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From Missio Dei To Missio Creatoris Dei

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FROM MISSIO DEI TO MISSIO CREATORIS DEI

Toward an African Missional Christology of Jesus as the Ecological Ancestor

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As negative human attitudes toward earth continue to undermine the quality of life across the globe, Christianity is witnessing a growing ecological consciousness. This consciousness has redefined Christian spirituality and discipleship to include human attitudes toward the creation. Since 1984, Anglicans have consistently attached creation care to Christian mission, spirituality and identity. “To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth”, is the

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Anglican fifth mark of Christian mission. Patriarch Bartholomew of the Orthodox Church has declared environmental irresponsibility a “crime against the natural world” and “a sin.”⁸² Aside from linking justice to creation care, the World Council of Churches 2014 *Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace* regretted that “the planet sits at the brink of disaster and life itself is imperiled.”⁸³ In 2015, Pope Francis released his Encyclical *Laudato Si'*. Addressed to all humanity, the Pontiff writes,

*Doomsday predictions can no longer be met with irony or disdain. We may well be leaving to coming generations debris, desolation and filth. The pace of consumption, waste and environmental change has so stretched the planet's capacity that our contemporary lifestyle, unsustainable as it is, can only precipitate catastrophes, such as those which even now periodically occur in different areas of the world. The effects of the present imbalance can only be reduced by our decisive action, here and now. We need to reflect on our accountability before those who will have to endure the dire consequences.*⁸⁴

Among those to endure the dire consequences, the Pontiff argues, are future generations of life and the poor in developing nations and Africa in particular.

⁸² Bartholomew and John Chryssavgis, (ed.), *On Earth as in Heaven: Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*, New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2012, 195.

⁸³ World Council of Churches, *Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace*, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2014/an-invitation-to-the-pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace> (accessed 30 April 2015).

⁸⁴ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, Brooklyn: Melville House, 2015, 161.

But long before *Laudato Si'*, the *Earth Charter* challenged humanity to choose “to care for Earth and one another or risk the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life.”⁸⁵ Since “we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny”, the *Earth Charter* demanded major paradigm shifts in the conception of the natural world. Such shifts, however, are equally needed in the conception of Christian mission and the work of Jesus Christ (Christology).

9.1 From Missio Dei to Missio Creatoris Dei⁸⁶

The vulnerability of Africa to the ecological catastrophe is a missional invitation to theological and ethical reflections and actions planted in African worldviews. Christian mission is not church or human centered, but God centered. It emanates from the Triune God, and we, Christians are invited to participate in the mission of God (*missio Dei*). In this regard, Christian Mission is joining God in proclaiming and performing God’s rule on earth. The church’s participation in the *missio Dei*, however, is planted in the mission of Christ (*missio Christi*), and empowered by the *missio Spiritus* (the mission of the Spirit). Thus, participants in the *missio Dei* respond to what God is already doing on earth. Amidst the occurring ecological crisis, for example, Christian mission ought to participate in the *missio Dei* of loving and caring for the creation as God’s sacred garden. This understanding proposes two paradigm shifts in Christian thought – the mission theology of God as

⁸⁵ *The Earth Charter*, http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/mods/theme_a/img/02_earthcharter.pdf

⁸⁶ The following section is part of my reflections on Christian mission and Earth care, originally presented at the Edinburgh 2010 Missionary Centennial Conference, Edinburgh, Scotland, June 2010. See “Missio Dei or missio Creatoris Dei: Witnessing to Christ in the Face of the Occurring Ecological Crisis,” In *Mission Today and Tomorrow*, Kirsteen Kim and Andrew Anderson, eds., Oxford: Regnum Books, 2011.

the Creator, who loves, cares for, and sustains the creation (*missio Creatoris Dei*), and the Christology of Jesus as the ancestor of all creation.

9.1.1 Christian Mission as Missio Creatoris Dei

The theological and ethical implications of God as the Creator and owner of the entire creation are many. First, just as humanity finds its source in God the Creator, the source and owner of the creation is God. Second, God is not absent from this earth. Every space is sacred ground – pointing to the fact that the natural world is sacred and how we relate to the creation is a gospel and Christian mission issue. Third, it points to the affinity of Christ with the creation – suggesting that the cosmos is a beneficiary of the salvation procured by Christ. Finally, the Spirit of God never left this earth – the Spirit moves on earth just as the Spirit did in the beginning (Gen.1:2). Thus, the creation is the witness to the True Creator God:

*The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world (Ps. 19:1-4).*

Consequently, Thomas O. Chisholm's hymn *Great is Thy faithfulness* reflects this theological truth when he presents the entire creation as joining "in manifold witness" to the Creator. He writes,

*Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,*

*Join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.*

God's great faithfulness, mercy and love are equally the gauge of justice and love on earth. The exploitation of earth follows the exploitation of the poor, thus creation care is a justice issue. Yet, the plight of earth and the poor are also missional invitations to work for the liberation of the poor and the earth. This entails the recognition of the intrinsic value of all beings in the universe from the Creator's perspective. In the words of Pope Francis, no creature "is superfluous. The entire material universe speaks of God's love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God."⁸⁷

The creation is not divine, but the natural world has sanctity by virtue of the creation's origin, and of the divine presence in the cosmos. Irenaeus (120–202) speaks to this truth when he writes "The initial step for a soul to come to knowledge of God is contemplation of nature."⁸⁸ Irenaeus words are also echoed in Pope Francis's Encyclical when he argues that a vital ecology ought to "recover a serene harmony with creation" as well as the contemplation of "the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us."⁸⁹ The cosmos, the Pontiff asserts, "unfolds in God, who fills it completely."⁹⁰

It is only within the sacredness of the creation that humanity can experience the Creator. This conception of spirituality invites a shift from experiencing God apart from the creation to seeing the Creator God in the natural world. Our responsibility to one another, future generations and the ecological community are aspects of the *missio Dei*

⁸⁷ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 84.

⁸⁸ In *The Green Bible*, NRSV, New York: HarperOne.

⁸⁹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 225.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 233.

(the mission of God), who creates, loves and sustains every creature – big and small. As missionaries, we are invited to accompany the Creator in caressing the entire cosmos (*missio Creatoris Dei*). The mission of the Creator God is not anthropocentric, but ecological in applications. Morally, the belief that the *missio Dei* concerns human life (*imago Dei*) aside from the natural world can translate into a belief that we own this earth. The reality is that YHWH is the ultimate owner, and the God of the land. In fact, God owns, loves and sustains the entire creation to which we are only a very small part. In this regard, the *missio Creatoris Dei* as opposed to *missio Dei* puts the creation at the heart of the mission of the Creator God.

But this shift is not limited to mission theology – it is equally needed in Christology. If Jesus is understood anthropologically, then his love, care and redemption only apply to humanity. However, once Jesus is understood ecologically, the application of the mission of Christ and his redemptive work extends to the entire universe. It is to this element we now turn.

9.2 Christ the Ecological Ancestor – Toward an African Ecological Christology⁹¹

African thought places emphasis on respect for elders – in Africa, seniority brings wisdom. As the Bemba of Zambia say, *umukulu apusa akabwe, tapusa cebo* (an old person can miss a stone, but not a wise word). Again, *akanwa kamwenfu takabepa* (the old mouth with a beard does not lie). These sayings speak to hierarchical organization of

⁹¹ I discuss this subject at length in my two books, Kapya J. Kaoma, *God's Family, God's Earth: Christian Ecological Ethics of Ubuntu* Zomba: University of Malawi Kachere Press, 2013; *The Creator's Symphony: African Christianity, The Plight of Earth and the Poor*, Dorpspruit, Pietermaritzburg, Cluster Publications, 2015.

African community cultures. Just as the living elders are respected, they too must respect “the seniority of the ancestral spirits.”⁹² Since ancestors are a vital link between various life forces in African worldviews, they belong to the higher hierarchy of spiritual beings associated with the Supreme Being.

The authority of ancestors is derived from the religious worldview that informs African ontology. While they rank above the living elders, ancestors are not above the Creator. Nonetheless, ancestors are involved in the very conception of life – family, clans, community, and the visible and the invisible worlds. For this reason, ancestors “do not occupy a single ‘position’ in a structural sense but are embodied in a number of different ways in a wide range of activities and material culture. These multiple manifestations suggest a variety of possible identities for ancestors rather than a unified model.”⁹³ Whereas ancestors can be said to be “biologically dead”, they are understood as alive. In this case, they are the “living dead” elders who are the guardians of the land, life and morality. It is this worldview that informs ancestral Christologies in African theological thought.

Jesus as our ancestor is one of the prominent themes in Christian theology in Africa. Charles Nyamiti presents Jesus as the ancestor.⁹⁴ To François Kabasélé, Jesus is an elder brother-ancestor.⁹⁵ Bénézet Bujo proposes the Christology of Jesus as the proto-ancestor, healer and

⁹² Jomo Kenyatta *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal life of the Gikuyu*, London: Secker and Arburg, 1938, 255.

⁹³ John C. McCall, “Rethinking Ancestors in Africa”, in: *Journal of the International African Institute* 65, no.2 1995, 258.

⁹⁴ Charles Nyamiti, *Christ As Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective*, Gweru : Mambo Press, 1984.

⁹⁵ François Kabasélé, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother,” In Robert J. Schreiter, (ed), *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, 116-127. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991.

master of initiation.⁹⁶ Gift Makwasha of Zimbabwe seems to follow Bujo in his theology of Christ as our ancestor. Following the role ancestors play in Shona cosmology, Makwasha proposes the tripartite conception of Jesus as the family, tribal and national ancestor. Unlike other theologians, Makwasha moves ancestors from their traditional role to include the post-colonial African context; arguing that Jesus has a role to play in contemporary national states – thus Christ is the national ancestor.⁹⁷ Roman Catholic Bishop Dieudonné Watio does not only associate Jesus with the ancestors, but raises another important question as to the relationship between Christians and ancestors. Watio writes,

*the cult of ancestors is not idolatry, but rather an expression of filial piety. It seems to me that if a good catechesis about the mediation of saints and ancestors were to be given to our Christians, and if for its part the Church could accept the need to look more seriously into the cult of the ancestors in order to capture better its spirit and actual function, then Christian recourse to and invocation of the ancestors would be possible, just as it is now for the Christian saints.*⁹⁸

Michael C. Kirwen shares Watio's observation when he compares the cult of ancestors to "the veneration of saints." But Kirwen also explores the role of ancestors in the traditional art of healing. Comparing *n'gangas* (diviners) to pastors or missionaries, Kirwen argues that African traditional religious thought has "a purer notion of the

⁹⁶ Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1992.

⁹⁷ Gift Makwasha, *Not Without My Ancestor*, unpublished doctoral thesis, Boston University, 2009.

⁹⁸ Dieudonné Watio, *Le culte des ancêtres chez les Ngyemba (Ouest-Cameroun) et ses incidences pastorales*, dissertation, Université of Paris-Sorbonne, 1986, 361-362.

uniqueness and unity of God than Christians do”.⁹⁹ It is within this context that he proposes the face of Jesus as the healer.

Whereas as the “healing face of Jesus” is acceptable to theologians, it can be contested once it is associated with the traditional office of *n’ganga* (traditional medium) – the very title Matthew Schoffeleers employed to explain the “Christological crisis” in African thought. Schoffeleers notes, “Africans find it difficult to integrate the person of Jesus Christ in their belief system, either because he is automatically associated with the West and the colonial past, or because his very essence is supposed to be incompatible with autochthonous [indigenous] religious conceptions.”¹⁰⁰

Schoffeleers’s observation sought to address the African face of Jesus as *n’ganga*, which contemporary mainline Christianity considers sinful. In *God’s Family, God’s Earth*, however, I note that Schoffeleers’ challenge speaks to the selective use of African traditional symbols and concepts in the development of Christian theology.

According to Kwame Bediako, the multiple faces of Jesus “are indicative of the way the primal imagination grasp the reality of Christ in terms in which all life is essentially conceived as spiritual.”¹⁰¹ The spiritualizing of all life in African ontology invites the multi-functional role of ancestors – thus Jesus our ancestor needs to fit into this cosmology in which all life is spiritual. That said, it is vital to note that ancestors do not occupy one office in African ontology, and neither does Christ in scriptures and Christian traditions. For example, Jesus is Lord,

⁹⁹ Michael C. Kirwen, *The Missionary and the Diviner: Contending Theologies of Christian and African Religions*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987, 24.

¹⁰⁰ Matthew Schoffeleers, “Folk Christology in Africa: The Dialectics of the Nganga Paradigm”, in: *Journal of Religion in Africa* 19, Fasc. 2, June 1989, 157. Also published in Blakely, Thomas D./ van Beek, Walter E.A./ Thomson, Dennis L. (eds.), *Religion in Africa: Experience and Expression*, London: James Currey, 1994, 73-88.

¹⁰¹ Kwame Bediako, *African Christianity*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995.

master, teacher, friend, life, the good shepherd, the way, the truth, and prophet among many other titles. These Christological titles point to how the church understands Jesus and his relevancy to people's lifeworlds – something we see in the development of Christian theology in Africa. It is from this perspective that we explore the ecological Christology in Christian thought.

9.3 The Ancestor Cult and the Land in the Hebrew Bible

Whereas Christ the ancestor is usually associated with life in heaven, African ancestors are concerned with life on earth which is their home and our home. This observation is not unique to Africa, but extends to how indigenous peoples such as Native Americans comprehend ancestors – they are present within the creation – in the waters, animals, trees, and snakes etc. If ancestors are concerned with earth, then Jesus our ancestor ought to be understood from the perspective of the earth. Besides, associating Jesus Christ with ancestors implies locating him into the daily lives of all God's people and in the environment in which they exist.

The cult of ancestors is the foundation of the biblical faith, one can argue. Aside from YHWH being the God of the land, the promise to Abraham is land based – it was a promise of occupying the land on earth as opposed to going to heaven. The entire history of Israel is land centred – thus Israel's cult of ancestors was meant to secure their rights to the land of the promise. For this reason, the Hebrew Bible continuously references ancestors or forefathers as the basis of divine favour. It is within the cult of ancestors that Israel's life, identity and destiny are realized. Through Abraham and Sarah, the Israel of the living is directly linked to that of the *living dead* – ancestors.

When God called Moses at Mount Horeb, Yahweh self-identified as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob” (Exodus 3:6). The identification of God with the bush and the command to Moses to remove his sandals reveal the sacredness of the creation. Whereas God used “human” images (angels) to Abrahams, the bush was the vehicle through which Yahweh revealed Godself to Moses.

Besides, ancestors are critical to the realization of divine promises to future generations. Israel is constantly reminded of the historical relationship between Yahweh and Israel’s ancestors. To some extent, the past and not the future is the testimony of Yahweh’s faithfulness to Israel. It is the past that informs the future – only by believing just as Abraham did is the nation to enjoy the fruits of the land Yahweh gave to their ancestors.

Like in African spirituality, Israel’s ancestors though dead are alive – they are the living dead. To Jesus, for example, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the God of the living and not the dead (Mk 12:17; Lk 20:38; Mt 22:32). Yet the God of Abraham is also the God of Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Naomi, Esther, David and many more. Whereas every generation had its own names it considered the archetype and epitome of obedience to Yahweh, the ancestor cult was the chain that linked generations to one another and ultimately to the Creator God. It is from this perspective that biblical genealogies must be understood.

9.4 Ancestors in the Christian Bible

The reader of the Bible is confronted with lists of names which may be perceived as meaningless. Yet those lists are critical to Israel’s self-understanding and identity. The ancestry tree is not only about the individuals, it is also about Yahweh’s dealing with the people of God.

Just as the Hebrew Bible considered genealogies critical to Israel's identity, Gospel writers did the same. According to William Barclay, Jews took their genealogies very seriously since one's life was told from the perspective of ancestry – thereby determining one's identity. Any person who could not trace the lineage, Barclay argues, “lost the right to be called a Jew and a member of the people of God.”¹⁰² In order to plant Jesus in the history of the people of God, for example, gospel writers traced his ancestry: “An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt 1:1); “Jesus was about thirty years when he began his work. He was the son (as was thought) of Joseph son of Helli... son of Judah, son of Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham... son of Adam, son of God.” (Lk.3:23-38). To Mark, Jesus was the son of God. The gospel of John lacks the genealogy but provides a prologue which locates Jesus in God – Jesus is the Creating Word. In other words, Matthew and Luke provide us with the human ancestors of Jesus while Mark and John provide his divine ancestry.

Barclay argues that while genealogies “may seem to be uninteresting” to the reader, to a Jew, “it would be a most impressive matter that the pedigree of Jesus could be traced back to Abraham.”¹⁰³ Raymond Brown shares this understanding. Aside from arguing that Jesus is identified as a son of David and Abraham to illustrate his identity in a mixed community of Jews and Gentiles, Brown posits that genealogies are/were expressions of one's identity and descent from ancestors.¹⁰⁴

In addition, genealogies directed one's expected role in life. In other words, they established the *cooperate personality* whereby an individual

¹⁰² William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Louisville, Westminster: John Knox Press, 1975, 14. Many African cultures share this view.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, 15

¹⁰⁴ Raymond Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, Garden City: Doubleday, 1977, 64-66.

was expected to replicate his or her ancestor's role within the covenant of Yahweh. Since David was a successful king, the future son of David would be expected to follow and fulfil his father's footsteps. But ancestry also established one's role in regard to certain offices. For one to be a priest, one was expected to trace his ancestry to Aaron before being admitted into Temple services. All these perspectives controlled the gospel writers when they addressed the pedigree of Jesus.

It is important to note that the Near East respected one's ancestry. Forgetting one's ancestry had serious negative implications. Paul, for example, boasted of his zeal in keeping the traditions of his ancestors (Gal. 1:14). When his authority was disputed, he wrote, "if anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrew (Phip.3:4-6). By arguing from his Jewish ancestry, Paul established his direct link to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and ultimately to Yahweh. Since Jews were children of Abraham, they had the right to benefit from the favour that God granted to Abraham – the land and all the earth's natural goods. Moreover, the biblical phrase "son of..." and the command to honour one's parents was not limited to the living, but extended to the living dead. It is from this perspective that Jesus' claim to have existed "before Abraham was born" (John 8:59) was considered disrespectful and blasphemous.

Jesus' discourse with the Samaritan woman is also centred on the cult of ancestors. "Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem" (Jn.4:20-26). To the Samaritans, their ancestral shrine was Mt. Gerizim, while the Jews held Jerusalem as the sacred space. Jesus, however, challenges both Samaritans and Jews to abandon their traditional manner of

worship and to accept the code brought by the Christ. Just as Jesus reduces the authority of Jewish and Samaritan ancestors, the authority of African ancestors is similarly reduced. Jesus brings about a new birth and a new community in which all peoples and the entire creation can worship God through *one ancestor*, who exists from the beginning.

9.5 Christ as the Ecological Ancestor

Jesus as our ancestor should not be limited to humanity alone; he is an ancestor to the entire cosmos. If Jesus is “the first born of all creation” (Col. 1:17), then he is an elder brother to every creature. As the origin of all creation, Jesus is the Lord and the ecological Ancestor of *all* life. As John Wesley writes, “I believe in my heart that faith in Jesus Christ can and will lead us beyond an exclusive concern for the well-being of other human beings to the broader concern for the well-being of the birds in our backyards, the fish in our rivers, and every living creature on the face of the earth.”¹⁰⁵

The gospel of John testifies to the ecological ancestry of Christ when it states that “through him, all things were made and without him, nothing made was made” (Jn 1:3). As the origin of all creation, Jesus is not just the provider of abundant life to the cosmos but also the guardian of the universe in its totality. As the Nicene Creed declares, “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only son of the father... through him *all things* (beings) were made.” Although the Nicene Creed limits redemption to humanity, an ecological creed ought to accept Christ as the redeemer, guardian and ancestor of all the creation.

¹⁰⁵ In Anthony Campolo, and Mary Albert Darling, *The God of Intimacy and Action: Reconnecting Ancient Spiritual Practices, Evangelism, and Justice*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007, 55.

The implication of Christ as the cosmic ancestor is clear. Like African theologians, Jewish scholars limited ancestorship to humanity, and saw Abraham as their ancestor – they were children of Abraham. However, Jesus declared himself to be above Abraham and therefore the ecological Ancestor to the entire creation, to whom the Jewish, Samaritan and by extension African ancestors descended from; “before Abraham was born, I am!” (John 8:59). While this verse can be understood as referring to the divinity of Christ, it is vital to the Christology of Jesus as the ecological ancestors. The *I AM* is the origin of all the creation;¹⁰⁶ and the ancestor of the entire cosmos. Thus, Jesus is the abundant life and liberator of the groaning creation (Romans 8:22).

9.6 Final Observations

The mission of the Creator God is founded on God’s own creative and sustaining love for the creation. The Creator declared creation “*very good*” and our negative attitudes towards the natural world are compromising the sacramental web of life. Moreover, every creature (big and small) exists to worship the Creator: “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord” (Psalm 150:6). As servants of God, and participants in the mission of the Creator God, caring for the creation is our sacred mission.

The single origin of the creation has implications for Christian ecological ethics, mission and theology. The mission of the Creator God

¹⁰⁶ The question of the salvation of ancestors is hereby resolved. If the Abraham was justified based on his relationship with the I AM, there is enough room to argue that before our African ancestors were even born, Jesus existed. In this case, they saw the day of the Lord and rejoiced. However, like the Jews, many theologians are likely to question when and how Jesus met our ancestors. His answer remains the same, before your “ancestor was born, I AM.”

and the Christology of Jesus as the ecological Ancestor ought to inform economic policies. Capitalistic policies of limitless growth exploit the natural goods while increasingly harming the poor. “Even if one can agree with the Neo-Böserupian assumption that development in agriculture coupled with sound government policies can address Africa’s food shortages, the future of food security ought to be addressed in the context of consumption of available goods.”¹⁰⁷

The mission of the Creator God should confront the unjust global economic and political systems contributing to the environmental crisis. But this is not all; capitalism harms the poor. Here, the global shocking economic imbalance needs illuminating: less than 20% of global North residents gluttonously consume 80% of natural goods while every 3 second someone dies from hunger – salient injustices that demand immediate attention. Amidst the growing ecological crises; and amidst the exploitation of the poor, Christians can hardly remain neutral but denounce the effects of capitalism on God’s people and God’s earth.

Furthermore, Christ the supreme guardian of the land demands that we examine our attitudes toward earth. The theological notion of resident aliens, which can sometimes negate earth as our home in favor of our heavenly home, demands revisiting. If we view ourselves as strangers on earth, then destroying earth simply accelerates our arrival to our heavenly city thus contributing to land degradation with dire effects on food security, especially in Africa. Poor people are both the “victims and agents of environmental degradation”, the Southern African Development Community rightly noted. Nonetheless, the poor are forced into destroying their environment to survive; hence addressing poverty is critical to food security.¹⁰⁸ The United Nations Food and

¹⁰⁷ Kaoma, Kapya J., *God’s Family, God’s Earth: Christian Ecological Ethics of Ubuntu*, Zomba: University of Malawi Kachere Press, 2013, 169-170.

¹⁰⁸ SADC, “Environment and Sustainable Development”, <http://www.sdc.int/>

Agriculture Organization noted environmental degradation has detrimental impact on food security and is responsible for the declining yields in many parts of Africa.¹⁰⁹

Accepting earth as our permanent home has practical implications for our relationships; human to human, and nature to human. For instance, rather than promising the poor a better world to come, Christianity must address socio-political and economic injustices that have forced the majority into abject poverty. Acknowledgement, in practice as well as in theory, of earth's status as our sacred home, is also fundamental to food security. For the earth to produce abundantly, we need to care for our planet. Our lives depend on the earth's wellbeing—destroying the land is akin to setting our home on fire while inside. To ensure our own and food security, ethicists, missiologists and theologians ought to engage economic and political issues from the perspective of the *missio Creatoris Dei*.

Finally, understanding Christ as the ecological Ancestor has implications for how we relate to earth and one another. Since all creatures trace their ancestry in Christ, we are one family of ontologically related beings. As moral beings, we, humans are obliged to repair the damage caused and being caused to our nonhuman brothers and sisters of the earth community. In ecological terms, sin is not just limited to human actions against fellow humans, but now extends to nonhumans in the universe. Thus, our relationship with the nature loving Creator should inform our relationships with one another, the natural world, and ultimately with Jesus Christ, the ecological Ancestor of all life.

issues/environment-sustainable-development/ (accessed 10 May 2016).

¹⁰⁹ United Nations, *Land and Environmental Degradation and Desertification in Africa*, FAO Corporate Document, 2007, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/x5318e/x5318e01.hlm> (accessed 10 April 2016).

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