, although present during the ceremony, would not participate in the above rituals. At the end of the tree planting, the Christian tree planters would then kneel before the prophetic healers for laying on of hands and prayer.

5.3 Towards an Ecologically-Sensitive Peacebuilding Paradigm

Generally, peacebuilding in Africa has focused on human relations, and rightly so, because of the many violent conflicts Africa continues to experience. Although this will continue to be an important aspect of our peacebuilding work, the threat of climate change to the environment and human existence calls for African peacebuilders to shift from the traditional concept of building peace to a holistic one that includes the environment. This work should not be left to conservationists alone.

Almost all religions seem to be in agreement that the degradation humans have caused to the environment over the years is violence against nature and creation. Although some religions view earth's primary function as the sustenance of human existence, there is also a common understanding that nature exists in its own right and for the glory of God or the Divine. There is an inextricable interdependence between humans and nature—a symbiotic relationship, as it were. The Creator's original plan, for a respectful and sustainable co-relationship between earth and human beings, has been shattered by the careless and irresponsible exploitation of nature by humans, and this threatens the very existence of both.

'Earthkeeping' is a spiritual act, and Africans tend to be spiritually conscious (whether, or not, they follow a particular religion). As such, it is incumbent upon African peacebuilders to seriously consider what role they ought to be playing in the protection and preservation of the ecological system. We need to think about developing a peacebuilding paradigm that encompasses the totality of our existential reality. That is to say, a peacebuilding approach that covers human relations, human spirituality and relations with nature and creation. For instance, from a Christian perspective (as in some of the religions discussed above), peacebuilding should happen on three dimensions: reconciling human beings with God (because of sin, we are in conflict with him), with one another (because of sin, interpersonal harmony and cohesion has been shattered) and with nature (the sustainable utilisation of natural resources, was overtaken by greed and recklessness).

The purpose of this reflection is to stimulate a practical discourse at personal and societal levels on: (a) how we as individual peacebuilders can adjust our behaviour and practices to reflect a life style that enables a healthy respect and care for the environment, (b) how we can make environmental conservation a peacebuilding agenda and mainstream it into our traditional programmes. How can we incorporate some of the principles espoused by the diverse religious persuasions to transform our own attitudes and practices and those of the communities with whom we work? Finally, how do we get governments to think long-term when it comes to the socio-economic policies they formulate?

5.4 Conclusion

As peacebuilders, we are concerned about conflict and violence, and we seek to foster positive peace in society. As amply demonstrated by the religious discourse above, misuse, overuse or abuse of the environment is violence towards an entity on which our very existence depends, and to which we are inextricably connected. We need to understand that we are fast approaching a point where a holistic peace will not be possible without a shift from an anthropocentric view of the environment. The field of peacebuilding is a fluid one that is ever changing in response to contemporary and arising conflictual issues. Climate change is a contemporary issue that threatens peace and harmony. African peacebuilders have to take up the challenge of 'earthkeeping,' and actively work for a more sustainable use, and better treatment of the environment. Pivotal to this is the awakening, within the African peoples of that spiritual connection that has existed between nature and them, and moving governments and business towards a more balanced and sustainable use of the continent's natural resources. In addition, as peacebuilders, we have our own individual contributions to make towards a healthy and less violated environment by how we live and treat the nature. We need to introspect on how we contribute towards the healing of nature and creation in our immediate environs first, before we can think about a more global contribution.

In short, a holistic peacebuilding approach should encompass the preservation of the environment as part of a toolkit for prevention of violent conflict. The environment is becoming an increasingly critical part of the peacebuilding ecosystem.

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