Vol. 41, No. 1 (2025)

Africa Theological Journal

A Publication of

Tumaini University Makumira

AFRICA THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL
VOLUME 41, No. 1, 2025

Published by the Faculty of Theology,
Tumaini University Makumira

The editors welcome contributions of theological interest relevant in Africa. Please refer to https://atj.makumira.ac.tz for further information and a submission form. Books sent for review will not be returned.

Africa Theological Journal is indexed through https://ixtheo.de.

Africa Theological Journal
ISSN **2961-6492**

Tumaini University Makumira
P.O. Box 55
Usa River, Tanzania

ATJ email: atj@makumira.ac.tz
ATJ online: https://atj.makumira.ac.tz

CONTENTS

ABOUT THE AUTHORS IN THIS ISSUE

Fidon Rwezahula Mwombeki, from Tanzania, serves as the General Secretary of the All African Conference of Churches (AACC). Previously, he was parish pastor, General Secretary of United Evangelical Missionm (Germany), and Director for Mission and Development of the Lutheran World Federation (Geneva). He holds a Ph.D. in theology from Luther Seminary, St. Paul Minnesota (USA).

Siyamthanda Mqhayisa serves as pastor in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church within the Cape Conference, South Africa. He is pursuing a Ph.D. within the field of Christian Ecotheology at the University of South Africa.

Nestar Kyobya serves as pastor in the ELCT – Morogoro Diocese. Currently, she pursues the Master degree in Missiology at the Faculty of Theology of the Tumaini University Makumira (TUMA).

Jörg Zehelein works as lecturer at the Faculty of Theology, Tumaini University Makumira, and as scholarship coordinator of Mission OneWorld Neuendettelsau (Germany). He is pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bavaria, Germany. He holds a Doctorate in Theology (Practical Theology/Missiology) from the Ernst-Moritz-Arndt University of Greifswald, Germany.

David Wilson Mdabuko serves as assistant lecturer in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at St.

John's University of Tanzania, Dodoma. He is a Ph.D. candidate at St. Paul's University, Limuru, Kenya, specialising in Missiology.

Kevin Muriithi Ndereba is lecturer in Practical Theology at St. Paul's University, Limuru, and Research Fellow at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. He is a Minister in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa.

Aloo Mojola is a retired Professor of Philosophy and Translation Studies. He formerly headed the Translation Department at St Paul's University, Limuru, and served as Africa Area Translation Coordinator for the United Bible Societies.

Emmanuel Subewope Gabriel is a Lutheran priest in Nigeria, currently working on a Lutheran World Federation project (Symbols of Hope). He is a Ph.D. candidate at the National Open University of Nigeria.

Authors take responsibility for content, language and grammar.

EDITORIAL

The editorial committee is pleased to present to you Vol. 41,1 (2025) of Africa Theological Journal. This issue continues the initiative we began in 2024: providing free access to readers and publishing contributions at no charge. We extend our heartfelt thanks to the editorial team, authors, and peer reviewers for their contributions to the creation of this remarkable issue. Its theme is 'African Ecotheology responding to endangered fullness of life.' Most articles and book reviews directly address this topic, as they all contribute to the academic and/or practical exploration of various facets of environmental care and creation in Africa from a theological perspective.

We rejoice in the fact that we have voices from Tanzania, as well as other parts of Africa and Europe. We are also proud of the interdenominational representation in ATJ 41,1. Authors from a Lutheran, Seventh-day Adventist, Anglican background, or from the ecumenical perspective of the All Africa Conference of Churches present their contributions. Thus, this issue presents a diverse range of voices relevant to theology in Africa, particularly ecotheology, which responds to threats to creation and the environment in Africa.

The first article, entitled "African Churches Responding to Endangered Fullness of Life: The Case of the All African Conference of Churches and the Africa Faith Actors Network for Climate Justice" and written by the General Secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), Fidon Mwombeki, is an ecotheological plea calling

African churches to address and advocate for climate justice. The author bases his theological argumentation particularly on Genesis and holds both the Global North and Africa accountable for preserving the environment. The AACC, with the African Faith Actors Network for Climate Justice, serves as a good practice example for taking care of "our welfare and survival."

The second article, "Integrating the Sabbath, the Health Message, and *Ubuntu* as a Response to the Ecological Crises: A South African Seventh-day Adventist Perspective," exploits two crucial tenets of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs, i.e., the so-called "health message" and the ethics of keeping the Sabbath. Together with the African philosophical idea of *ubuntu*, the author contributes to the development of an African Christian ecotheology. He argues for a relational theology that transcends the old anthropocentrism and opens a space for disrupting the ongoing violation of the environment and caring for the comprehensive health of human beings and the entire creation.

In the third article with the title "Conflation of Diakonia with Charity: An Analysis of the Annual Mission Week in the Evangelical Lutheran Church – Morogoro Diocese" Nestar James Kyobya and Jörg Zehelein analyse the Annual Mission Week (AMW) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church – Morogoro Diocese in terms of its understanding and practice of diakonia. The central thesis is that the week-long AMW event, which is organised once a year, conflates diakonia with charity. The authors argue that there is potential to align the AMW's programme with a comprehensive concept of diakonia that aims at short- and

long-term practices, transformation, advocacy, empowerment, and environmental care. Nevertheless, the AMW falls short of tying in with this broader agenda and claims to realise diakonia through charity activities, namely, distributing food and clothing.

Article No. 4 is entitled "Reimagining Theological Education in the Anglican Church of Tanzania: Overcoming Institutional and Pedagogical Barriers to the Five Marks of Mission." David W. Mdabuko, Kevin M. Ndereba, and Aloo Mojola address the curriculum and practices of theological education in the Anglican Church of Tanzania. Through empirical research conducted among students and educators of various Anglican theological institutions across Tanzania, the authors identify several obstacles to the contextual, field-based, and missional formation of theological education in line with the Five Marks of Mission. They recommend revisions of curricula, faculty capacity building, cooperation between churches and civil society, experiential learning, supervised ministry placements, and reflective practice to foster missional competence among clergy-in-training. The Five Marks of mission, which demand "to safeguard the integrity of creation," serve as a criterion of a holistic and eco-friendly concept of mission in Africa.

Emmanuel S. Gabriel, with the final article in this issue, entitled "The Cross and the African Ancestor: Reimagining Christ as the Ultimate Mediator in Nigerian Lutheran Theology," does not explicitly address ecotheology matters in Africa. Nevertheless, his contribution is an important voice in the ongoing debate about the understanding of Christ as ancestor. In conversation with

Lutheran theology and the African Primal religious concept of ancestors who serve as mediators and moral guardians to the living, the author identifies the crucified Christ as the "ultimate ancestor" who represents sacrificial solidarity with suffering humans and, through his atoning death, offers eternal mediation to the world. In his soteriological explorations, he transcends a narrow individualism and argues for a communal and "socio-spiritual" perspective on salvation. This systematic-theological contribution aims to serve as a contextual theology that is readily accessible to African Lutherans and Christians.

We wish you a pleasant reading of this issue and hope that you may gain valuable insights.

Nehemia Moshi, Chairperson and Editor of Africa Theological Journal

Jörg Zehelein, Managing Editor of Africa Theological Journal

African Churches Responding to Endangered Fullness of Life: The Case of the All African Conference of Churches and the Africa Faith Actors Network for Climate Justice

Fidon R. Mwombeki

DOI 10.25661/atj.v41i1.1230

Abstract

The climate change crisis has been a global concern in recent years, with discussions focusing on who is most affected, the need for compensation to the most affected, and how best to mitigate it. The West has been widely accused of being the primary contributor to this crisis over the years. However, Africa and other continents, often seen as the most impacted but contributing little, have also played a role in causing the harm, and thus must take steps to stop the climate crisis. This crisis threatens not only ecosystems but also fundamental human rights and the quality of life. The church in Africa, particularly within the ecumenical community, has been at the forefront of discussions on climate justice. The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), one of the faith actors on the forefront of seeking mitigation of the crisis under the African Faith Actors Network for Climate Justice (AFAN-CJ), has actively advocated for both theological and practical responses to this urgent issue. This paper examines the efforts made by AFAN-CJ towards climate justice, reflecting on God's

command and human responsibility towards the environment, particularly through the lens of dominion and stewardship over the earth, the love of one's neighbor, and the care for future generations. It will further highlight the challenges that have hindered change, despite the efforts put in place, such as poverty, unsustainable population growth, ignorance, and reckless theological positions.

Key Words

Climate, stewardship, justice, ecology, All Africa Conference of Churches, fullness of life

Introduction

The conversation about the climate change crisis, which has led to the demand for climate justice, is ubiquitous. Whether in social, political, civil, religious, or any other spheres, the reality of climate change and its devastating impact on livelihoods and quality of life is undeniable. Geographically, there are differences between continents and countries, with the effects varying in severity. It is generally agreed that Africa bears the harshest brunt of this change.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is one of the global organisations with a comprehensive focus on addressing climate issues from a justice perspective.

> *"Climate justice means putting equity and human rights at the core of decision-making and action on climate change … The concept has been widely used to*

> *refer to the unequal historical responsibility that countries and communities bear in relation to the climate crisis. It suggests that the countries, industries, businesses, and people that have become wealthy from emitting large amounts of greenhouse gases have a responsibility to help those affected by climate change, particularly the most vulnerable countries, and communities, who often are the ones that have contributed the least to the crisis.*" [1]

It goes on to show that injustice takes different forms: structural inequalities (between and within countries based on race, gender, economic situation, age, etc.), socio-economic inequalities, and intergenerational inequalities (the future generations will suffer more). The UNDP treats climate change as a human rights issue because it denies or limits peoplés agency to live with dignity. It causes loss of livelihoods, even lives, putting many at risk of food and water shortages, which in turn force people into displacement and conflicts. Moreover, the UNDP report highlights that the climate crisis also undermines the right to good health. The increasing frequency of extreme weather events, along with polluted air and water, contributes to severe health impacts, including heat stress, disease outbreaks, malnutrition, and psychological trauma from having experienced disasters.

The UNDP's statement highlights that the climate crisis threatens the fullness of life. It is a human rights issue

1 'Climate Change Is a Matter of Justice – Here's Why | UNDP Climate Promise', 26 June 2023, https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/climate-change-matter-justice-heres-why.

because the people who contribute relatively little to climate degradation bear disproportionately higher consequences. And Africa is one of those vulnerable continents.

There are various levels of engagement in the fight for climate justice. The fight is at a high level politically, as evidenced by the series of the Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings this year, which will number 29 in Azerbaijan. At this level, various issues are discussed, ranging from the provision of scientific evidence to support the reality of the crisis to the complex calculations of climate change and to different demands and proposals for achieving justice. The contributions from the African continent focus on the unjust ways Africa is disproportionately affected by the consequences of climate change, despite contributing the least to its cause. In these global negotiations, Africás voice is not as strong due to what the UNDP terms a lack of transparency and inclusion in climate negotiations and plans, as well as a lack of relevant education, resources, and connections to enable participation in policy discussions.[2]

At the international level, issues such as the scientific proof of Ozone layer depletion, calculations of carbon footprints per country, the concepts of loss and damage, climate compensation funds, and carbon market trading processes are highly debated. African negotiators are few and poorly funded, with limited resources to prepare. Even when they do, their voices often come from a victim standpoint. These climate negotiations and funding

2 'Climate Change Is a Matter of Justice – Here's Why | UNDP Climate Promise', 26 June 2023, https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/climate-change-matter-justice-heres-why.

proposals, although highly touted, such as the one at COP27, have no enforcement mechanisms. The rich countries, which had promised to contribute up to USD 100 billion annually to the climate fund, have not done so, and no one can enforce the pledges.

Focus on Africa Itself

In this article, as we examine how ecotheology can contribute to addressing the endangered fullness of life, I believe it is worthwhile to focus on Africa itself. Even though I do believe that Africa suffers from the global climate destruction disproportionately, Africa itself is not innocent. Africa also contributes to the destruction and plays a role in it.

In a monumental publication coordinated by the World Council of Churches, *the International Handbook on Creation Care &Eco-Diakonia: Concepts and Theological Perspectives of Churches from the Global South*, several articles by African authors address the subject.[3] They are a valuable resource as we consider eco-theology in Africa.

The starting point is the realisation of the impact of climate change as it is manifested in the daily lives of Africans. Indeed, as mentioned above, the impact of global activities has a profoundly negative effect on Africa. Unfortunately, human activities in Africa contribute significantly to the crisis, from local to international levels.

3 Daniel Carlos Beros et al., eds., International Handbook on Creation Care and Eco-Diakonia: Concepts and Theological Perspectives of Churches from the Global South, Regnum Handbooks (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2022).

Climate change has affected their way of life. In the food sector, the droughts experienced in various parts of Africa have made agriculture challenging, leading to food shortages. Additionally, many homesteads in different parts of Africa still rely on non-renewable energy sources in their homes. This has not only increased pollution but also elevated the rate of deforestation. Not to mention the water shortages in many areas of Africa, which significantly impact the daily lives of Africans. There has been a high degree of migration within countries and communities due to climate disasters. African countries experience conflicts between communities, particularly between farmers and herders in many countries, as each community struggles to make ends meet by accessing a dwindling supply of resources, such as arable land and water. The impact of such constraints on society's quality of life, including access to education for children, as well as food security and sanitation, is a threat. The church in Africa cannot help but get engaged in endeavours to turn the tide, limit the damage, and ensure quality of life, or fullness of life. This paper, in analysing ecotheology vis-à-vis the endangered fullness of life, begins by providing theological and existential reasons for caring for creation. Then I will showcase some of the work that churches in Africa are doing on ecological matters, from the perspective of the AACC. Lastly, I would like to mention the obstacles faced in the fight for ecological justice.

It is the Question of Obedience – The Duty of Stewardship

The fundamental theological foundation for eco-theology is that it is a question of obedience to God's

mandate or order. We need to care for creation because it has been entrusted to us by God. The central theological concept is that of stewardship, i.e., taking care of something that is not ours but has been entrusted to us for later giving account to the owner.

Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, writing on Christian theology of stewardship as it relates to creation, asserts that the earth has been exploited in self-centred ways and has turned that which God saw as good during creation in Gen 1:31 into a monster that is a threat to humanity.[4] God has already created the land and does not create it anew. As stewards, we have one option left: to apply divine wisdom in the utilisation of the creation, taking care of something that is not ours. If we do not do so, we have to take responsibility for the failure.

Marthe Maleke Kondemo, writing on the care of creation with a focus on Gen 2, highlights that this creation narrative emphasises the intended harmony of the proper relationship we ought to have with God, the natural world, and with one another.[5] Gen 2 opens with the narrative of the Garden of Eden, where, after Adam's formation, he is placed. He is assigned the duty to till and keep the land. Tilling here

4 J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, 'Christian Stewardship and Creation: African Perspective on Environment and Development', in International Handbook on Creation Care and Eco-Diakonia: Concepts and Theological Perspectives of Churches from the Global South, ed. Daniel Carlos Beros et al., Regnum Handbooks (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2022), 3–15.

5 Marthe Maleke Kondemo, 'Care for Creation: An Ecotheological Reading of Genesis 2', in International Handbook on Creation Care and Eco-Diakonia: Concepts and Theological Perspectives of Churches from the Global South, ed. Daniel Carlos Beros et al., Regnum Handbooks (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2022), 16–24.

refers to the cultivation, ploughing, or working, while keeping means caring, protecting, overseeing, and preserving. Adam was not only to inhabit the land but also to fulfil his God-given task to work and keep it. God gave humankind the responsibility to cultivate, multiply, and care before eating from it. Therefore, if we want creation to sustain and feed us not just now but also in the future, we need to care for it. Additionally, she adds that Gen 2 reminds us that humans are not only a part of nature but also have responsibility over it.

Saint Francis of Assisi, according to John Isaack, also uses Gen 1:26, 28 as his basis for ecotheology, where humans are asked to dominate over other creatures, then be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it.[6] He highlights that Gen 1:26 should be read in conjunction with Gen 2:15, where God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden for them to cultivate or be in service to the process of cultivating Mother Earth. In the process of taking dominion over, God's people entrusted themselves with the power to exploit creation and oppress it. This, he argues, has been significantly shaped by the understanding of the meaning of domination. However, Gen 2:15 emphasises the service of the earth as God's representatives or stewards, as we utilise it to satisfy our needs. Asamoah-Gyadu notes that in Gen 1:28-30, when human beings were given the power to reproduce and dominate the earth, the domination is not just in the naming

6 John Paul Isaak, 'A Missio–African Discourse on Eco-Diakonia', in International Handbook on Creation Care and Eco-Diakonia: Concepts and Theological Perspectives of Churches from the Global South, ed. Daniel Carlos Beros et al., Regnum Handbooks (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2022), 53-59.

and having authority over; it is also expressed through tender care and respect for nature.[7] We are God's agents and stewards of humanity over creation; hence, it is a privilege.

This view of service is also held by Jared Hyneman and Christopher Shore, who affirm that humanity is God's appointed steward of creation because creation belongs to God.[8] Hence, humans are accountable to God for their stewardship of and interaction with the creation. Caring for creation is a relational act that is closely connected to our relationship with Christ. God has called us to care for creation in a way that demonstrates our love for Him. Additionally, it is our duty to care for creation because it is a means of God's revelation. In a quest to know more about God, we must conserve that through which He reveals Himself. Recognising the great responsibility humans have been entrusted with, we cannot compromise in its execution. Revelations 11:18 demonstrates that this care is mandatory by explicitly noting that God will destroy those who destroy the earth. The destroyers include those who stand by and remain silent about environmental abuses. It is, therefore, a mandatory duty for humans to care for the environment.

7 Asamoah-Gyadu, 'Christian Stewardship and Creation.'

8 Jared Hyneman and Christopher Shore, 'Why Are We Stewards of Creation? Why Are We Stewards of Creation? World Vision's Biblical Understanding of How We Relate to Creation', Natural Environment and Climate Issues, World Vision International, 2013.

It is for Our Welfare and Survival

The AACC, as it engages with issues of climate justice, has chosen the theme: "The Welfare of the Earth is Our Welfare." [9] We base it on Jer 29:7, where God told the Israelites in exile not to stay idle, waiting to return home. Contrary to their expectations of an early return home, God said they would remain there for a long time. They should buy land, plant, raise livestock, get married, and start families. And then he said: "But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." We are here in the world as pilgrims. It is not our eternal home. However, we will not be here for very long. We are not leaving soon. Therefore, it is in our interest that the world we live in prospers. Our welfare, our happiness, our fullness of life, depends on the welfare of the world. So, taking care of the earth is not only a question of duty to God, but this duty to God is actually for our own welfare. Therefore, we say in AACC that climate justice is a matter of life and death. We can effectively bring an end to our lives, and many are dying because of the impact of climate change. We need to live. We need to thrive. And that depends on how responsibly we take care of the earth.

Ernst Conradie suggests that it is essential to recognise that God didn't need to create; it was part of God's

9 'The Welfare of the Earth Is Our Welfare | AACC-CETA : All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC)', 8 July 2025, https://www.aacc-ceta.org/en/welfare-earth-our-welfare.

sovereign will.[10] God, therefore, finds pleasure in this world and creation. The material world is hence God willed and is the object of God's joy. We cannot enjoy the Creator without finding joy in the creature. In finding joy in creation, humans are expected to carefully utilise it to satisfy their needs.

It was God's plan and will to create the world for the sustenance of life. It is not by accident that humans were created last, after everything else was put into place. God wanted humans to enjoy life on earth by keeping and stewarding all else. Asamoah-Gyadu with Hyneman and Shore assert that God purposed to provide for the entire world, including natural systems and the needs of nonhuman life, as well as human physical needs such as food, water, shelter, clothing, and energy.[11] Additionally, God is said to provide for human and nonhuman life not only in the present but also in the future. The Earth has complex natural structures, systems, and organisms that, when well-stewarded, provide for human sustenance and well-being. In Gen 1:29, God makes the provision for every plant yielding seed and every tree with seed in its fruit so that we may have them for food.

It is essential, however, to guard against overemphasis on the anthropocentric utilitarian interpretation of creation, as Jonathan Kivatsi Kavusa warns, by focusing too much on

10 Ernst M. Conradie, 'God's Mission, God's Economy of God's Joy as the Deepest Source of Resilience amidst Forces of Death and Destruction?', in International Handbook on Creation Care and Eco-Diakonia: Concepts and Theological Perspectives of Churches from the Global South, ed. Daniel Carlos Beros et al., Regnum Handbooks (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2022), 35–43.
11 Asamoah-Gyadu, 'Christian Stewardship and Creation;' Hyneman and Shore, 'Why are we Stewards of Creation?'

the idea that God intended humans to exploit nature to meet their needs.[12] Such overemphasis leads to the attitude that the earth is all ours, which results in practical materialism, greed, and selfishness. The problem with this attitude is that it opens a gateway for humans to selfishly exploit the rest of the creation, which inevitably affects human life itself as the source of welfare is depleted.

Abednego Nkamuhabwa Keshomshahara also highlights that although humans are to use nature to meet their needs, they should not be driven by greed to dominate to the extent that it harms the creation.[13] Using the African setting, he claims that Africans traditionally feared harming others or nature since they believed God and the spirits could be everywhere and see everything. The ancestral spirits were seen as the pioneers of community life and instituted the morals that guaranteed law and order, as well as protected nature. Those who would go astray would, therefore, be punished by God and spirits. To address greed and individualism, African traditional religions emphasised the sharing of resources, ensuring that no one within the community would lack basic needs. The community took

12 Jonathan Kivatsi Kavusa, 'Ecological Stewardship from African Indigenous Thoughts in Dialogue with Christian Traditions: Resisting Ecological Violence in Africa', in International Handbook on Creation Care and Eco-Diakonia: Concepts and Theological Perspectives of Churches from the Global South, ed. Daniel Carlos Beros et al., Regnum Handbooks (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2022), 44–52.

13 Abednego Nkamuhabwa Keshomshahara, 'The Ecclesial Mandate of Eco-Diakonia in the Mission of God', in International Handbook on Creation Care and Eco-Diakonia: Concepts and Theological Perspectives of Churches from the Global South, ed. Daniel Carlos Beros et al., Regnum Handbooks (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2022), 25–34.

care of those in need. This created a society based on love, compassion, empathy, security, and justice.

In 2022, the UN General Assembly declared that access to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is a universal human right. The declaration recognises

> *"that the impact of climate change, the unsustainable management and use of natural resources, the pollution of air, land and water, the unsound management of chemicals and waste, and the resulting loss in biodiversity interfere with the enjoyment of this right - and that environmental damage has negative implications, both direct and indirect, for the effective enjoyment of all human rights."*[14]

For the Sake of Love for the Neighbour and the Future Generation

It is essential to care for the earth, not only for the sake of our current generation and livelihood, but also for those to come. Caring for the world is caring for people. It is a pity that to some Christians, focus on creation care sounds like we value the planet more than people.[15] However, caring for the earth is indeed caring for people. The effects

14 'UN General Assembly Declares Access to Clean and Healthy Environment a Universal Human Right | UN News', 28 July 2022, https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/07/1123482.

15 'Why Should Christians Care for Creation? - Common Question', BioLogos, accessed 28 July 2025, https://biologos.org/common-questions/why-should-christians-care-for-creation.

of environmental degradation impact people's lives on a daily basis.

Unfortunately, the climate crisis affects the poorest and most vulnerable people on the planet, who have less capacity to mitigate against its effects. Similarly, the third-world countries, which contribute little to environmental degradation, feel the pain of destruction the most compared to the developed countries. Even in a country, richer people can mitigate the impact of climate change more effectively than the poor. So even if one can mitigate against it, for the sake of other people, we as Christians have a duty to care for creation, even for the sake of our neighbours.

The most vulnerable neighbours who cannot even fend for themselves are the children and young people. As we witness rapid changes in climatic conditions, it becomes a matter of love for our neighbour to act in ways that ensure the sustainability of life beyond our time, which is often referred to as intergenerational justice. As Africans, we need to do more in this regard. We must beef up our theology of planning. Many of our plans, individually and institutionally, are very short-term. We are almost based on the theology of "tomorrow will take care of itself." (Matt 6:33–34)

Out of greed and a desire to earn more, humans have overexploited the Earth without giving much concern to future generations. Mank Bradford asserts that the present generation has no obligation to the future and that the present has a choice to make whether to benefit from the depletion of non-renewable resources and eliminate

renewable ones at the expense of future generations.[16] Steve Vanderheiden provides an accurate response to this concern, arguing that our actions now will affect the livelihoods of people yet to be born.[17] There is a causal link between our actions and their consequences for future generations. Therefore, each generation's decision to eschew conservation would lead to a continuous decline in the quality of life.

Isaak asserts, by referring to the philosophy of ubuntu, that the love of God and the love of a neighbour cannot be separated.[18] In serving one's neighbour, one is not only serving God but also united with God by faith and participating in God's work. Diakonia, therefore, refers to the responsibility of serving the gospel through deeds and words that Christians perform. The deeds should be motivated by Mark 12:30-31, which emphasises the love for God and one's neighbour. God's honour and dignity should be shown in the actions that we take toward our neighbours.

Churches' Interventions in Africa: The Case of the All Africa Conference of Churches – Africa Faith Actors Network for Climate Justice

The AACC was concerned about climate change conditions and found the need to intervene and provide

16 Mank Bradford, 'Protecting the Environment for Future Generations: A Proposal for a Republican Superagency', Faculty Articles and Other Publications 122 (1996), https://scholarship.law.uc.edu/fac_pubs/122.
17 Steve Vanderheiden, 'Conservation, Foresight, and the Future Generations Problem', Inquiry 49, no. 4 (2006): 337–52.
18 Isaak, 'Missio–African Discourse on Eco-Diakonia.'

protective measures for the environment. This pushed for the formation of an ecological justice program. AACC brought together faith leaders from all religions to address the matter at hand, and they agreed that the crisis was urgent and required a collective response. This led to the formation of the Africa Faith Actors Network for Climate Justice (AFAN-CJ) and a subcommittee that included diversity.[19] They tackled environmental issues from a moral, ethical, and justice perspective. The primary focus of the organisation, above other ecological concerns, is the climate sector. The basis for the intervention is the Bible, where the main question is what the Christian faith says about the environment and science. This involves studying the specific condition of the world according to scientific principles, as well as a political framework that focuses on policies affecting the ecological perspective. The three groups also questioned what could be done differently and explored potential solutions to be implemented. From a faith sector and justice perspective, the focus is on the changes that must be made in a way that promotes justice, so that those

19 Tinashe Gumbo, the AACC Program Executive for Ecological and Economic Justice explains, that "AFAN-CJ is an interfaith, multisectoral, and continental network that is hosted by the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and coordinated by [Tinashe Gumbo]. Established in 2022 to ensure that faith actors become active in climate justice work in Africa, the AFAN-CJ is currently represented in thirty-eight countries with Christians and Muslims as its main actors. The network is run through a steering committee that spearheads the work at the national and regional (West, East, Central, and North Africa) levels before connecting with continental and global processes." Tinashe Gumbo, 'A New Climate Activism in Africa', in Civic Activism in an Intensifying Climate Crisis, ed. Erin Jones and Richard Youngs (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2024), 61.

who have a greater share in environmental destruction will also bear a greater responsibility for supporting the measures implemented. Additionally, Faith emphasises that humans are stewards on earth. The scientists advocate for reducing emissions of harmful products. The political sector establishes policies and platforms, such as the Africa Climate Week and the COP, to address these issues. The three agree on the advocacy for adaptation. The program engages in both local and international initiatives addressing climate change. Additionally, the AFAN-CJ is to be incorporated in the establishment of policies.

The members of AFAN-CJ are expected to design and implement community-based activities to further the cause of climate justice. Some engage in advocacy, others seek to participate in national dialogues and activities addressing climate change issues, and still others are entitled to represent Africa in global conversations and activities.

For example, the Methodist Church of Togo has implemented a project aimed at fostering a comprehensive understanding of national policies related to climate change, encouraging participation in policy dialogues, increasing awareness of climate change within communities, and mobilising members of faith communities to participate actively in environmental protection initiatives. It has organised an educational seminar on understanding national policies related to climate change, conducted two awareness workshops for religious communities, and established discussion groups within these communities to regularly discuss climate change issues and plan concrete actions. To

link understanding with faith, it has organised worship services dedicated to climate and the environment.

In most countries, network members are encouraged to go beyond simply planting trees by ensuring that the trees grow and thrive. However, they are also encouraged to follow up with their policymakers in their respective governments to monitor the implementation of national and international commitments. Some of the AFAN-CJ members are now included in the national delegations to COP29. Some use radio programs to train and discuss environmental issues.

Obstacles to Creation Care

The primary and most significant obstacle is poverty. As mentioned earlier, people experiencing poverty have less capacity to mitigate the impact of climate change, let alone the capacity to implement what they know is necessary. For example, many communities see that they should not cut trees and deplete forests. However, the cost of clean cooking energy, which is environmentally friendly, is too expensive for most households.[20] Africans cut trees and use charcoal for survival. No amount of education will deter them from cooking what they need if they cannot afford clean energy. A report by Habitat for Humanity states that access to

20 There are several organisations working to promote clean cooking energy. However, these are still very expensive and inaccessible to most vulnerable families. See, e.g., (all accessed on 29 September 2024): https://cleancooking.org/, https://renewablesroadmap.iclei.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Clean-cooking_Final-1.pdf, https://www.unops.org/news-and-stories/stories/powering-a-greener-tomorrow?gad_source=5&gclid=EAIaIQobChMI-JyyoLboiAMVppNQBh1rrCBREAAYBCAAEgKu0_D_BwE.

adequate and affordable energy sources in the modern era is closely tied to economic and social development. [21] Therefore, people experiencing poverty are usually equipped with the worst energy services, which enhance malnutrition, unhealthy living conditions, and limited access to education and employment. Therefore, one of the significant barriers to creation care is poverty, as people experiencing poverty often strive to meet their basic needs, which can have a negative impact on the environment, with deforestation being a central area of concern.

Christian ecotheology must address the importance of the fullness of life. Asamoah-Gyadu explains that the teaching brought in by the old Western missionaries, which glorified poverty over wealth, has also been critiqued.[22] This type of Christianity made Africans loathe profit and wealth. The ascetic theology that sentimentalises poverty and focuses mainly on striving for a better life only on the other side of the grave is dangerous for the environment. The theology where the lack was seen as preferable to having created a comfortable one, even with destruction present, because it is temporal, either for an individual or for the whole world, as it will be destroyed anyway.

Moreover, Elinor Ostrom suggests that empowering local communities to be in charge of natural resources would

21 Habitat for Humanity, 'Energy Poverty: Effects on Development, Society, and Environment Europe, Middle East and Africa', accessed 28 July 2025, https://www.habitat.org/emea/about/what-we-do/residential-energy-efficiency-households/energy-poverty.
22 Asamoah-Gyadu, 'Christian Stewardship and Creation.'

be a valuable method of caring for creation.[23] In the context of the Central and West Basin Water Replenishment project, which not only provided employment opportunities to the community but also allowed the public enterprise to manage it, he affirms that this has not only allowed people experiencing poverty to benefit from it but also instilled a form of responsibility over it.

According to Edward Barbier, a lack of assets exacerbates the situation because it limits the key markets accessible to poor households, constraining them from adopting technologies to improve their farming systems and livelihoods.[24] This forces them to continually use the same cycle, which leads to the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources. This hinders creation care because, with the same resources being utilised, exploitation is inevitable.

As a response to the above challenges, alternative resources must be made readily available and affordable in society. Solar energy, LED lighting, and the use of biogas are some suitable alternatives for energy production. However, for people experiencing poverty, these two options are not easily accessible due to the high cost of installation and the equipment required. Instead of turning to non-environmentally friendly alternatives because they are cheaper, eco-friendly options should be made available to them. Additionally, policies should be implemented to

23 Elinor Ostrom, Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
24 Edward Barbier, 'Poverty, Development, and Environment', Environment and Development Economics 15, no. 6 (2010): 635–60.

regulate the use of energy systems that harm the environment.

The second obstacle to our efforts for a sustainable climate is unsustainable population growth in Africa. Africa is projected to double its population by 2050, to reach more than 2.5 billion people, and "without adequate employment opportunities, education, and health care, this demographic boom could exacerbate poverty, inequality, and social unrest, contributing to migration pressures both within and outside the continent."[25]

As the global population grows, the environmental impact increases. Every human being consumes their share of resources from the environment. The AACC has identified population growth in Africa as a serious challenge to sustainable development. It goes without saying that as the population in Africa grows exponentially, the large population puts pressure on non-renewable resources, including land, water, sanitation, and services. AACC has produced a theological framework for churches to address population growth.[26]

The third obstacle is ignorance. Hogan Yarrow asserts that ignorance lies in the fact that people are either unaware or unconcerned about how their actions impact their lives,

25 Julius Kirimi Sindi, 'A Development Plan for Africa: Charting a Path to Sustainable Growth and Stability', 2024, https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/development-plan-africa-charting-path-sustainable-sindi-ph-d-eabdf.

26 Lesmore Gibson Ezekiel, 'Sustainable Population for Sustainable Development', AACC Discussion Paper, Nairobi, 2021.

exemplified by the principle of "it doesn't affect my life."[27] Based on this mentality, people have argued that one individual cannot change the state of the world. Consequently, they have not made any effort to change the situation in the environment because the small impact they can make will not be practical. Additionally, many people are unaware that some of their activities can be harmful to the environment. The low level of education among many African communities makes it difficult to convince them of the impact of their actions at present, especially when the consequences are not immediately visible.

Dayyeh Ayoub highlights the consequences of ignorance of environmental issues, noting that the denial of ecological consequences can lead individuals, businesses, and the government to engage in polluting activities without realising their impact.[28] Additionally, it can lead to poor decision-making regarding environmental policies and regulations. Moreover, due to a lack of awareness about environment-friendly alternatives, people may continue to rely on polluting technologies; hence, even holding polluters accountable becomes difficult. He, therefore, notes that it is essential to educate and raise awareness to mitigate these effects. This will also help disseminate accurate information

27 Yarrow Hogan, 'Ignorance Isn't a Justification for Careless Environmental Inaction', Opinion, The Channels, 2023, https://www.thechannels.org/opinion/2023/03/06/ignorance-isnt-a-justification-for-careless-environmental-inaction/.

28 Ayoub Abu Dayyeh, 'Ignorance Pollution: Argument of Ignorance Consequences | Jordan Times', The Jordan Times, 2023, https://jordantimes.com/opinion/ayoub-abu-dayyeh/ignorance-pollution-argument-ignorance-consequences.

and demystify stereotypical arguments and false claims. Failure to deal with the issue at hand will affect not only our present but also our future generations.

Finally, and perhaps most consequential for the churches, are what I call careless or reckless theological positions. It is very disheartening to observe that many of the climate crisis deniers in the developed world base their denial on their Christian faith and convictions. There is an alarming study by Bryan Ezawa and Julie M. Fagan, which shows that the White Evangelical Christians, the so-called "Christian right" in the USA, are the leading climate change deniers.[29] They claim that human beings are not responsible for climate change if there is any at all. And that God will, in the end, be in charge. Others are based on biblical theologies, like the story of Noah, pointing to the rainbow that God promised never to destroy the earth ever again, so it cannot happen.

For example, Kondemo notes that humans have held the belief that the responsibility given to them by God for naming animals is a sign of dominion and authority over creatures. [30] The interpretation of dominion is that of domination, subjugation, and exploitation at will, for the sake of humans. Therefore, there should be no consequence for humans, even if they dominate and exploit the earth, regardless of whether their actions are conducive to the environment or not. In response to this challenge, Kondemo

29 Bryan Ezawa and Julie Fagan, Religious Beliefs a Root Cause of the Denial of Climate Change Being Anthropogenic (New Jersey: Rutgers University Community Repository, 2015).
30 Kondemo, 'Care for Creation.'

writes that human beings are placed on earth to be stewards, carrying out God's sovereign rule over other creatures. We, therefore, become accountable to God for keeping his creation in the care and well-being that honours Him. The land and all in it belong to God, and He has not granted power to human beings to alter and exploit it. Humanity is commissioned to protect, care for, and promote the flourishing of nonhuman creation. This stewardship is a duty for both fellow human beings and the nonhuman creation.

Kavusa attributes the destruction of creation to the theology of salvation of only the soul, which detached humans from the rest of the creation and facilitated the treatment of everything non-human as only lifeless objects that can be exploited.[31] Humans anticipate the forthcoming salvation and a better place thereafter. However, this resulted in the belief that the rest of creation should not be protected because there is a better place where humans will go, and the rest will be left behind and destroyed.

Isaak presents a theology of salvation that Jesus brought not only for humans but for the whole creation. He responds to this claim, noting that Christ Himself came so that we may have life in abundance and hence enjoy the fullness of life in Christ.[32] This is also highlighted in Gen 1:28-30, where human beings were given the power to reproduce and dominate the earth. It is essential, therefore, to note that the domination here is not just in the naming and having authority over, but it is expressed by tender care and respect

31 Kavusa, 'Ecological Stewardship.'
32 Isaak, 'Missio–African Discourse on Eco-Diakonia.'

for nature. We are God's agents, and the stewardship of humanity over creation is a privilege.

Conclusion

Baden John records Martin Luther's response when asked what he would do if the world were to end tomorrow, where Luther said he would plant an apple tree.[33] This is recorded as an anecdote on environmental stewardship. An excellent pointer that care of creation begins and ends with each one of us. Even with the knowledge that the world will come to an end, there is a need to take care of it in our present time.

Bibliography

Asamoah-Gyadu, J. Kwabena. 'Christian Stewardship and Creation: African Perspective on Environment and Development'. In *International Handbook on Creation Care and Eco-Diakonia: Concepts and Theological Perspectives of Churches from the Global South*, edited by Daniel Carlos Beros, Bosela Ekakhol Eale, Lesmore Ezekiel, Kambale Jean-Bosco Kahongya Bwiruka, Ruomin Liu, Grace Moon, Marisa Noemi Strizzi, and Dietrich Werner, 3–15. Regnum Handbooks. Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2022.

Baden, John A. 'Luther's Apple Tree'. Acton Institute, 2020. https://www.acton.org/religion-liberty/volume-29-number-4/luthers-apple-tree.

33 John A. Baden, 'Luther's Apple Tree', Acton Institute, 2020, https://www.acton.org/religion-liberty/volume-29-number-4/luthers-apple-tree.

Barbier, Edward. 'Poverty, Development, and Environment'. *Environment and Development Economics* 15, no. 6 (2010): 635–60. https://doi.org/doi:10.1017/S1355770X1000032X.

Beros, Daniel Carlos, Bosela Ekakhol Eale, Lesmore Ezekiel, Kambale Jean-Bosco Kahongya Bwiruka, Ruomin Liu, Grace Moon, Marisa Noemi Strizzi, and Dietrich Werner, eds. *International Handbook on Creation Care and Eco-Diakonia: Concepts and Theological Perspectives of Churches from the Global South*. Regnum Handbooks. Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2022.

BioLogos. 'Why Should Christians Care for Creation? - Common Question'. Accessed 28 July 2025. https://biologos.org/common-questions/why-should-christians-care-for-creation.

Bradford, Mank. 'Protecting the Environment for Future Generations: A Proposal for a Republican Superagency'. *Faculty Articles and Other Publications* 122 (1996). https://scholarship.law.uc.edu/fac_pubs/122.

Brock, Sebastian. 'St Isaac the Syrian and His Understanding of Universal Salvation and of "the Mystery of Gehenna (Hell)"'. *Clarion Journal*, 2014, 1–11.

'Climate Change Is a Matter of Justice – Here's Why | UNDP Climate Promise'. 26 June 2023. https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/climate-change-matter-justice-heres-why.

Conradie, Ernst M. 'God's Mission, God's Economy of God's Joy as the Deepest Source of Resilience amidst Forces of Death and Destruction?' In *International Handbook on Creation Care and Eco-Diakonia: Concepts and Theological*

Perspectives of Churches from the Global South, edited by Daniel Carlos Beros, Bosela Ekakhol Eale, Lesmore Ezekiel, Kambale Jean-Bosco Kahongya Bwiruka, Ruomin Liu, Grace Moon, Marisa Noemi Strizzi, and Dietrich Werner, 35–43. Regnum Handbooks. Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2022.

Dayyeh, Ayoub Abu. 'Ignorance Pollution: Argument of Ignorance Consequences | Jordan Times'. The Jordan Times, 2023. https://jordantimes.com/opinion/ayoub-abu-dayyeh/ignorance-pollution-argument-ignorance-consequences.

Ezawa, Bryan, and Julie Fagan. *Religious Beliefs a Root Cause of the Denial of Climate Change Being Anthropogenic*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Community Repository, 2015. https://doi.org/doi:10.7282/T37S7R4R.

Gumbo, Tinashe. 'A New Climate Activism in Africa'. In *Civic Activism in an Intensifying Climate Crisis*, edited by Erin Jones and Richard Youngs, 59–64. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2024. https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/12/climate-change-protest-activism-green-transition?lang=en.

Habitat for Humanity. 'Energy Poverty: Effects on Development, Society, and Environment Europe, Middle East and Africa'. Accessed 28 July 2025. https://www.habitat.org/emea/about/what-we-do/residential-energy-efficiency-households/energy-poverty.

Hogan, Yarrow. 'Ignorance Isn't a Justification for Careless Environmental Inaction'. Opinion. The Channels, 6 March 2023.

https://www.thechannels.org/opinion/2023/03/06/ignorance-isnt-a-justification-for-careless-environmental-inaction/.

Hyneman, Jared, and Christopher Shore. 'Why Are We Stewards of Creation? Why Are We Stewards of Creation? World Vision's Biblical Understanding of How We Relate to Creation'. Natural Environment and Climate Issues, World Vision International, 2013.

Isaak, John Paul. 'A Missio–African Discourse on Eco-Diakonia'. In *International Handbook on Creation Care and Eco-Diakonia: Concepts and Theological Perspectives of Churches from the Global South*, edited by Daniel Carlos Beros, Bosela Ekakhol Eale, Lesmore Ezekiel, Kambale Jean-Bosco Kahongya Bwiruka, Ruomin Liu, Grace Moon, Marisa Noemi Strizzi, and Dietrich Werner, 53-59. Regnum Handbooks. Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2022.

Kavusa, Jonathan Kivatsi. 'Ecological Stewardship from African Indigenous Thoughts in Dialogue with Christian Traditions: Resisting Ecological Violence in Africa'. In *International Handbook on Creation Care and Eco-Diakonia: Concepts and Theological Perspectives of Churches from the Global South*, edited by Daniel Carlos Beros, Bosela Ekakhol Eale, Lesmore Ezekiel, Kambale Jean-Bosco Kahongya Bwiruka, Ruomin Liu, Grace Moon, Marisa Noemi Strizzi, and Dietrich Werner, 44–52. Regnum Handbooks. Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2022.

Keshomshahara, Abednego Nkamuhabwa. 'The Ecclesial Mandate of Eco-Diakonia in the Mission of God'. In *International Handbook on Creation Care and Eco-Diakonia: Concepts and Theological Perspectives of Churches from the*

Global South, edited by Daniel Carlos Beros, Bosela Ekakhol Eale, Lesmore Ezekiel, Kambale Jean-Bosco Kahongya Bwiruka, Ruomin Liu, Grace Moon, Marisa Noemi Strizzi, and Dietrich Werner, 25–34. Regnum Handbooks. Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2022.

Kondemo, Marthe Maleke. 'Care for Creation: An Ecotheological Reading of Genesis 2'. In *International Handbook on Creation Care and Eco-Diakonia: Concepts and Theological Perspectives of Churches from the Global South*, edited by Daniel Carlos Beros, Bosela Ekakhol Eale, Lesmore Ezekiel, Kambale Jean-Bosco Kahongya Bwiruka, Ruomin Liu, Grace Moon, Marisa Noemi Strizzi, and Dietrich Werner, 16–24. Regnum Handbooks. Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2022.

Ostrom, Elinor. *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Sindi, Julius Kirimi. 'A Development Plan for Africa: Charting a Path to Sustainable Growth and Stability'. 2024. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/development-plan-africa-charting-path-sustainable-sindi-ph-d-eabdf.

'The Welfare of the Earth Is Our Welfare | AACC-CETA : All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC)'. 8 July 2025. https://www.aacc-ceta.org/en/welfare-earth-our-welfare.

'UN General Assembly Declares Access to Clean and Healthy Environment a Universal Human Right | UN News'. 28 July 2022. https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/07/1123482.

Vanderheiden, Steve. 'Conservation, Foresight, and the Future Generations Problem'. *Inquiry* 49, no. 4 (2006): 337–52. https://doi.org/10.1080/00201740600831422.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Author's contributions

The author declares that he is the sole author of this research article.

Ethical considerations

The author declares that in his research he followed all due ethical standards and guidelines of academic research.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

There was no field research conducted in compiling this article and there are no restrictions on the secondary data presented in this article.

Integrating the Sabbath, the Health Message, and *Ubuntu* as a Response to the Ecological Crises: A South African Seventh-day Adventist Perspective

Siyamthanda Mqhayisa

DOI: 10.25661/atj.v41i1.1238

Abstract

This study is situated in the intersections between systematic theology and Christian ecotheology. It seeks to bring into dialogue the current ecological situation in South Africa with two Seventh-day Adventist beliefs, namely, the Sabbath and the health message in tandem with the African notion of *ubuntu* as a possibility of probing an ecological ethos and praxis in the Seventh-day Adventist church in the context of South Africa and beyond. On this basis, this paper offers an explication of the Seventh-day Adventist "Fundamental Beliefs," the contributions that the Seventh-day Adventist church can make to Christian ecotheology, the South African situation and lastly the significance of the doctrine of the health message, Sabbath and *ubuntu* as response(s) to the current ecological crises. This study will contribute to the growth of ecotheology within the Seventh-day Adventist church in South Africa.

Keywords

Ecotheology, fundamental beliefs, health message, Seventh-day Adventist Church, sabbath, systematic theology, ubuntu

Introduction

The emergence of Christian ecotheology is partly due to concerns over the global ecological crises. Ernst Conradie maintains that Christian ecotheology can arguably be a Christian critique of ecological destruction and an ecological critique of Christianity.[1] Such an environmental critique of Christianity was famously expressed in an essay by Lynn White Jr, who argued that "Christianity is profoundly anthropocentric and that the notion of exercising dominion over nature in medieval Christianity encouraged control over nature, so Christianity remains deeply implicated in ecological destruction".[2] Christian ecotheology could indeed be regarded as a response to Lynn White's essay. In the text, *Christianity and Ecological Theology: A Research Guide* (2006), Conradie underscores the significance of Christian ecotheology in the following manner:

> "*Ecological theology is an attempt to retrieve the ecological wisdom in Christianity as a response to environmental threats and injustices. At the same*

1 Ernst Conradie, "The Four Tasks of Christian Ecotheology: Revisiting the Current Debate," Scriptura 119, no. 1 (February 2020): 4.
2 L. Junior White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," Science 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1204.

> *time, it is an attempt to reinvestigate, rediscover and renew the Christian tradition in the light of the challenges posed by the environmental crisis. Just as feminist theology engages in a twofold critique, that is, a Christian critique of sexist or patriarchal culture and a feminist critique of Christianity, so ecological theologies offer a Christian critique of the cultural habits underlying ecological destruction and an ecological critique of Christianity. In other words, ecological theology is not only concerned with how Christianity can respond to environmental concerns; it also offers Christianity an opportunity for renewal and reformation."*[3]

Given the contextual nature of Christian ecotheology, I define with Tomren:

> *"Ecotheology is a theology developed to motivate individuals to engage in ecological sustainability. Ecotheology includes systematic theology, environmental ethics, practical theology, and environmental politics. The concept is normative and interdisciplinary."*[4]

This paper is, therefore, a dialogue between Christian ecotheology, systematic theology, and African Indigenous knowledge system with a special focus on the notion of

3 Ernst Conradie, Christianity and Ecological Theology: Resources for Further Research (Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2006).

4 Tom S. Tomren, 'Foreword', in Contemporary Ecotheology, Climate Justice and Environmental Stewardship in World Religions, ed. Louk A. Andrianos and Tom S. Tomren (Latvia: Livonia Print, 2021), 32.

ubuntu. The main question to assess here is how South African Adventism can respond to the ongoing ecological crises.

Christian ecotheology touches on all the traditional subdisciplines of Christian theology, including rereading the biblical texts, revisiting the history of Christianity, examining the content and significance of the Christian faith and a Christian ethos, reflecting on Christian praxis, on the church and its many ministries, on God's mission in church and society, and on the relations between Christianity and other religious tradition. Systematic theology, therefore, forms one crucial dimension of ecotheology, albeit alongside several others. Accordingly, ecotheology cannot be reduced to creation theology, anthropology (the relationship between human beings and the rest of nature), the ecological impact of human sin, or environmental ethics only. It touches on every aspect of the Christian faith, including God's work of creation, [5] ongoing creation, providence, salvation, the formation of the church, [6] its ministries and missions, and the consummation of God's work. [7] It also touches on the person of God, God's transcendence and

5 T.S. Tomren, 'Foreword', in Contemporary Ecotheology, Climate Justice and Environmental Stewardship in World Religions, ed. L.A. Andrianos and T.S. Tomren (Latvia: Livonia Print, 2021), 23--32.

6 C.W. Ayre and Ernst Conradie, eds., The Church in God's Household: Protestant Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ecology (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2016).

7 See Ernst Conradie, Hope for the Earth: Vistas on a New Century. Eugene: Wipf and Stock. (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2005); Sigurd Bergmann, Eschatology as Imagining the End (New York: Routledge, 2018).

immanence, the person and work of Jesus Christ[8] and the Holy Spirit,[9] and on the doctrine of the Trinity.[10]

On this basis, this paper discusses the contributions that have been/can be made in the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDAC) on Christian ecotheology. To assess Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) ecotheology in the context of South Africa, a careful analysis of the ecological situation in South Africa, African concepts such as *ubuntu*, doctrines, ethos, and spirituality of the SDAC is required. Hence, this paper begins with a brief outline of the significance of the 28 fundamental beliefs held by the SDSV. Second, I discuss the distinct contributions made by the SDAC in addressing the ongoing ecological crises. Third, I outline the current ecological situation in South Africa. Fourth, I illustrate how the African concept of *ubuntu* and two SDA fundamental beliefs, namely (1) Christian behaviour and the (2) Sabbath, carry an ecological ethos and praxis. Last, I offer some concluding remarks.

Brief History of the 28 Fundamental Beliefs

Unlike other denominations, the SDAC is not guided by creeds or articles of faith but by its 28 "Fundamental Beliefs" (FB). The history of the FB dates back to 1872 when

8 See Denis Edwards, 'The Church as Sacrament of Relationships', Pacifica 8, no. 2 (1995): 185–200.
9 See Jürgen Moltmann, The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1992); Sigurd Bergmann, Creation Set Free: The Spirit as Liberator of Nature (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2005).
10 See Denis Edwards, Ecology at the Heart of Faith: The Change of Heart That Leads to a New Way of Living on Earth (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006).

the "Declaration of the Fundamental Principles", taught and practiced by the SDAC was accepted by its General Conference. However, the FB were systematically developed from 1849–1887 and were already formulated before the formal inception of the SDAC. Upon the inception of the SDAC, only 25 such principles were in existence. It was in 1931 when these "principles" were renamed to the FB of the SDAC. [11] Following minor revisions at the 1980 General Conference, two beliefs on lifestyle, namely on "Baptism" and "Christian behaviour" were added, while a further statement on "Growing in Christ" was added at the 2015 General Conference. [12] Currently, the FB are divided into 28 paragraphs. In the SDAC Manual, the significance of these fundamental beliefs is explicated in the following manner:

> "*Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teachings of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truths or find better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word.*"[13]

11 Michael W. Campbell, 'Seventh-Day Adventism, Doctrinal Statements, and Unity', Journal of the Adventist Theological Society 27, no. 1 (2016): 99.
12 Campbell, "Seventh-Day Adventism," 98-111.
13 General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist, 'Seventh-Day Adventist Church Manual: (19th Ed.)' (Silver Spring: The Secretariat, 2015), 162.

In the SDAC, the FB are a "synopsis of faith and identity."[14] Furthermore, Kwabena Donkor notes that these 28 FB function in three ways in the SDAC, namely: (1) they describe the content of what SDAs believe in, (2) they reflect a consensus within the SDAC on truth, (3) and they ground the mission of the church.[15] Accordingly, the SDAC maintains a protestant "conviction" of *sola Scriptura* (the Bible alone), so that the 28 fundamental beliefs reflect how the SDAC interprets Scripture. Currently, in the church manual of the SDAC, these fundamental beliefs are categorized in the following order: (1) God, (2) man, (3) salvation, (4) the church, (5) daily Christian life, and (6) restoration.

Having offered this brief historical overview of the SDAC, I now present the contributions made by the SDAC to ecotheology.

Seventh-day Adventists' Contributions to Christian Ecotheology

The current ecological crisis, associated with devastating floods from deforested hills, loss of species, land degradation, depletion of energy resources, climate change, and so forth calls for a theological reflection and intervention from all Christian traditions, including the SDAC. In the foreword of the edited volume by Kapya J.

14 T.N. Nkuna, 'The Relevance of the Messianic Dimension for the Christological Controversy in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church' (Master Thesis, North-West University, 2021), 12.

15 Kwabena Donkor, 'Why a Statement of Beliefs?', Perspective Digest 11, no. 3 (2006): 17.

Koama entitled, *Christian Care in Christian Mission*, Thabo Magoba notes:

> *"The ramifications of our ecological crises present the most urgent moral issue of our day, and time is of the essence in addressing it. We cannot claim to love God while watching the earth being destroyed."*[16]

Considering that the current ecological crises have had a profoundly harmful impact on the world, the SDAC has a moral obligation and responsibility to intervene in the current environmental crises. Ezra Chitando, reflecting on the ecological crises from an "African perspective", furthers this point and argues, "To ask God to intervene, without calling upon human beings to take corrective action, is to renege on responsibility." [17] However, Celia-Deane Drummond cautions us that we must "strike a balance between exaggerating these ecological threats as total devastation (apocalypse) and a pretense that more technology will solve all ecological problems." [18] Thus, I contend that Christian ecotheology has to be contextually taking its cue from how we have treated the environment in the past, present, and how we will treat it in the future. In

16 Thabo Magoba, 'Foreword', in Creation Care in Creation Mission, ed. Kapya A. Kaoma (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2015), xii.
17 Ezra Chitando, 'Ecotheology in Africa: An Overview and Preliminary Assessment', in Law, Religion and the Environment in Africa, ed. M. Christian Green and Muhammed Haron (Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, n.d.), 10.
18 Celia Deane-Drummond, A Handbook in Theology and Ecology (London: S.C.M. Press, 1996), 1.

this regard, Ernst Conradie argues as follows that Christian ecotheology is indeed a contextual theology:

> "*Ecological theology may be regarded as the next wave of contextual theology. It joins liberation theology, black theology, feminist theology, womanist theology, and various Indigenous theologies in the quest for a theology that can respond to the challenges of our time. While all theologies reflect the contexts within which they are situated, contextual theologies are, for better or for worse, attempts to articulate and address their social contexts self-consciously and explicitly.*"[19]

Elsewhere in his essay entitled "The Four Tasks of Christian Ecotheology: Revisiting the Current Debate", he notes:

> "*Christian ecotheology offers a dual critique, namely both an ecological critique of Christianity and a Christian critique of ecological destruction. Without a critique of Christianity, it becomes an apologetic exercise that overlooks the need for a radical ecological reformation of Christianity and merely reiterates human responsibility towards the environment through notions of stewardship or priesthood. Without a Christian critique of ecological destruction, ecotheology loses its ability to offer any distinct contribution to wider debates. Ecotheology then becomes nothing more than one branch of "religion*

19 Conradie, Christianity and Ecological Theology, 1.

and ecology" and cannot avoid the traps of self-secularization."[20]

Most Christian traditions have contributed to Christian ecotheology through various means. Despite the minimal contribution to Christian ecotheology, the SDAC, like all denominations, has a significant role to play in the current ecotheological discourse. On this point, in the year 2008, the former General Conference President, Jan Paulsen, encouraged more discourse on ecotheology. Although such a call was made by the then president of the SDAC, no institution, department, or leader has been appointed to address this issue as yet.

It is worth noting that there have been some recent scholarly interventions by SDA theologians in this regard. For instance, Norman Gulley, one of the leading SDA theologians, in his book *Systematic Theology: Creation, Christ, Salvation* writes briefly about ecotheology and the ecological crises. He holds that in the face of the current ecological turmoil, a "biblical ecology" is needed.[21] He refers to the following biblical texts: Col 1:15–20; John 1:3; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:6; Eph 1:9–10; Heb 1:2–3; and Rom 8. At the heart of his proposed "biblical ecology" is the care that God has for all his creatures in the world which Christians should mirror. On this basis, Gulley maintains that ecotheology should be grounded in Jesus Christ as the Creator and Redeemer of the cosmos.[22] He argues that redemption is pivotal and does not

20 Conradie, "Four Tasks," 3.
21 Norman R. Gulley, Systematic Theology: Creation, Christ, Salvation (Vol. 3) (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2012), 105.
22 Gulley, Systematic Theology, 105-106.

benefit humans only but all of creation. However, he adds that, "restoration of humans and all creation includes more than this world." [23] This indicates the significance of eschatology within the SDA tradition.

Sivge Tonstad, in his unpublished conference paper entitled, "COVID-19: 'Crisis of Ecology and Hermeneutics'," notes that the SDAC is earth-oriented in its ethos. [24] However, such ethos, spirituality, and theology have not yet been fully expanded in an ecological sense. In this regard he notes:

> *"Seventh-day Adventists are interested in the earth, but has the interest brought benefits to ecology? Our focus has been on whether the earth was created, when, and how long it took to make it. These are worthwhile interests, but do they benefit the earth? The age of the earth in the Adventist community mattered more than the ache of the earth, and the priority persists even as the groaning of non-human creation gets louder and more insistent. It persists, I say, even though the Bible does not specify precisely when the earth was created. What it does, by contrast, is to prescribe our duty to care for the earth."*[25]

Given this ecological responsibility, interestingly, contributions by SDA theologians from Africa remain limited because there are no postgraduate theses, monographs, or edited volumes on ecotheology from within the SDA

23 Gulley, Systematic Theology, 106.
24 Sivge Tonstad, 'COVID-19: "Crisis of Ecology and Hermeneutics"', 2021.
25 Tonstad, "COVID-19," 9-10.

tradition. At the moment, the SDAC does not endorse any unique position on Christian ecotheology. Still, the theological/doctrinal views of the SDAC may offer some distinct perspectives in this regard. To demonstrate that some doctrines of the SDAC may contribute to ecotheological discourses, I will consider two fundamental beliefs: The SDA Health Message and the Sabbath. I will not engage a theological or biblical exposition of these two fundamental beliefs. Instead, I will reflect on how, considering the current ecological demise, these two fundamental beliefs can be significant perspectives that the SDAC can utilize for contributing to ecotheology in Africa.

The Ecological Crises in South Africa

Colonialism and apartheid remain two paramount historical factors that have shaped the history of South Africa (nature and humanity). In conformity with this view, Hlulisani Ramatswana, in his essay entitled, "Not Free While Nature Remains Colonized: A Decolonial Reading of Isiah 11:6–9", observes that the "colonial system disrupted the harmony that existed between human beings and nature by colonising both, thereby causing a divide between human beings and nature." [26] Despite South Africa being characterized as being a post-colonial and post-apartheid state, the effects of colonialism and apartheid are still evident in almost all aspects of the country. At an environmental level these effects may be characterized by

26 Hlulisani Ramantswana, 'Not Free While Nature Remains Colonised: A Decolonial Reading of Isaiah 11: 6––9', Old Testament Essays 28, no. 3 (2015): 807.

the scarcity of clean water, proper sanitation facilities, and so on. For instance, in the townships I grew up in Khayelitsha and rural areas, the scarcity of clean drinking water goes back to forced removals under apartheid, which led to over-population and, thus, to soil erosion and the exhaustion of water supplies. As a result, many underprivileged people resorted to poaching and forms of deforestation as survival strategies. This, in turn, caused further ecological damage and, thus, exacerbating the vicious ecological destructive cycle. However, at a larger scale, within the Southern Africa region, it can be noted:

> "*The sub-continent is already under pressure from climate stresses; with further climate change, climate in the region is predicted to become more variable and extreme weather events such as droughts and floods are predicted to become more frequent and severe. Southern Africa is particularly vulnerable to climatic changes and variability because of the fact that the majority of the population makes their living from the land as cultivators and pastoralists.*"[27]

In this regard, Ezra Chitando observes that because of the very real threats that African people are facing, African theologians and scholars of religion have sought to address the issue of the environmental crisis.[28] One of the biggest motivating factors for this engagement is that African theology seeks to be contextually sensitive, while unearthing

27 Michael B.K. Darkoh, 'An Overview of Environmental Issues in Southern Africa', African Journal of Ecology 47, no. 1 (2009): 93.
28 Chitando, "Ecotheology in Africa," 4.

some fundamental African indigenous knowledge as a praxis to answer life threatening situations, such as the ecological crisis. Having briefly outlined the current ecological situation in South Africa, I now discuss the concept of *ubuntu* amid the ongoing ecological crises.

Ubuntu Amid the Ongoing Ecological Crises

Umntu Ngumntu Ngabantu is a Xhosa adage that is found in all Indigenous languages in South Africa. This adage can be translated as, "to be human is to affirm one's humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and on that basis establish humane relations with them."[29] Accordingly, the notion of *ubuntu* is built on being "humane" (being respectful, caring, gentle, and so on) towards other human beings. On this point, Puleng LenKaBula argues that when the concept of *ubuntu* is interpreted in a creative way — which acknowledges its socio-economic, political, and ecological scope or horizon— it has the potential to become a resource, principle, and norm for overcoming ecological degradation and economic injustices in the world today.[30] This is based on this notion of being "humane" or *ukubano-Buntu*, as this notion encompasses the idea of "interconnectedness." In this regard Ramose argues:

29 Mogobe Ramose, 'Ecology Through Ubuntu', in African Ethics: An Anthology for Comparative and Applied Ethics, ed. Munyara F. Murove (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2015), 72.

30 Puleng LenkaBula, 'Beyond Anthropocentricity: Botho/Ubuntu and the Quest for Economic and Ecological Justice in Africa', Religion and Theology 15, no. 3–4 (2008): 375.

> *"The principle of wholeness applies also to the relation between human beings and physical or objective nature. To care for one another, therefore, implies caring for physical nature as well. Without such care, the interdependence between human beings and physical nature would be undermined. Moreover, human beings are indeed part and parcel of physical nature, even though they might be a privileged part at that."*[31]

It is this wholeness embedded in the concept of *ubuntu* that postures African ideas of being to extend beyond humans to the environment.

The Significance of the SDA Health Message

The SDAC is distinguished not only by its eschatological emphasis on the Second Advent of Jesus Christ and Sabbath observance but also for its commitment to promoting a healthy lifestyle. This is unequivocally articulated in a statement by the SDA General Conference, which posits, "the health reform and teaching of health and temperance are inseparable of the church's mission and message."[32] Currently, the SDA health message is subsumed under the church's "fundamental belief 22: Christian behaviour," which underscores the significance of a healthy lifestyle in Christian living. The following is an excerpt:

31 Ramose, "Ecology Through Ubuntu," 73.
32 General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist, "Seventh-Day Adventist Church Manual," 168.

> *"We are called to be godly people who think, feel, and act in harmony with biblical principles in all aspects of personal and social life. For the Spirit to recreate the character of our Lord in us, we involve ourselves only in those things that will produce Christlike purity, health, and joy in our lives. This means that our amusement and entertainment should meet the highest standards of Christian taste and beauty. While recognizing cultural differences, our dress is to be simple, modest, and neat, befitting those whose true beauty does not consist of outward adornment but in the imperishable ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit. It also means that because our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, we are to care for them intelligently. Along with adequate exercise and rest, we are to adopt the most healthful diet possible and abstain from the unclean foods identified in the Scriptures. Since alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and the irresponsible use of drugs and narcotics are harmful to our bodies, we are to abstain from them as well. Instead, we are to engage in whatever brings our thoughts and bodies into the discipline of Christ, who desires our wholesomeness, joy, and goodness."*[33]

According to this excerpt, Christian behaviour entails a lifestyle characterised by a "most healthful" diet, daily exercise, and abstinence from alcohol and tobacco. On this point, Rachel Wells, in her essay entitled "Why care for the

33 General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist, "Seventh-Day Adventist Church Manual," 168.

earth If it is going to burn? Eschatology and Ecology", argues that "a plant-based diet is one of the very best things humans can do for animals vegan saves the lives of at least ninety-five animals per year."[34] In examining the SDA's emphasis on dietary habits, Tonstad notes:

> "*Food choices have a role in Adventist theology and practice, ranging from the observance of Old Testament dietary laws to preference for plant-based food, the former an ethical obligation for Adventists all over the world, the latter optional, and the choice of a minority. The hermeneutic grounding these choices is either obedience to a still-binding prescription or personal health advantages. The reason, conspicuously, is not ecological. Should it be? Or rather, shouldn't it be? Food production and food choices are possibly the most important determinants of global warming.*"[35]

Accordingly, a vegetarian or, better, a vegan diet is indeed a crucial step in caring for creation. Seventh-day Adventists, through decades, have understood this through the many writings of Ellen White on this subject. For instance, in the book, *The Ministry of Health and Healing*, she argues, "Think of the cruelty to animals that meat eating involves, and its effects on those that inflict and those who behold it. How it destroys the tenderness with which we

34 A. Rachel Wells, 'Why Care for the Earth If It Is All Going to Burn?', in Eschatology and Ecology: Eschatology from an Adventist Perspective, ed. Elias B. de Souza et al., vol. 1 (Silver Springs: Biblical Research, 2021), 23.
35 Tonstad, COVID-19, 6.

should regard these creatures of God."[36] This is further expressed in *the Seventh-day Adventist Believe Volume*, in which it states that "by abstaining from unclean foods, God's people demonstrate their gratefulness, for their redemption, from the corrupt unclean world."[37] On this point, Joshua Méndez notes:

> "*By grounding the health message in the ethical, affirming a vegetarian diet as a crucial element of Christian behavior is a powerful first step in a relational model of Creation that abandons the species, anthropocentric confines. The health message lures us into a space that transforms the pre-existing hierarchies between human creatures and animals by suggesting a relational component that extends individual moral actions beyond human subjectivity.*"[38]

Despite the SDA's emphasis on diet and healthy living, the ecotheological expression that might be found in this doctrine has not yet been sufficiently explored. On this point, Tonstad holds that "the traditional Seventh-day Adventist health message should be explored not only to address dietary habits but also to emphasise ecological intervention that may come from the Seventh-day Adventist

36 Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Health and Healing (Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), 47.
37 Seventh-Day Adventist Believe (Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1988), 283.
38 Joshua Méndez, 'Dreaming Beyond the Flesh: Toward a Relational Adventist Ecotheology for a Global Age' (Adventist Society for Religious Studies Conference, San Antonio, 2016), 4.

Church."[39] Thus, I contend, a closer look at the SDA health message probes a theological and ethical commitment to caring for God's creation.

Suffice to note that the SDA health message is not only concerned with dietary habits but also addresses an "irreducible spiritual dimension."[40] This is expressed in the call to abandon living in cities and opt to live in the outskirts of cities. At the heart of this call is the realization that, "one of the causes of the ongoing ecological crises is overpopulation caused by urbanization." [41] Furthermore, Rizal Abdi and Ferry Pardamean observe that "cities are often health hazards. This is associated with visible diseases, foul air, impure food, impure water, overcrowding, unhealthy living conditions." [42] According to Wells, living on the outskirts of the city grounds humanity into a realization that "other living creatures are co-inhabitants of the world with humans." [43] White extends a similar view and notes how nature assists humans:

> *"Through the agencies of nature, God is working, day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment, to keep us alive, to build up and restore us. When any part of the body sustains injury, a healing process is at once begun; nature's agencies set at work to restore*

39 Tonstad, „COVID-19," 3.
40 Méndez, "Dreaming Beyond the Flesh," 2.
41 M. Rizal Abdi and Ferry Goodman Pardamean, 'Christianity and Ecology a Critical Study on the Contribution of SDA Theology toward Ecology', Jurnal Kawistara 8, no. 3 (2019): 283.
42 Rizal and Pardamean, "Christianity and Ecology," 284.
43 Wells, "Why Care for the Earth," 24.

> *soundness. However, the power working through these agencies is the power of God."*[44]

Given this understanding, human beings and other creatures are intertwined and consequently, interdependent. This is the theological framework that is needed in the SDA health message. The ecological crises present a unique opportunity for the SDAC to redefine and re-emphasize the SDAC's health message through this relationality lens, which may indeed lure us into a space that enables Adventists to move beyond pre-existing hierarchies between human creatures and animals by suggesting "a relational component that extends individual moral actions beyond human subjectivity."[45]

The Significance of Sabbath-Keeping within the SDAC as an Ecological Ethos

In an article entitled "Adventism and the World: Toward an Adventist Theology of Solidarity", Silakhe Singata notes that the Ten Commandments within the SDAC are understood dually, i.e., (1) the love for God and (2) the love for other fellow human beings. In his view, the Sabbath commandment is understood amongst SDAs as a bridge that connects the love humans ought to have towards God and the love that humans ought to have for fellow humans and

44 White, Ministry of Health and Healing, 21.
45 Méndez, "Dreaming Beyond the Flesh," 7.

creation in its entirety.[46] Accordingly, the SDA's Church Manual introduces the Sabbath in the following manner:

> *"After the six days of Creation, the gracious Creator rested on the seventh day and instituted the Sabbath for all people as a memorial of Creation. The fourth commandment of God's unchangeable law requires the observance of this seventh-day Sabbath as the day of rest, worship, and ministry in harmony with the teaching and practice of Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a day of delightful communion with God and one another. It symbolizes our redemption in Christ, a sign of our sanctification, a token of our allegiance, and a foretaste of our eternal future in God's kingdom. The Sabbath is God's perpetual sign of His eternal covenant between Him and His people. Joyful observance of this holy time from evening to evening, sunset to sunset, is a celebration of God's creative and redemptive acts."*[47]

The Sabbath in the SDAC is presently understood through a soteriological and eschatological lens. Thus, the significance of the Sabbath remains restricted to benefit humanity. On this basis, I agree with Méndez who underscored the Sabbath as a day of "communion" between God and every creature in God's household. For instance, he argues, "For humans to enter into the Sabbath rest, the

46 Silakhe Singata, 'Adventism and the World: Towards an Adventist Theology of Solidarity', 2018, 2.
47 General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist, "Seventh-Day Adventist Church Manual," 179.

relationship they have with the rest of creation must be taken into account."[48] Similarly, Tonstad notes:

> "We *have taught the world which day to keep, when it begins and ends, and what not to do on the Sabbath, but we have said very little about its communal and ecological character. The communal prescription for the Sabbath includes benefit to animals (Exod.* 20:8–11; 23:12; *Deut.* 5:12–15), *and the prescription for the Sabbath Year promises relief to animals and the earth Exod.* 23:10–11; *Lev.* 25:2–3."[49]

As proposed by Tonstad, this communal imperative can potentially reverse the damages meted out by capitalism to the body and the rest of creation. Just like the health message, the Sabbath implies relationality with nature. By interpreting the Sabbath through this concept of relationality as proposed by the SDAC's Manual, the Sabbath can be redefined as a hermeneutical key the SDAC can use to relate with creation in a life-affirming manner.[50] Leonardo Boff better explains this relationality in his text *Ecology and Liberation* (1995), by arguing, "From an ecological viewpoint, everything co-exists. Everything that co-exists pre-exists. And everything that co-exists and pre-exists subsists using an infinite web of all-inclusive relations. Nothing exists outside relationships." [51] (Boff 1995:7). Given this

48 Méndez, "Dreaming Beyond the Flesh," 8.
49 Tonstad, "COVID-19," 5.
50 Tonstad, "COVID-19," 6.
51 Leonardo Boff, Ecology & Liberation: A New Paradigm (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995), 7.

understanding of ecology, from an Adventist perspective, the question becomes, how can the doctrine of the Sabbath advance such an ecological ethos and spirituality? For instance, in the context of South Africa in particular, in most black SDACs, the whole Sabbath day is spent in church buildings, where minimal interaction with nature is practised. However, Ellen White long advised that on the Sabbath, humans ought to interact with nature. In this regard, she argues, "To keep the Sabbath holy, we do not need to enclose ourselves in walls, shut away from beautiful scenes of nature and from the free, invigorating air of heaven."[52] The Sabbath allows all creation in God's household to reconcile. As Joshua Méndez profoundly argues:

> *"The Sabbath attempts to resolve the human/nature dualism by extending rest to animals and the land. In keeping with the spirit of Leviticus, I advocate for a rest that disrupts the linear cycles of production and engenders the transformation and renewal of the whole of Creation through the weekly experience of the Sabbath."*[53]

Through the Sabbath rest creation (human and non-human) has an opportunity to experience the interconnectedness of all things and, most significantly, the presence of God. This was also profoundly captured by Abraham Heschel:

52 Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy (Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), 66.
53 Méndez, "Dreaming Beyond the Flesh," 8.

> *"To set apart one day a week for freedom, a day on which we should not use the instruments that have been so easily turned into weapons of destruction, a day for being with ourselves, a day of detachment from the vulgar, of independence of external obligations, a day on which we stop worshipping the idols of technical civilization, a day on which we use no money, a day of armistice in the economic struggle with our fellow men and the forces of nature — is there any institution that holds out a greater hope for Man's progress than the Sabbath?"*[54]

The SDAC can explore the Sabbath from this premise and arrive at a point wherein the members can claim that the Sabbath is "a day which we are called to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation, from the world of creation to the creation of the world."[55] Accordingly, the weekly Sabbath arrives to disrupt and transform human time, and the violence it imposes to the poor and the environment. Thus, the Sabbath awards nature an opportunity to transcend the material to experience interdependence with all living things, the land they occupy, and, most importantly, to be in God's presence.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to provide the significance of the 28 fundamental beliefs of the SDAC, its contributions to

54 Abraham J. Heschel, The Sabbath (London: MacMillan, 1951), 12.
55 Heschel, The Sabbath, 23.

Christian ecotheology, and an ecotheological examination of the notion of *ubuntu*, the SDAC health message and the Sabbath. The current ecological crisis presents a *kairos* moment for the SDAC. As stated above, by discarding anthropocentric interpretations of *ubuntu*, the health message, and the Sabbath, the SDAC in South Africa may indeed develop a theological language emphasizing the relationality and interdependence of all creation in "God's Household". Accordingly, this paper brought to light the following questions: What is the role of the SDCA in responding to the current ecological crises? How can the doctrines of the SDA Church be expanded to address the environmental challenges that severely impact the poor and marginalized communities? I agree with Méndez[56] that the SDAC can no longer afford to remain restricted by the anthropocentric confines of our theological language when its underlying truths offer a profound alternative — a relational, holistic vision for creation.

Bibliography

Abdi, M. Rizal, and Ferry Goodman Pardamean. 'Christianity and Ecology a Critical Study on the Contribution of SDA Theology toward Ecology'. *Jurnal Kawistara* 8, no. 3 (2019): 275–78.

Ayre, C.W., and Ernst Conradie, eds. *The Church in God's Household: Protestant Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ecology*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2016.

56 Méndez, "Dreaming Beyond the Flesh," 12.

Bergmann, Sigurd. *Creation Set Free: The Spirit as Liberator of Nature*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2005.

Bergmann, Sigurd. *Eschatology as Imagining the End*. New York: Routledge, 2018.

Boff, Leonardo. *Ecology & Liberation: A New Paradigm*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995.

Campbell, Michael W. 'Seventh-Day Adventism, Doctrinal Statements, and Unity'. *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 27, no. 1 (2016): 98–116.

Chitando, Ezra. 'Ecotheology in Africa: An Overview and Preliminary Assessment'. In *Law, Religion and the Environment in Africa*, edited by M. Christian Green and Muhammed Haron, 3–16. Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, n.d.

Conradie, Ernst. *Christianity and Ecological Theology: Resources for Further Research*. Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2006.

Conradie, Ernst. *Hope for the Earth: Vistas on a New Century. Eugene: Wipf and Stock*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2005.

Conradie, Ernst. 'The Four Tasks of Christian Ecotheology: Revisiting the Current Debate'. *Scriptura* 119, no. 1 (February 2020): 1–13.

Darkoh, Michael B.K. 'An Overview of Environmental Issues in Southern Africa'. *African Journal of Ecology* 47, no. 1 (2009): 93–94.

Deane-Drummond, Celia. *A Handbook in Theology and Ecology*. London: S.C.M. Press, 1996.

Donkor, Kwabena. 'Why a Statement of Beliefs?' *Perspective Digest* 11, no. 3 (2006): 1–20.

Edwards, Denis. *Ecology at the Heart of Faith: The Change of Heart That Leads to a New Way of Living on Earth*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006.

Edwards, Denis. 'The Church as Sacrament of Relationships'. *Pacifica* 8, no. 2 (1995): 185–200.

General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist. 'Seventh-Day Adventist Church Manual: (19th Ed.)'. Silver Spring: The Secretariat, 2015.

Gulley, Norman R. *Systematic Theology: Creation, Christ, Salvation (Vol. 3)*. Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2012.

Heschel, Abraham J. *The Sabbath*. London: MacMillan, 1951.

LenkaBula, Puleng. 'Beyond Anthropocentricity: Botho/Ubuntu and the Quest for Economic and Ecological Justice in Africa'. *Religion and Theology* 15, no. 3–4 (2008): 375–94. https://doi.org/10.1163/157430108X376591.

Magoba, Thabo. 'Foreword'. In *Creation Care in Creation Mission*, edited by Kapya A. Kaoma, xi–xiv. Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2015.

Méndez, Joshua. 'Dreaming Beyond the Flesh: Toward a Relational Adventist Ecotheology for a Global Age'. San Antonio, 2016.

Moltmann, Jürgen. *Christian Hope: Messianic or Transcendent? A Theological Discussion with Joachim of Fiore and Thomas Aquinas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1992.

Nkuna, T.N. 'The Relevance of the Messianic Dimension for the Christological Controversy in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church'. Master Thesis, North-West University, 2021.

Ramantswana, Hlulisani. 'Not Free While Nature Remains Colonised: A Decolonial Reading of Isaiah 11: 6--9'. *Old Testament Essays* 28, no. 3 (2015): 807–31.

Ramose, Mogobe. 'Ecology Through Ubuntu'. In *African Ethics: An Anthology for Comparative and Applied Ethics*, edited by Munyara F. Murove, 69–77. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2015.

Seventh-Day Adventist Believe. Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1988.

Singata, Silakhe. 'Adventism and the World: Towards an Adventist Theology of Solidarity', 2018.

Tomren, Tom S. 'Foreword'. In *Contemporary Ecotheology, Climate Justice and Environmental Stewardship in World Religions*, edited by Louk A. Andrianos and Tom S. Tomren, 23--32. Latvia: Livonia Print, 2021.

Tonstad, Sivge. 'COVID-19: "Crisis of Ecology and Hermeneutics"', 2021.

Wells, A. Rachel. 'Why Care for the Earth If It Is All Going to Burn?' In *Eschatology and Ecology: Eschatology from an Adventist Perspective*, edited by Elias B. de Souza, A. Rachel Wells, László Gallusz, and Denis Kaiser, 1:25–41. Silver Springs: Biblical Research, 2021.

White, Ellen G. *The Great Controversy*. Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911.

White, Ellen G. *The Ministry of Health and Healing*. Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948.

White, L. Junior. 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis'. *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203–7.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Author's contributions

The author declares that he is the sole author of this research article.

Ethical considerations

The author declares that in his research he followed all due ethical standards and guidelines of academic research.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

There was no field research conducted in compiling this article and there are no restrictions on the secondary data presented in this article.

Conflation of Diakonia with Charity: An Analysis of the Annual Mission Week in the Evangelical Lutheran Church – Morogoro Diocese

Nestar James Kyobya and Jörg Zehelein

DOI: 10.25661/atj.v41i1.1233

Abstract

This article explores the Annual Mission Week (AMW) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Morogoro Diocese (ELCT-MD) and its understanding of diakonia. The central thesis is that the AMW embraces a flawed concept of diakonia, i.e., mere charity. This conflation limits the potential of diakonia to foster genuine social transformation and empowerment. Methodologically, the article draws on systematic-theological reflections on diakonia and charity. Its primary sources are ecumenical documents and the works of African scholars, such as Mercy A. Oduyoye. These theological perspectives challenge a narrow misunderstanding of diakonia as charity and advocate for a nuanced understanding of service that includes community empowerment and systemic change. To analyse the AMW and its understanding and practice of diakonia, this study also employs qualitative research methods. These are semi-structured interviews with 15 pastors responsible for the organisation and management of the AMW. The major findings were that many respondents expressed a desire for a broader interpretation of diakonia that encompasses not just immediate relief but also sustainable development and

social justice. Furthermore, the interviews revealed key themes, including the importance of spiritual care, social empowerment, and structural justice. Finally, this paper brings these empirical insights into a dialogue with the theological grounding of diakonia. It concludes by calling for a more comprehensive understanding of diakonia through the AMW.

Key Words

Diakonia, Charity, Annual Mission Week, ELCT – Morogoro Diocese

Introduction

The AMW in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the ELCT-MD represents a significant period of community engagement, spiritual renewal, and outreach. This one-week event serves as a focal point for the church's mission, bringing together congregants and community members to participate in various activities that aim at both spiritual enrichment and social support. The overarching goal of this initiative is to not only spread the gospel but also to embody the principles of diakonia service and ministry that reflect Christ's teachings through acts of love and compassion. The AMW is part of the general strategy of the diaconical ministry of ELCT-MD. The latter adopts a comprehensive approach to diaconia and social justice, aiming to empower individuals and communities to transform injustices in society. Particular initiatives that bring this strategy into action are, e.g., health care services, the “Women Power”

project, which assists prostitute women to explore alternative income-opportunities, and advocacy programmes that strive for the empowerment of girls and women facing various forms of gender-based violence.

However, the AMW stands in stark contrast with the general strategy and agenda of the ELCT-MD. Whereas the latter defines and connects diakonia with practices of empowerment and advocacy services that aim at sustainable transformation on a long-term basis, the AMW does not. Despite claiming to embrace diaconal activities, it rather limits itself to short-term relief actions, such as distributing food and clothing. In other words, the AMW is all about charity, but not diakonia. This article aims to address this discrepancy. There has been no scholarly exploration of the AMW and its understanding and realisation of diaconia to date. Thus, this study represents the first academic attempt to address this issue, as it aims to explore the conflation of diakonia with charity and the factors contributing to it.[1]

By situating the discussion within a theological and practical/empirical context, this article employs systematic theological reflections on diakonia and charity to highlight the necessity of viewing diakonia as a transformative force that advocates for justice and fosters community empowerment. From there, this study empirically examines perspectives on the AMW of the ELCT-MD, particularly the understanding of diakonia and factors that contribute to a

1 This article, in addition to further resources, draws on the first author's master's thesis, submitted at Tumaini University of Makumira in July 2025. Jörg Zehelein supervised this work and collaborated with Nestar Kyobya to author this article.

possible conflation of diakonia with charity. Further methodological remarks regarding this empirical approach will be provided below, where the results of the qualitative study are presented.

Diakonia and Charity - Defined

This paper employs a definition of diakonia that aligns with the overall strategy of diakonia in the ELCT-MD.[2] Diakonia, derived from the Greek word for service, embodies a call to action in response to human suffering, promoting empowerment, transformation, and reconciliation. Diakonia ministry encompasses a range of activities, including social welfare programs, educational initiatives, advocacy, political engagement, and pastoral care services.[3] Such a comprehensive understanding of diakonia is opposed to the narrow and short-term-oriented idea of charity. Robert D. Lupton, in this regard, coined the term "toxic charity." This form of aid attempts to meet superficial and short-term needs, thereby creating dependencies and disempowerment.[4] Whereas diakonia has a comprehensive

2 '5 Years Strategic Plan 2018 -2023' (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania – Morogoro Diocese, 2018). Despite the fact that this document differentiates diaconal services outreach (mostly health services) from social justice's enhancement and gender justice (advocacy) it becomes clear that what this article terms as diakonia is fully accepted and aimed at by this official 5 Years Strategic Plan.

3 John N Collins, Diakonia: Re-Interpreting the Ancient Source (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 10; Diakonia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2009), 8.

4 Robert D. Lupton, Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (and How to Reverse It) (New York: HarperOne, 2011). Despite the lack of more significant grounding of arguments by Lupton (see Stephen E. McMillin,

agenda of justice and transformation, charity is merely short-term action.[5] Against such a narrow approach of charity, for the context of the South African Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), Nioma Venter pleads for a collaborative-integrated, missional-diaconal praxis that will help "the DRC to get out of the groove of its traditional short-term, charity approach."[6] Thus, charity is a short-term, non-sustainable way of giving. It is a limited form of assistance that addresses immediate needs without tackling the systemic issues underlying poverty and social injustice.

In terms of deconstructing power relations, charity typically involves reaching out from positions of privilege vis-à-vis those in need who will appear as passive recipients rather than active participants.[7] From this perspective, donors may seek recognition for their contributions, which shifts the focus from the beneficiaries to the donors

'Book Review of Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (And How to Reverse It)', Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought 37, no. 3 (2018): 325–27), Lupton is convincing in that he argues for philanthropical practices that go beyond immediate, non-transformative aid which mirrors the comprehensive understanding of diakonia that this article embraces.

5 Stéphan van der Watt, 'Transforming Diaconia in the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa: Compassionate Service Demanding Justice and Reconciliation', in Diaconia: Acts, Understanding and Stories in a Pluralistic Southern Africa, ed. Johannes Knoetze and Jacques W. Beukes (Wellington, [South Africa]: Barnabas Academic Publishers, 2024), 117.

6 Nioma Venter, 'Little Seeds: A Prototype of Collaborative-Integrated, Missional-Diaconal Praxis' (Doctoral Dissertation, Pretoria, University of Pretoria, 2023), vi.

7 Lupton, Robert D. Lupton. Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (and How to Reverse It). New York: HarperOne, 2011. 191 pp. Hardcover., p. 9.

themselves.[8] Charity may, thus, primarily benefit the giver, and it will affirm the difference between a powerful giver and a powerless receiver.[9] Likewise, *Diakonia in Context* analyses that "the provision of help may deepen differences and create a situation where some people always are 'resourced helpers', while others always are 'helpless receivers.'" [10] Consequently, as Corbett and Fikkert hold, charity can reinforce inequalities.[11] This dynamic can create a narrative that emphasises the generosity of the donor rather than the transformational potential of the community.[12]

In summary, charity is a short-term relief action that affirms the difference between the donors and recipients and thus reinforces inequalities. It does not pave the way for participation and empowerment of marginalised people and communities. Conversely, diakonia is a concept and practice that aims at both short-term and long-term transformation and empowerment, intending to create spaces for the agency and empowerment of those at the margins of a society.

8 Susan Horne, 'The Ethics of Donor Recognition: Navigating the Fine Line between Appreciation and Self-Promotion', Nonprofit Management & Leadership 22, no. 3 (2012): 298.

9 As we will see later, charity cannot be condemned completely; it is not necessarily harmful. Especially in situations of emergency and/or as rudimentary support, charity is essential.

10 Diakonia in Context, 49.

11 Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor-- and Yourself (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012). 151.

12 See Beth Breeze, 'Giving in the UK: Philanthropy Embedded in a Welfare State Society', in The Palgrave Handbook of Global Philanthropy, ed. Pamala Wiepking and Femida Handy (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), 285–306.

Theological Foundations of Diakonia

Diakonia, rooted in the Greek term for service, emphasises a comprehensive approach that aims at transforming lives and communities.[13] Biblical reflection on diakonia and charity reveals a profound connection between service and love, emphasising that true diakonia extends beyond mere acts of charity to encompass a holistic response to the needs of others. Passages of Scripture such as the final judgement according to Matt 25:35–40 illustrate that serving those in need is serving Christ. Such diaconal action implies not only the distribution of food and clothing (Matt 25:35–36), but also visiting prisoners and welcoming strangers. These actions reach beyond charity and call for advocating for a compassionate engagement that transforms both the giver and the receiver.[14] In similar vein, Johannes J. Kritzinger, Peter G. J. Meiring and Willem A. Saayman hold: 'The followers of Jesus Christ, who live out of [God's] magnificent grace, can never acquiesce in any passive acceptance of injustice and oppression, or be satisfied merely to provide charity to the victims'[15] Ultimately, the biblical framework calls for a more profound commitment to love in action, where diakonia transforms into a way of life.

13 Collins, Diakonia, 10.

14 David J Bosch, Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books., 1991), 80.

15 Johannes J. Kritzinger, Peter G. J. Meiring and Willem A. Saayman, On being witnesses (Johannesburg: Orion Publishers, Halfway House, 1994), 3, cited in Attie van Niekerk, 'Dabar as Word and Deed: Exploring the Relation Between Helping Those in Need and Winning People for Christ', in Diaconia: Acts, Understanding and Stories in a Pluralistic Southern Africa, ed. Johannes Knoetze and Jacques W. Beukes (Wellington, [South Africa]: Barnabas Academic Publishers, 2024), 79.

By internalising the values and experiences gained through diakonia, individuals can integrate these principles into their daily lives, thereby reflecting God's grace and justice in the world.[16]

From an African theological point of view, Mercy Amba Oduyoye emphasised that the role of the church and its ministry is to actively participate in God's mission to bring about systemic change. This calls for a shift away from a charity-based service toward one that aims for justice, empowerment, dignity, lasting relationships, and societal transformation. [17] In the same way, African theologian Emmanuel Twesigye further emphasises the church's role in advocating for systemic change, moving beyond mere charity to engage in actions that promote justice and liberation.[18]

> *"This means that as the church is called to partake in the missio Dei, its work must be holistic, oriented towards the Father, in loving custodianship of the earth, and in fellowship with all humanity in caring for the vulnerable and the poor. However, being rooted in the reign of Christ moves this beyond mere charity*

16 Johan Pillay, 'The Significance of Social Justice and Diakonia in the Reformed Tradition', In Die Skriflig 56, no. 4 (2022): 5.

17 Oduyoye, Daughters of Anowa, 122.

18 Samuel K. Elolia, Afeosemime U. Adogame, and Emmanuel Twesigye, eds., 'The Church and State Conflict in Uganda: Presidential Idi Amin Kills the Angrican Archbishop', in Religion, Conflict, and Democracy in Modern Africa: The Role of Civil Society in Political Engagement, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 148–92; see even Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarch (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 199.

> *or acts of mercy, lending a political and social dimension to the diaconate of the Church 'that includes matters such as structural injustice, human dignity, and much more'"*[19]

This statement affirms what *Diakonia in Context*, published by the Lutheran World Federation, envisions as diakonia. This document unfolds diakonia as a multifaceted ministry that encompasses short-term emergency action, long-term engagement, advocacy for justice, and empowerment at the congregational and institutional levels. [20] Diakonia focuses on empowerment and transformative justice. [21] More recently, the concept of diakonia has also been applied to environmental care. As climate change and environmental degradation threaten the entire ecosystem, the call to diakonia will also embrace an ecological dimension.[22] In this vein, diakonia must provide ways for a church that seeks to empower people in need and to pave the way for the realisation of their agency. Such an understanding of diakonia cannot accept that the church is

19 Yolande Steenkamp and Nadia von Wielligh, 'Diaconia, Social Work and Sustainable Development: Beyond Pragmatics to a Dialogue of Normative Frameworks', in Diaconia: Acts, Understanding and Stories in a Pluralistic Southern Africa, ed. Johannes Knoetze and Jacques W. Beukes (Wellington, [South Africa]: Barnabas Academic Publishers, 2024), 322.

20 Diakonia in Context, 8, 9, 62.

21 Knut Nordstokke, 'Ecumenical Diakonia: Responding to the Signs of the Times', The Ecumenical Review 66, no. 3 (2014): 269.

22 See Kuzipa Nalwamba and Teddy C. Sakupapa, 'Ecology and Fellowship (Koinonia): A Community of Life', in The Church in God's Household: Protestant Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ecology, ed. Clive W. Ayre and Emilie M. Conradie, with Kate Davies (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Cluster Publications, 2016), 75–93.

the donor "for the poor" rather than the facilitator of empowerment "with the poor." *Diakonia in Context* argues, furthermore, that a charity approach "tends to be paternalistic and alienating, as it is organised according to what benefits and serves the needs of the helpers. In Latin America, this practice is often called '*asistencialismo*,' as its aim is to assist, and not to give space for equality and mutuality."[23]

Stéphan van der Watt interprets the distinction between the church for others and the church with others as the difference between charity and the ministry of "truly empowering and transforming marginalised communities," which we define here as diakonia.[24] With Michael Biehl, we claim: "This could even be understood as a decolonising approach, as it can dissolve the distinction between 'them' and 'us', a binary that is strongly entrenched in traditional mission paradigms and in diaconia understood as charity."[25]

Nevertheless, as South African theologian Molefe Tsele, cited in *Diakonia in Context*, holds: "We must resist the tendency to turn charity into a dirty word. God is charitable to his entire creation. Society as a whole needs to be made more charitable."[26] Indeed, there is a (limited) contribution of charity at the bottom of a diaconical developmental hierarchy:

23 Diakonia in Context, p. 49.
24 Van der Watt, Transforming Diaconia, 114 (FN 3).
25 Michael Biehl, 'Diaconia as a Practice of Hospitality?', in Diaconia: Acts, Understanding and Stories in a Pluralistic Southern Africa, ed. Johannes Knoetze and Jacques W. Beukes (Wellington, [South Africa]: Barnabas Academic Publishers, 2024), 160.
26 Johannesburg report, p. 54, as cited in Diakonia in Context, 49.

> *"First-generation projects can be characterised as charity (to give people fish), second-generation projects teach people how to fish for themselves, and third-generation projects involve lobbying authorities (alongside those learning to catch fish) to advocate for changes in existing legislation and policies that exclude or oppress homeless people."*[27]

Thus, charity as part of a comprehensive concept of diakonia can have its actual benefits, especially in emergency situations when immediate help is needed. Nevertheless, charity as a short-term relief and a tool for reinforcing inequalities must never replace or marginalise practices that aim at long-lasting and justice-oriented impact on society (diakonia). True philanthropic service aims at community and justice. Community-based diakonia fosters inclusiveness and mutuality in addressing the challenges of suffering and injustice. It affirms the value of doing things together and the conviction that all persons are gifted and able to participate in working for what is good and right. It resembles the African saying: "If you want to hurry, walk alone. If you want to go far, walk together."[28]

In short, Diakonia encompasses charitable acts, but it extends far beyond such short-term relief practices. As part of God's mission to the world (*missio dei*), diakonia intends

27 Jacques W. Beukes, 'Can Engaged Scholarship Be Regarded as Diaconia? A Critical Investigation of Theological Academic Institutions' Community Engagement Projects and Diaconia', in Diaconia: Acts, Understanding and Stories in a Pluralistic Southern Africa, ed. Johannes Knoetze and Jacques W. Beukes (Wellington, [South Africa]: Barnabas Academic Publishers, 2024), 337.
28 Diakonia in Context, 49.

to work for systemic transformation that does not follow the model of the church *for* others, but the church *with* others. Diakonia is a collaborative ministry that aims to empower everyone involved in diaconical practices, not reinforcing the difference between donor and receiver, but implementing mutuality, solidarity, and equality.

Practices of Diakonia in the Church

According to *Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in 21st Century*, diakonia encompasses a wide range of services, including advocacy, education, and healthcare, rooted in the historical commitment to serving others.[29] According to the Lambeth Conference of 1998, the Anglican church expresses its call to mission through the Five Marks of Mission.

1. "*To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom*
2. *To teach, baptise and nurture new believers*
3. *To respond to human need by loving service*
4. *To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation*

29 'Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in 21st Century', World Council of Churches, 2012, https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/theological-perspectives-on-diakonia-in-21st-century.

5. *To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth*"[30]

These marks are also applicable beyond the Anglican Communion, as they outline five dimensions of holistic mission that delineate the scope of a Lutheran or Ecumenical vision of the church's calling to holistic mission and its practice.[31] Especially marks 3 – 5 are of particular relevance. The third mark emphasises diaconal and charitable work, as it demonstrates compassionate care for others in their needs. It emphasises the Christian duty to actively engage in practical acts of compassion and service to alleviate human suffering. It encompasses activities such as providing food, shelter, healthcare, and education to those in need, irrespective of their background or circumstances. The fourth mark is to transform unjust societal structures, challenge all forms of violence, and actively pursue peace and reconciliation. A recent publication and joint statement by ACT Alliance and World Council of Churches (WCC) voices a call to such transformation as a realisation of ecumenical

30 Anglican Communion Office, 'Anglican Communion: Marks of Mission', Anglican Communion Website, accessed 16 July 2025, http://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx.

31 Cf. Mission in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment: An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Mission (Geneva, Switzerland: Lutheran World Federation, Dept. for Mission and Development, 2004); Jooseop Keum, ed., Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes: With a Practical Guide (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches Publications, 2013); see Jörg Zehelein, Die Bedeutung der Gemeinschaft der Glaubenden für Mission eine Studie zu theologischen Perspektiven aus Wissenschaft und missionarischer Gemeinde, Missionswissenschaftliche Forschungen (Neuendettelsau: Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Ökumene, 2018), 67.

diakonia.[32] This principle implies that a comprehensive concept of diakonia extends beyond charity, encompassing advocacy and activism for social justice. It calls for addressing the root causes of poverty, inequality, and violence through systemic change. It is about getting involved in advocating for human rights, promoting peacebuilding initiatives, and confronting issues such as ethnic conflicts, political oppression, and economic injustices. This can involve challenging power imbalances and advocating for the rights of vulnerable groups, recognising that true diakonia extends beyond immediate aid to address the root causes of inequality.[33] This evolves into what Rudelmar Bueno de Faria recently termed "Diakonia as Public Service and Public Witness," i.e., diaconical practices that are public, or in other words, political.[34] African womanist theologian Oduyoye reflects on how women in African communities engage in diakonia by supporting one another through various challenges, including economic hardships, health issues, and social injustices. She says that "we need to take on our share in enabling others to recover their worth as women and to empower other women to survive and struggle against

32 ACT Alliance and World Council of Churches, Called to Transformation - Ecumenical Diakonia (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 2022), https://actalliance.org/act-news/diaconia/.

33 Kuruvilla C. Abraham, 'Chapter 7: From Diakonia to Political Responsibility – Religion Online', Religion Online, n.d., accessed 16 July 2025, https://www.religion-online.org/book-chapter/chapter-7-from-diakonia-to-political-responsibility/.

34 Rudelmar B. de Faria, 'Diakonia as Public Service and Public Witness', in The Diaconal Church, First edition, ed. Stephanie Dietrich et al., with Martin Junge (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2019), 251–64.

justice."[35] This approach to diakonia builds on a radical spirituality dedicated to transforming sinful social structures and liberating their victims.

Finally, the fifth mark is to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, i.e., to care for the natural environment. This principle underscores the stewardship role of Christians who are called to preserve life and promote environmentally friendly, sustainable practices. It recognises the interconnectedness between environmental health and human well-being. As Isaiah Kipyegon Toroitich and Guillermo Kerber hold, Diakonia is intricately connected with concerns for sustainability in the face of climate change. In this regard, diakonia has "a broader understanding, looking not only at human beings but at the whole creation, which is under threat."[36] Thus, practices of environmental care and preservation of life on this earth are part of the Christian calling to service, as African theologians Kuzipa Nalwamba and Teddy Chalwe Sakupapa argue.[37]

Together, these marks illustrate a holistic approach to mission and a comprehensive concept of diakonia that integrates immediate acts of charity with long-term commitments to social justice and empowerment, as well as taking action for environmental preservation.

35 Oduyoye, Daughters of Anowa, 199.
36 Isaiah Kipyegon Toroitich and Guillermo Kerber, 'Diakonia, Sustainability, and Climate Change', The Ecumenical Review 66, no. 3 (October 2014): 288.
37 Nalwamba and Sakupapa, Ecology and Fellowship, 83.

The Annual Mission Week in the Evangelical Lutheran Church – Morogoro Diocese

Methodological Remarks

This study utilised a qualitative research approach to explore the AMW of ELCT-MD and its understanding and realisation of diakonia. For that, the lived experiences and perceptions of pastors responsible for organising and overseeing the AMW were at the centre of attention.

Fifteen participants were selected through purposive sampling to create relevant and rich data. The sample consisted of only pastors who are responsible for organising and managing the AMW. These facilitators offer a unique perspective on the spiritual and operational aspects of diakonia. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather data, ensuring that discussions remained focused on key themes related to participants' understanding, experiences, and expectations of diakonia during the AMW. Data collected from the interviews was analysed thematically, which involved identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. The process of data collection and analysis adhered to ethical standards, which included obtaining informed consent from all participants, maintaining confidentiality, and implementing a data security protocol. This approach allowed for a nuanced exploration of the understanding of diakonia expressed by the AMW of ELCT-MD. The extent to which diakonia is mistaken for charity is particularly relevant in this context. Furthermore, factors of the possible conflation of diakonia with charity and helpful approaches for fostering an

appropriate understanding of diakonia ministry through the AMW were addressed. The findings of this qualitative study were discussed from the perspectives of both theological and practical understandings of diakonia. By integrating both empirical research and theological discourse, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive analysis that addresses the complexities of diakonia, as represented in the AMW.

Diakonia in the ELCT – Morogoro Diocese

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania runs a Mission and Evangelism department. This is committed to holistic human service, including evangelism, education, health ministry, and diakonia, among other support activities.38 ELCT-MD embraces the same approach. This diocese considers diakonia a central part of the church's mission. In the 5-Year Strategic Plan 2018-2023, "Diaconal Services Outreach" is one of seven main areas that need improvement. 39 This is primarily concerned with healthcare, including the management and establishment of health centres, health education, and health services. Furthermore, it wants to "implement a diocese-wide Good Samaritan week for the benefit of those in need in our community." This Good Samaritan week is another label for the AMW, which this article addresses. These health initiatives, termed diaconical services, are seen in company with social justice initiatives and ministries for gender justice

38 Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, Mission and Evangelism, n.d., https://elct.or.tz/index.php/mission-and-evangelism/.

39 '5 Years Strategic Plan 2018 -2023' (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania – Morogoro Diocese, 2018). A new strategic plan beyond 2023 is not available.

(especially advocacy). While the 5 Years Strategic Plan distinguishes between diakonia and social or gender justice, the secretary of planning and development in ELCT-MD reported that Diakonia ministry initiatives involve the "Women Power" project to empower prostitute women economically, alongside healthcare services such as Mkulazi and Kiganila dispensary located at Ngerengere and advocacy programs like "Girls with a Purpose project" and "Kimbilio House" to rescue women and young girls who are facing gender violence together with fighting against early marriage, genital mutilation and promote gender equality. Additionally, the ELCT-MD introduced the AMW, which the members of the organisational team run every year in October.40 Despite some terminological incongruencies, it becomes clear that diakonia includes or intricately ties in with issues of health services, social justice, and advocacy work. Environmental aspects are not explicitly mentioned.

Agenda of the Annual Mission Week

Through the AMW, the organisers reach out to remote areas within ELCT-MD. They hold that these communities are in particular need of the proclamation of the Christian gospel, as they claim to have limited exposure to it, and that there is a specific need for diakonia work. These efforts are coordinated by the Mission and Evangelism department under the Assistant Bishop's office. The AMW is a significant event among the activities of ELCT-MD throughout the year. It provides an opportunity for the church community to

40 Interview with the Secretary of Planning and Development in the ELCT Morogoro Diocese on 11th May 2024.

come together in solidarity and service. In terms of diakonia, the event emphasises charitable acts such as distributing food and clothing to those in need. This is remarkable, as the general concept of diakonia within the diocese's ministry is quite broad and holistic. By narrowly focusing on charity, which in Swahili is referred to as "matendo ya hisani," the AMW does not launch or introduce programmes that foster sustainable community development, education, healthcare access, environmental preservation, and economic empowerment, despite labelling the AMW's efforts as diakonia.

The Conflation of Diakonia and Charity During Annual Mission Week in the ELCT Morogoro Diocese

Despite the crucial role of diakonia ministry, which encompasses advocacy, education, transformation, environmental care, reconciliation, and empowerment, its understanding is often limited, as exemplified by the AMW and its charitable practices, such as distributing clothes and food to those in need in the ELCT-MD. This conflation becomes evident in how the mission week is perceived and executed, often prioritising immediate relief over sustainable community development. The mission week falls short of fully embodying the transformative potential of diakonia, which is intended to address systemic issues and promote social and ecological transformation. The following sections explore this issue of the conflation of diakonia with charity in terms of the factors contributing to the conflation or misunderstanding.

Factors Contributing to the Conflation of Diakonia with Charity

Lack of Understanding of Diakonia

A high number of respondents' answers revealed that the concept of carrying out philanthropic activities during the AMW is often too narrow, focusing solely on charity. Many organisers of the AMW view diakonia solely as charitable acts, such as distributing food and clothes, and as an appendix to preaching the word of God. Some respondents point out this discrepancy. Respondent (R) 1 pointed out that people often fail to understand that diakonia should aim for lasting positive change, not just meeting immediate needs. R2, R3, and R6 emphasised that a lack of understanding of the comprehensive concept of diakonia results in a focus on immediate material support rather than transformation or empowerment. R14 illustrated that true diakonia involves not just preaching but engaging and teaching the community for holistic growth. This lack of a comprehensive understanding hinders the execution of activities such as empowerment, advocacy, and transformation during Mission Week (R1 interviewed on 20th Sept 2024, R6 interviewed on 15th Oct 2024, and R14 interviewed on 4th Mar 2025). Respondent R8 and R5 pointed out that while preaching and distributing material aid might meet immediate needs, empowerment and advocacy often don't take place because the focus remains on short-term charity. Nevertheless, respondents R10 and R4 noted that empowerment or advocacy would occur occasionally, such as when specific community issues, like family conflicts or

gender injustices, were addressed. However, these instances are the exception, not the norm (R8 interviewed on 16th Oct 2024, R5 interviewed on 15th Oct 2024, R10 interviewed on 15th Jan 2025, and R4 interviewed on 9th Oct 2024). In summary, one aspect of the conflation of diakonia with charity in the AMW is the lack of a comprehensive understanding of diakonia.

Resource Constraints

Another critical issue identified is the lack of resources necessary to carry out more extensive diakonia activities, such as empowerment programs or advocacy efforts. Many respondents agreed that these activities require specialists, funding, and long-term commitment, which are often unavailable for the organisers of the AMW. R7 and R8 expressed that limited funds and resources mean the church can only focus on what can be accomplished within a short timeframe, i.e., preaching and distributing goods. R15 also mentioned that while the church has occasionally managed to organise special activities, such as providing free legal or health services, this has been rare and costly. This issue is complicated by the fact that diakonia, especially in the sense of empowerment and transformation, requires professionals like health workers, counsellors, and educators, whose services can be expensive and difficult to secure for a one-week event (R7 interviewed on 15th Oct 2024, R8 interviewed on 16th Oct 2024, and R15 interviewed 5th Mar 2025). Funding, therefore, is a critical issue regarding the implementation of the full agenda of diakonia.

Socio-political transformation as a task of the Government

Both R5 and R15 clearly emphasise a differentiation of roles between the church and the government regarding social engagement. R5 explained that empowerment, advocacy, and community development are viewed as social matters and are considered the responsibility of the government. Therefore, the church would not prioritise these activities during the AMW. The church provides community service to some extent only to demonstrate God's love by giving the needy clothes, food, etc. (R5 interviewed 15th Oct 2024). Echoing R5's perspective, R15 emphasises that the church cannot take on every responsibility because the government exists to manage necessary social changes. The church shall focus on its spiritual role, while the government handles social matters in the communities (R15 interviewed 5th Mar 2025). These voices convey the conviction among some AMW organisers that profound socio-political engagement is not the task of the church, but rather of the state.

Lack of Long-Term Planning and Impact

Several respondents emphasised that the AMW lacks long-term. They suggested that a deeper engagement with community needs, including follow-up and continued support, is essential for fostering real change. R6 noted that there is rarely any follow-up after the AMW to assess the long-term impact on the community, thus failing to create sustainable change. R9 argued that with better preparation, the AMW could have more structured programs aimed at

empowering the community economically. But this requires careful planning and long-term commitment. Without these considerations, as R6 and R9 indicate, the activities of the AMW remain limited in scope and impact, failing to move beyond charity to sustainable transformation (R6 interviewed 15th Oct 2024, and R9 interviewed 4th Nov 2024). According to these inputs, the AMW appears as an isolated event in the year with no commitment to an agenda before or after that particular week.

Summary of the Findings

The findings reveal several factors contributing to the conflation of diakonia with charity during the AMW. First, there is a lack of understanding of diakonia, according to which many respondents believe that diakonia merely consists of charitable acts, such as distributing food and clothing. Second, resource constraints, such as a lack of funds and/or professionals, hinder the implementation of comprehensive programs. Third, cultural and institutional factors are barriers to addressing deeper community issues, e.g., a culture of silence about being in need. Fourth, some respondents view the church as having only a limited responsibility, as the state is responsible for social transformation. Finally, a lack of long-term planning and impact is another reason why diakonia is conflated with charity during the AMW.

Discussion

The finding revealed that the ELCT-MD, in their entire strategy and vision, despite being silent about the ecological dimension, embraces a quite comprehensive concept of diakonia. The AMW, however, embodies a misunderstanding of diakonia. In response to the reduction of diakonia to charity, scholars and ecumenical statements from around the world, including those from Africa, have argued that diakonia must involve much more. As we outlined above, diakonia should encompass systemic change and empowerment, as well as social, political, and ecological transformation. It shall shift from short-term relief to long-term solutions. Oduyoye, furthermore, asserts that true diakonia involves engaging communities in ways that promote self-reliance and social justice.[41] This perspective resonates with R1's observation that diakonia should strive for lasting positive change rather than merely addressing immediate needs. Without a deeper understanding of diakonia's goals, community members may miss opportunities to engage in initiatives that foster genuine empowerment and transformation. Acts of charity, which in the case of the AMW are clearly no emergency supply, are in danger of turning out to become “toxic charity” (Lupton). This critique is echoed in the findings, where respondents, such as R6 and R14, emphasise the need for diakonia to engage in advocacy and education, which involves teaching and community engagement that fosters self-reliance and empowerment among the people being served. Another

41 Oduyoye 1995, 45.

aspect is the ecological dimension. The most recent WCC's official statement of mission, Together Towards Life, voices a profound call to care for the environment. African scholars like Nalwamba and Sakupapa call for the inclusion of the preservation of nature into a concept of diakonia.[42] Neither the 5-Year Strategic Plan of ELCT-MD nor the AMW pays particular attention to this dimension of diakonia. The fifth mark of mission of the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Church seems to be neglected. This ecological gap between ELCT-MD and the AMW stands out as one significant concern, namely the lack of a comprehensive understanding of diakonia, shared by the organisers of the AMW (and the ELCT-MD).

The AMW could serve as an integral part of a comprehensive strategy of diakonia. Still, it falls short in its potential for long-term impact without sustained efforts to integrate its ideals into ongoing community engagement. Here, the lack of long-term planning is a crucial factor. While the format of the AMW is undoubtedly limited in its capacity to produce long-term impact within a couple of days, it can still serve as an opportunity to catalyse awareness and engagement. This week could raise awareness about the broader principles of diakonia, serving as a platform for presenting good-practice examples and encouraging community members to reflect on their roles in promoting justice, empowerment, and care for creation. By initiating discussions and activities around these themes, the mission week could spark interest in ongoing efforts beyond the

42 Keum (ed.), Together Towards Life.

event itself. A sustained commitment to follow up on the ideas and initiatives introduced or represented during this week could help to exploit the potential for lasting change.

The findings highlight a critical issue regarding resource constraints that hinder the execution of comprehensive diakonia activities, such as empowerment programs and advocacy efforts. Respondents noted that the focus during the AMW often centres on immediate actions, such as distributing goods, predominantly due to limited funding and resources (R7, R8, R15). This situation reflects the broader challenge of balancing short-term relief with long-term strategic initiatives in church activities. Recognising that meaningful change cannot occur in just one week, it is essential to establish ongoing initiatives that run throughout the year, focusing on specific community needs. David McCullough calls for a church that is ready to cooperate with organisations and professionals to implement sustainable transformation.[43] This approach is echoed in the findings, where the respondents indicated that specialists, such as health workers and counsellors, are essential for successful empowerment initiatives but are often unavailable or too costly during a one-week event. The lack of funds is a serious problem, as many respondents mentioned. Nevertheless, the existing funds available for buying or collecting food and clothes are evidence that there is, however limited, potential.

The findings reveal that some respondents (R5, R15) regard the state as responsible for social or political

43 David McCullough, 'The Role of the Church in Community Development', Journal of Urban Affairs 26, no. 1 (2004): 115.

transformation. This division is challenged by arguments presented by theologians like David J. Bosch, who contends that the church must actively engage in political issues rather than relegating them entirely to governmental authorities. Bosch argues that the church's mission should transcend mere charity, advocating for justice and systemic change as a fundamental aspect of its calling.[44] The same idea is taken up by the aforementioned Rudelmar Bueno de Faria, who calls for a public witness of diakonia. Furthermore, Oduyoye emphasises that the church's mission involves an active partnership with the community in addressing social or political issues, reinforcing the idea that the church should not shy away from its responsibility in advocacy.[45] The findings suggest a reluctance to adopt this broader understanding, which may limit the church's potential to effect positive change in society.

Conclusion

The AMW has a long tradition and is a crucial part of the ELCT-MD's annual agenda. This week-long activity aims to proclaim the Gospel and serve people in need. Our research has revealed that this service, however, is limited and, at worst, harmful. Despite the claim that what happens during the AMW is diakonia, it is predominantly charity. This can turn into toxic charity (Lupton) if there is no comprehensive concept of diakonia that aims at the

44 David J. Bosch, Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books., 1991), 370.
45 Oduyoye, Daughters of Anowa, 58.

sustainable transformation of individuals, communities, and the preservation of the environment. This research has identified several factors that explain the conflation of diakonia with charity by the organisers of the AMW. These are the lack of understanding of diakonia, resource constraints, an apolitical definition of the church's role in society, and a lack of long-term planning and impact. This study underscores the need for a paradigm shift towards a comprehensive understanding of diakonia that integrates individual and communal empowerment, social justice, community development, and environmental care. Key areas of focus for the AMW should include economic empowerment, environmental care, gender equality, and human rights advocacy. By integrating a comprehensive approach into the AMW, churches can effectively address systemic issues and foster long-term transformation within communities. Collaborating with local organisations will enhance the efforts and create a network of support. By re-envisioning its role, the ELCT can embody the true essence of diakonia, aligning compassion, justice, and ecology as integral components of its diaconical calling. This strategy enables the church to capitalise on the awareness generated during the AMW, thereby building momentum for ongoing initiatives that truly embody the principles of diakonia.

Bibliography

'5 Years Strategic Plan 2018 -2023'. Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania – Morogoro Diocese, 2018.

Abraham, Kuruvilla C. 'Chapter 7: From Diakonia to Political Responsibility – Religion Online'. *Religion Online*,

n.d. Accessed 16 July 2025. https://www.religion-online.org/book-chapter/chapter-7-from-diakonia-to-political-responsibility/.

ACT Alliance, and World Council of Churches. *Called to Transformation - Ecumenical Diakonia*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 2022. https://actalliance.org/act-news/diaconia/.

Anglican Communion. 'Five Marks of Mission'. n.d. https://www.anglicancommunion.org/.

Beukes, Jacques W. 'Can Engaged Scholarship Be Regarded as Diaconia? A Critical Investigation of Theological Academic Institutions' Community Engagement Projects and Diaconia'. In *Diaconia: Acts, Understanding and Stories in a Pluralistic Southern Africa*, edited by Johannes Knoetze and Jacques W. Beukes, 335–46. Wellington, [South Africa]: Barnabas Academic Publishers, 2024.

Biehl, Michael. 'Diaconia as a Practice of Hospitality?' In *Diaconia: Acts, Understanding and Stories in a Pluralistic Southern Africa*, edited by Johannes Knoetze and Jacques W. Beukes, 147–62. Wellington, [South Africa]: Barnabas Academic Publishers, 2024.

Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books., 1991.

Breeze, Beth. 'Giving in the UK: Philanthropy Embedded in a Welfare State Society'. In *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Philanthropy*, edited by Pamala Wiepking and Femida Handy, 285–306. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137341532.

Collins, John N. *Diakonia: Re-Interpreting the Ancient Source*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Corbett, Steve, and Brian Fikkert. *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor-- and Yourself*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012.

Diakonia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment. Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2009.

Elolia, Samuel K., Afeosemime U. Adogame, and Emmanuel Twesigye, eds. 'The Church and State Conflict in Uganda: Presidential Idi Amin Kills the Angrican Archbishop'. In *Religion, Conflict, and Democracy in Modern Africa: The Role of Civil Society in Political Engagement*, 148–92. Princeton Theological Monograph Series. Eugene, Or.: Pickwick Publications, 2012.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. *Mission and Evangelism*. n.d. https://elct.or.tz/index.php/mission-and-evangelism/.

Faria, Rudelmar B. de. 'Diakonia as Public Service and Public Witness'. In *The Diaconal Church*, First edition, edited by Stephanie Dietrich, Knud Jørgensen, Kari Karsrud Korslien, and Kjell Nordstokke, with Martin Junge, 251–64. Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2019. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/j.ctv1ddcntm.

Horne, Susan. 'The Ethics of Donor Recognition: Navigating the Fine Line between Appreciation and Self-Promotion'. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership* 22, no. 3 (2012): 3.

Knoetze, Johannes, and Jacques W. Beukes, eds. *Diaconia: Acts, Understanding and Stories in a Pluralistic*

Southern Africa. Wellington, [South Africa]: Barnabas Academic Publishers, 2024.

Lupton, Robert D. *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (and How to Reverse It)*. New York: HarperOne, 2011.

Lutheran World Federation. 'Diakonia'. 2024. https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/diakonia.

McCullough, David. 'The Role of the Church in Community Development'. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 26, no. 1 (2004): 111–26.

McMillin, Stephen E. 'Book Review of Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (And How to Reverse It)'. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* 37, no. 3 (2018): 325–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/15426432.2018.1497581.

Mission in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment: An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Mission. Geneva, Switzerland: Lutheran World Federation, Dept. for Mission and Development, 2004.

Nalwamba, Kuzipa, and Teddy C. Sakupapa. 'Ecology and Fellowship (Koinonia): A Community of Life'. In *The Church in God's Household: Protestant Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ecology*, edited by Clive W. Ayre and Emilie M. Conradie, with Kate Davies, 75–93. Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Cluster Publications, 2016.

Niekerk, Attie van. 'Dabar as Word and Deed: Exploring the Relation Between Helping Those in Need and Winning People for Christ'. In *Diaconia: Acts, Understanding and Stories in a Pluralistic Southern Africa*, edited by Johannes Knoetze and Jacques W. Beukes, 79–96.

Wellington, [South Africa]: Barnabas Academic Publishers, 2024.

Nordstokke, Knut. 'Ecumenical Diakonia: Responding to the Signs of the Times'. *The Ecumenical Review* 66, no. 3 (2014): 265–74.

Oduyoye, Mercy Amba. *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarch*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995.

Office, Anglican Communion. 'Anglican Communion: Marks of Mission'. Anglican Communion Website. Accessed 16 July 2025. http://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx.

Pillay, Johan. 'The Significance of Social Justice and Diakonia in the Reformed Tradition'. *In Die Skriflig* 56, no. 4 (2022): 4.

Steenkamp, Yolande, and Nadia von Wielligh. 'Diaconia, Social Work and Sustainable Development: Beyond Pragmatics to a Dialogue of Normative Frameworks'. In *Diaconia: Acts, Understanding and Stories in a Pluralistic Southern Africa*, edited by Johannes Knoetze and Jacques W. Beukes, 315–34. Wellington, [South Africa]: Barnabas Academic Publishers, 2024.

'Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in 21st Century'. World Council of Churches, 2012. https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/theological-perspectives-on-diakonia-in-21st-century.

Toroitich, Isaiah Kipyegon, and Guillermo Kerber. 'Diakonia, Sustainability, and Climate Change'. *The*

Ecumenical Review 66, no. 3 (October 2014): 288–301. https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12106.

Twesigye, Emmanuel. *The Church and State Conflict in Uganda: Presidential Idi Amin Kills the Angrican Archbishop*. Edited by Samuel K Elolia. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2012.

Venter, Nioma. 'Little Seeds: A Prototype of Collaborative-Integrated, Missional-Diaconal Praxis'. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2023.

Watt, Stéphan van der. 'Transforming Diaconia in the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa: Compassionate Service Demanding Justice and Reconciliation'. In *Diaconia: Acts, Understanding and Stories in a Pluralistic Southern Africa*, edited by Johannes Knoetze and Jacques W. Beukes, 113–32. Wellington, [South Africa]: Barnabas Academic Publishers, 2024.

Zehelein, Jörg. *Die Bedeutung der Gemeinschaft der Glaubenden für Mission eine Studie zu theologischen Perspektiven aus Wissenschaft und missionarischer Gemeinde*. Missionswissenschaftliche Forschungen. Neuendettelsau: Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Ökumene, 2018.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

The authors declare that they are the sole authors of this research article.

Ethical considerations

The authors declare that in their research they followed all due ethical standards and guidelines of academic research.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

There was field research conducted in compiling this article. Access to interview transcripts can be granted on request (contact through knestar@yahoo.com). There are no restrictions on the secondary data presented in this article.

Reimagining Theological Education in the Anglican Church of Tanzania: Overcoming Institutional and Pedagogical Barriers to the Five Marks of Mission

David W. Mdabuko, Kevin M. Ndereba, Aloo Mojola

DOI: 10.25661/atj.v41i1.1234

Abstract

This study examined the institutional and pedagogical challenges to integrating the Five Marks of Mission into Anglican theological education in Tanzania. Data were collected from ten Anglican theological institutions using a convergent mixed-methods case study approach, including structured surveys, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. Bandura's Social Learning Theory provided the theoretical foundation, offering insights into how institutional culture, instructor behaviour, and social modelling influence students' ministerial development. Findings indicated that while the institutions offered intense doctrinal instruction, they faced significant challenges in delivering contextually relevant and mission-oriented education. These challenges included outdated curricula, inadequate faculty qualifications in contextual and applied theology, limited exposure to ecological and justice-centred pedagogies, weak collaborations with local communities, and bureaucratic resistance to curriculum innovation. Students often reported a lack of practical mission opportunities, few examples in areas like social justice and environmental

stewardship, and limited access to field-based learning experiences. The analysis confirmed long-standing critiques within African theological scholarship that theology education remains overly theoretical and disconnected from the lived realities of society. It also highlighted a gap between classroom teaching and the holistic ministerial formation promoted by the Five Marks of Mission. The study recommended strategic reforms in curriculum development, faculty capacity building, and institutional partnerships with churches and civil society organisations. It emphasised the importance of experiential learning, supervised ministry placements, and reflective practice in fostering missional competence among clergy-in-training. By aligning theological education more closely with the Five Marks of Mission, this study provides a roadmap for transforming clergy training in Tanzania. The findings offer valuable insights into missiological discourse in Africa and serve as a practical resource for theological educators, church leaders, and policymakers dedicated to preparing clergy for faithful and contextually relevant ministry.

Key Words

Theological Education, Five Marks of Mission, Missional Formation, Social Learning Theory, Curriculum Reform, Contextual Theology

Introduction

This article explores how theological education within the Anglican Church of Tanzania can be reimagined to align

more effectively with the Five Marks of Mission – evangelism, discipleship, social service, justice, and ecological care. Despite the broad missional mandate of these marks, many Tanzanian theological colleges continue to prioritise traditional, doctrine-based curricula with minimal emphasis on contextual relevance or practical engagement. This disconnection raises concerns about the adequacy of current training in preparing clergy to respond to the complex social, ecological, and cultural realities facing the church and society today.

Guided by Bandura's Social Learning Theory, the study examined how institutional culture, pedagogical methods, and faculty role modelling influence students' formation for holistic, mission-oriented ministry. Employing a convergent mixed-methods case study design, data were collected from ten Anglican theological institutions through surveys, interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. The research identified five principal barriers to integrating the Five Marks of Mission: outdated and overloaded curricula, insufficient faculty capacity in contextual theology, weak partnerships with local communities, inadequate infrastructure for practical training, and institutional conservatism that impedes curriculum reform.

These challenges have constrained students' ability to internalise and apply the church's missional priorities, often resulting in graduates who are doctrinally grounded but underprepared for real-world ministry. In response, this study proposes reforms focused on curriculum development, faculty training, institutional systems, and community engagement. The goal is to establish a more

responsive model of theological education that equips clergy not only for pastoral responsibilities but also for transformative societal engagement.

To support the analysis that follows, the article also clarifies key concepts central to the study: theological education, the Five Marks of Mission, contextual theology, faculty development, and Social Learning Theory. Defining these terms provides a conceptual framework for interpreting the findings and understanding the theological, pedagogical, and institutional dynamics within the Anglican Church of Tanzania.

Definitions for the Keywords

Theological education, as applied in this study, refers to the structured process of forming clergy through academic, spiritual, and ministerial training. Within the African context, it is expected not only to cultivate doctrinal depth but also to address social and contextual relevance. This study investigated the extent to which theological colleges in Tanzania prepare students for leadership and mission beyond traditional ecclesiastical roles.[1] This framing provided a foundation for exploring how theological institutions might become more missionally responsive in both form and content.

Building on that, the Five Marks of Mission – adopted by the Anglican Communion – offer a comprehensive

1 Dietrich Werner et al., fueds., *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity: Theological Perspectives, Ecumenical Trends, Regional Surveys* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2010), 45–47.

missional framework that combines evangelism, discipleship, social service, justice, and care for creation.[2] This framework was employed as an analytical lens for evaluating whether theological training in Tanzania reflects the Church's broader commitment to holistic ministry.[3] It served as a benchmark for assessing the connection between academic instruction and practical ministry outcomes.

To deepen this assessment, the study applied the concept of contextual theology, which posits that theology must emerge from and address local realities – namely, culture, history, and lived experience.[4] By adopting this perspective, the study examined how Tanzanian theological colleges engage with their communities and whether local concerns are incorporated into theological curricula. Contextual theology was thus essential in assessing institutional responsiveness to socio-cultural dynamics.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory provided the central analytical framework for this study, highlighting how learning occurs not only through direct instruction but also through observation, imitation, and social interaction.[5] The theory's four key processes – attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation – explain how learners

2 Anglican Consultative Council, *Mission in a Broken World: Report of* ACC-6, *Badagry*, *Nigeria*, 1984 (London: Anglican Consultative Council, 1984), 12–15.

3 Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 215–218.

4 Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. and expanded ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 7–10.

5 Albert Bandura, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory*, Prentice-Hall Series in Social Learning Theory (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1986).

internalise behaviours by observing role models. In theological education, this framework was crucial for understanding how students adopt mission-oriented values through the example of faculty, institutional culture, and relational dynamics. The study revealed that where positive role modelling and contextual engagement were lacking, students struggled to apply theological knowledge in practice. Thus, Social Learning Theory offered valuable insights into how theological institutions either facilitate or hinder the integration of the Five Marks of Mission, reinforcing the need for relational, participatory, and contextually grounded formation.

Faculty development was also highlighted as a central concern. It refers to the ongoing training and capacity-building of theological educators. While many lecturers in Tanzanian colleges possess strong doctrinal knowledge, the study found that they often lack exposure to pedagogical approaches that support applied theology in areas such as ecological justice, peacebuilding, and community transformation.[6] Enhancing faculty competencies emerged as a key strategy for equipping institutions to deliver missionally relevant education.

Lastly, the concept of holistic ministry – defined as Christian service that integrates spiritual, social, and environmental dimensions – was used to frame the desired outcome of theological education. Drawing from Katongole and Rice, the study used this concept to determine whether theological training equips students to serve in ways that

6 Katie G. Cannon, "Teaching Theological Ethics: Black Women's Voices," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 4, no. 3 (2001): 148–157.

address the complex needs of contemporary Tanzanian communities. [7] The convergence of these keywords underlines the study's broader goal: to reimagine theological education as a formation process that is biblically grounded, contextually engaged, and missionally transformative.

Following the clarification of key terms, the following section presents a review of relevant scholarly literature to position this study within the broader academic context. It examines how curriculum design, teaching approaches, and institutional culture shape the formation of clergy, offering valuable insights that support the study's focus on theological education within the Anglican Church of Tanzania.

Theological Foundations and African Contextual Engagement with the Five Marks of Mission

This literature review frames the theological and curricular landscape in which this study investigates the integration of the Five Marks of Mission within Tanzanian Anglican institutions. Missional theology has increasingly shaped contemporary theological discourse by redefining the Church not merely as a spiritual institution but as a participant in the ongoing redemptive work of God – *Missio Dei* – as revealed throughout Scripture. This concept is rooted in biblical theology, beginning with God's covenantal commissioning of Israel (Gen 12:1–3; Exod 19:5–6), fulfilled in

7 Emmanuel Katongole and Chris Rice, *Reconciling All Things: A Christian Vision for Justice, Peace and Healing* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 35–40.

the incarnate mission of Christ (John 20:21), and extended through the Church's calling to bear witness to the kingdom of God (Matt 28:18–20; Col 1:20; 2 Cor 5:18–20). The Church, therefore, does not possess a mission of its own but participates in God's mission, which encompasses spiritual renewal, social justice, and the reconciliation of all creation.[8]

Foundational thinkers such as Bosch and Guder significantly advanced this theological paradigm, portraying Christian mission as both personal and structural, engaging the spiritual transformation of individuals and the renewal of unjust social systems.[9] Their work helped shift the understanding of mission from ecclesiocentric expansionism to holistic participation in God's redemptive purposes. While these contributions emerged from Western contexts, they must not be dismissed as outdated. Instead, they provide an interpretive foundation that has informed and been reinterpreted by theologians across the Global South. The present study adopts a more nuanced approach that acknowledges the ongoing dialogue and interdependence between Western and Majority World scholarship, affirming that theological development is inherently relational and evolving.

Within the Anglican Communion, the Five Marks of Mission – proclaiming the Good News, teaching and nurturing new believers, responding to human need,

8 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 11–15.

9 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*; Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Church's Sending to North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 50–55.

transforming unjust structures, and safeguarding creation – were formally adopted by the Anglican Consultative Council in 1984.[10] These five marks provide a biblically grounded and theologically coherent vision of the Church's vocation, reflecting the breadth of *Missio Dei* in action. In African contexts, they function as a practical theological tool for engaging both ecclesial and societal realities, including poverty, injustice, spiritual dislocation, and ecological degradation. Recent African scholarship has enriched this missional dialogue by affirming theology as contextually accountable and grounded in lived experience. Gerald O. West argues that African biblical interpretation is fundamentally postcolonial and emerges from the "life-world" of communities – a site of theological struggle rather than abstract dogma.[11] Likewise, Andrew Mbuvi introduces African Biblical Studies as an emerging discipline that integrates scholarly rigour with grassroots Christian practice.[12] These scholars call for a theology that speaks directly to African realities, including gender inequality, cultural identity, land injustice, and economic marginalisation. This body of work reflects a growing consensus that theological education must form clergy not only for doctrinal fidelity but also for transformative public engagement.

10 Anglican Consultative Council, *Mission in a Broken World*, 12–15.
11 Gerald O. West, "African Biblical Scholarship as Post-Colonial, Tri-Polar, and a Site-of-Struggle," in *Navigating African Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. E. E. Ekblad (Bamenda, Cameroon: Langaa RPCIG, 2018), 15–38.
12 Andrew Mbuvi, "African Biblical Studies: An Introduction to an Emerging Discipline," *Currents in Biblical Research* 15, no. 2 (2017): 149–178.

Earlier contributions from John Mbiti, Kwame Bediako, and Samwel Kunhiyop laid the foundation for African contextual theology.[13] These scholars emphasised that Indigenous cultural frameworks, communal worldviews, and local languages must shape authentic theology in Africa. They challenged the dominance of imported Western models, calling instead for theological reflection that is both biblically faithful and socially responsive. In East Africa, theologians such as Musimbi Musimbi and Emmanuel Katongole have expanded this vision, arguing that theological education must equip clergy to address contemporary challenges, including political instability, corruption, gender-based violence, and ecological crises.[14] Katongole, in particular, urges the Church to reclaim its prophetic identity – not only through proclamation but also through tangible public action that confronts systemic brokenness.

In the Tanzanian context, Fabian Mdolwa and Stephen Burns have critically evaluated how the Five Marks of Mission are reflected in theological institutions.[15] Although these

13 John S. Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 80–85; Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992), 110–115; Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 45–50.

14 Musimbi R. Musimbi, "Gender, Theology, and Development in East Africa," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 30, no. 1 (2014): 85–104; Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 120–125.

15 Fabian Mdolwa, "Theological Education's Challenges in Tanzania," *African Ecclesial Review* 53, no. 3 (2011): 211–225; Stephen Burns, "Challenges and

marks are officially endorsed by church leadership, their curricular integration remains limited and uneven. Burns noted that while traditional disciplines, such as biblical studies and systematic theology, are foundational, they are often prioritised at the expense of applied fields, including social ethics, ecological theology, and community development.[16] To be clear, this critique does not assume that core theological disciplines are inherently disconnected from contextual concerns. As Gerald West and Mbuvi demonstrate, African biblical and theological studies are actively engaging life-world issues such as creation care and justice.[17] However, in the Tanzanian institutions reviewed, these themes are not always embedded in course objectives or assessed through practical learning outcomes. The concern, therefore, lies not with the disciplines themselves but with how they are institutionally structured and taught.

Josephat Kinyashi added that many theological colleges in Tanzania still rely on Western-derived pedagogies that emphasise doctrinal transmission and cognitive learning, often with minimal emphasis on critical thinking, practical formation, or contextual application.[18] As a result, graduates tend to be well-prepared for liturgical

Opportunities in Theological Education in East Africa," *Journal of Anglican Studies* 13, no. 1 (2015): 50–67.

16 Burns, "Challenges and Opportunities," 60–62.

17 Gerald O. West, "African Biblical Hermeneutics," in *The Oxford Handbook of African Theology*, ed. Elias Kifon Bongmba (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 233–245; Mbuvi, "African Biblical Studies," 20–25.

18 Josephat Kinyashi, "Contextualization and Curriculum Transformation in Theological Education in Tanzania," *African Journal of Practical Theology* 4, no. 2 (2018): 134–148.

and sacramental functions – an essential aspect of ordained ministry – but less equipped for leading their communities in addressing social and ecological challenges. This observation is not a call to diminish the importance of sacramental or liturgical training. Instead, it supports a more integrated model of ministerial formation that unites theological depth with practical engagement. Clergy, while not social workers or environmental scientists, hold a strategic role in shaping the theological imagination of communities, fostering ethical reflection, and promoting faithful responses to the pressing needs of society.

A further concern identified in the literature is the limited capacity of faculty to model contextual and missional engagement. Both Mdolwa and Burns observed that many lecturers in Tanzanian institutions have received little or no training in contextual theology or transformative pedagogy.[19] This is where Bandura's Social Learning Theory becomes particularly relevant. Students learn not only from what is taught but also from what is modelled in behaviour, attitude, and institutional culture.[20] In contexts where faculties are disengaged from missional theology or lack exposure to applied theological frameworks, students are less likely to internalise the values expressed in the Five Marks of Mission – even if those values are present in the syllabus. In such cases, the hidden curriculum may undermine the very goals of formal instruction.

19 Mdolwa, "Theological Education's Challenges," 218–220; Burns, "Challenges and Opportunities," 63–65.
20 Bandura, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action.*

In summary, the literature reveals a shared concern across both African and Western sources: theological education must be reformed to align more closely with the Church's missional identity. While doctrinal fidelity remains central, it must be complemented by pedagogical approaches and curricular content that engage the realities of contemporary African life. This study builds on these theological and educational insights by empirically examining how the Five Marks of Mission are integrated – or neglected – within Anglican theological institutions in Tanzania. In doing so, it seeks to contribute toward a vision of theological education that is biblically grounded, contextually responsive, and holistically missional. The literature review revealed a consistent gap between the Church's commitment to *Missio Dei* and the current practices of theological education in Tanzania, where curricula often lack integration of the Five Marks of Mission. To address this, the study conducted an empirical investigation using a convergent mixed-methods case study design, which enabled both a broad institutional analysis and an in-depth exploration of lived experiences. This methodological approach, outlined in the following section, was chosen to ensure that the findings are theologically grounded, contextually relevant, and practically helpful in strengthening theological education within the Anglican Church of Tanzania.

Research Methodology

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods case study strategy to investigate how Anglican theological

institutions in Tanzania incorporated the Five Marks of Mission into their curricula and teaching practices. The method enabled the simultaneous collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data, providing a holistic view of the institutional dynamics that influence missional formation.[21] Data were collected from ten institutions across Tanzania's five zones, involving 181 participants: 106 final-year theology students, 59 educators, and 16 church leaders. Structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and document analysis (including the ACT Education Policy 2002) were used to gather insights into curriculum content, institutional priorities, and teaching practices.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory provided a framework for assessing how faculty behaviour, institutional culture, and relational interactions influenced students' internalisation of mission values. The theory illuminated how observation and modelling – beyond formal instruction – shaped students' capacity to apply theological knowledge practically.[22] To enhance credibility and limit bias, the study used inductive thematic analysis, peer debriefing, and triangulation across all data sources. Patterns emerged organically, ensuring alignment with participants' genuine

21 John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014), 10–15; David L. Morgan, "Paradigms Lost and Pragmatism Regained: Methodological Implications of Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Methods," *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 1, no. 1 (2007): 48–76.
22 Bandura, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action*.

experiences.[23] Ethical protocols were rigorously followed, including obtaining informed consent, preserving confidentiality, and ensuring that all participation was voluntary. Ethical approvals were secured from St. Paul's University and the ACT Education Department. Confidentiality was maintained through anonymised data and secure digital storage. Questions were neutrally phrased, and participant engagement was fostered through a respectful, non-directive approach. Internationally recognised ethical standards, including the Belmont Report and Declaration of Helsinki, guided all research stages.[24]

Findings and Discussion

Following the research procedures outlined in the previous section, this part of the study presents and discusses the main findings concerning the central objective: to identify the institutional and pedagogical barriers that hinder the integration of the Five Marks of Mission into theological education within the Anglican Church of Tanzania. The analysis utilised both quantitative and qualitative data and was interpreted through the lens of

23 Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.

24 National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, *The Belmont* Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979), https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/belmont-report/read-the-belmont-report/index.html; World Medical Association, "World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki: Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects," JAMA 310, no. 20 (2013): 2191–2194, https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2013.281053.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which offered insights into how observed behaviours, role modelling, and learning environments influence students' ministerial formation. By emphasising the interaction between institutional culture and pedagogical practice, the theory provided a strong framework for analysing how mission-oriented values were either internalised or resisted.[25] The discussion is organised around key themes emerging from the data, each supported by statistical results, participant interviews, and institutional documents.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The study included 133 participants from ten Anglican theological institutions across Tanzania, comprising 87 final-year theology students and 46 educators. This broad distribution ensured that findings captured diverse institutional cultures, regional contexts, and theological emphases.

Among the 46 theological educators, only 13% held doctoral degrees, 28% had master's degrees, and 59% held bachelor's degrees. This indicates a reliance on educators with foundational qualifications, which may limit theological innovation and the integration of interdisciplinary or missional content. As illustrated in Table 1, the majority of educators with bachelor's degrees also had limited teaching experience, which can weaken the modelling of advanced theological reasoning crucial for internalising complex ministerial values. The term "Educator" is used instead of

25 Bandura, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action*.

"Lecturer" to reflect their teaching roles, given the accurate distribution of qualifications.

Table 1: Faculty Qualifications by Years of Teaching Experience

Academic Qualification	0–5 years	6–10 years	11–15 years	Above 15 years
Bachelor's Degree	2	9	2	0
Master's Degree	6	7	3	0
Doctoral Degree	1	2	1	0

Figure 1: Faculty Qualification Distribution

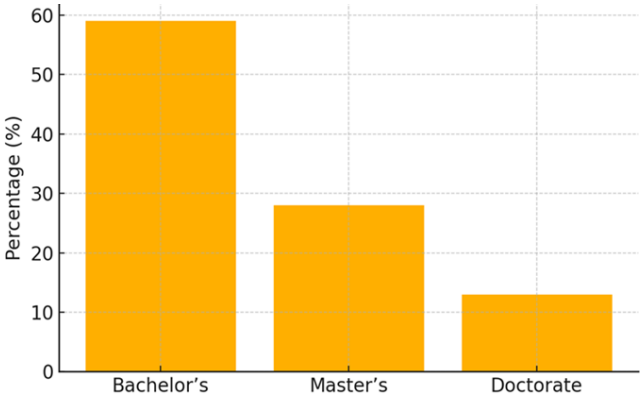

Figure 1 illustrates that theological education in many Tanzanian Anglican institutions is predominantly delivered by educators with bachelor's degrees (59%), followed by

those with master's degrees (28%) and a small proportion holding doctoral qualifications (13%). This distribution highlights a significant gap in academic depth and signals the urgent need for institutional investment in faculty development to enhance both scholarly engagement and pedagogical effectiveness.

To avoid overstating academic rank, the term "Educator" is used throughout this study instead of "Lecturer". While "Lecturer" is an official designation typically requiring a doctoral qualification within Tanzanian higher education structures, the majority of participants in this study did not meet this threshold. The use of "Educator" reflects their actual role in teaching, mentoring, and facilitating curriculum delivery.

A balanced combination of positively and negatively worded items was purposefully included in the questionnaire to reduce the risks of confirmation bias and response bias. By encouraging critical reflection on each topic, this method decreased the possibility of reflexive or acquiescent agreement. For instance, although statements with a deficiency framing, such as "The curriculum does not adequately prepare me for ministry," were included, they were balanced by statements with a positive frame, such as "The curriculum strengthens my ability to serve in my local context." In addition to upholding the ethical norms of impartiality and equity in study design, this methodological balance facilitated the collection of more complex and trustworthy data, especially from student respondents.

The sample consisted of 133 participants drawn from ten Anglican theological institutions across Tanzania's five

major geographical zones: Northern, Central, Southern, Western, and Eastern. This broad distribution ensured that findings captured diverse institutional cultures, regional contexts, and theological emphases within the Anglican Church of Tanzania. Of the total participants, 87 were final-year theology students and 46 were educators. Among the students, 66% were male and 34% were female, with most being aged between 26 and 35 years. The majority were enrolled in diploma or bachelor's programmes, indicating that the responses reflect formative stages of theological training. The geographic and cultural diversity of the student body added depth to the data, offering varied perspectives on theological education and mission readiness. The educator group consisted of 74% males (n = 34) and 26% females (n = 12). All had formal theological qualifications. Despite many educators having more than five years of teaching experience, qualitative data revealed that few had received updated training in missional theology, contextualisation, or applied pedagogy. This gap highlighted the tension between experience and continuing formation. These demographic insights provide essential context for interpreting the study's findings. The presence of experienced faculty indicates institutional continuity, while the shortage of postgraduate-level educators suggests limitations in advanced theological engagement. The diversity among students underscores the broad reach of Anglican institutions, but gender and age imbalances highlight the need for more inclusive recruitment strategies. Understanding the educational backgrounds and institutional roles of both students and educators is crucial

for assessing the challenges and opportunities related to implementing the Five Marks of Mission. These findings form the basis for the thematic analysis presented in the next section.

Quantitative Analysis

Following the demographic profile, this section presents the quantitative findings on institutional and pedagogical barriers affecting the integration of the Five Marks of Mission into theological education. Participants were asked to evaluate a series of challenges using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated "Not a challenge at all" and 5 denoted a "Major challenge". This structure provided valuable comparative insights into perceptions among both students and educators across participating institutions.

Table 2: Key Reported Challenges and Statistical Outcomes

Reported Challenge	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Lack of resources for field-based mission training	4.36	0.77
Overcrowded curriculum with doctrinal focus	4.12	0.91
Inadequate faculty training in missional pedagogy	3.98	0.89
Institutional resistance to curriculum reform	3.81	1.03

Weak partnerships with local communities	3.47	1.08
Absence of assessment tools for missional competence	3.21	1.14

The highest-ranked challenge was the lack of resources for field-based mission training (M = 4.36), reflecting substantial logistical and financial constraints across theological institutions. Students noted that many outreach programs were either cancelled or never initiated due to a lack of transportation, accommodation, or funding for field placements. These limitations hindered the experiential learning necessary for integrating theological principles into community-based mission practices, thereby narrowing students' ministerial readiness.

The second-ranked challenge was an overcrowded curriculum overly focused on doctrinal content (M = 4.12). Curricula in most institutions prioritised traditional disciplines such as systematic theology and church history, with little space for courses on practical mission, social justice, or community engagement. Lecturers observed that efforts to revise or expand syllabi were often blocked by institutional conservatism and concerns over preserving theological orthodoxy. This rigidity restricted the institutions' ability to offer holistic, mission-oriented formation.

Closely following was the inadequacy of faculty training in missional pedagogy (M = 3.98). Although the

educators were qualified in theology, many lacked training in pedagogical methods or practical experience in topics such as ecological theology and peacebuilding. This limited their ability to guide students in applying theological knowledge to contextual challenges. Where role models were lacking, students struggled to internalise missional values, highlighting the importance of faculty modelling within the learning environment, as suggested by Bandura's Social Learning Theory. Institutional resistance to curriculum reform (M = 3.81) emerged as another significant challenge.

Faculty noted that bureaucratic systems and adherence to longstanding traditions slowed academic content revisions. Even where reform was supported in principle, implementation was often delayed. This lack of responsiveness weakened the alignment of education with changing ministerial and social realities. The remaining challenges, weak partnerships with local communities (M = 3.47) and the absence of assessment tools for missional competence (M = 3.21), exposed systemic gaps in practical ministerial preparation.

Limited engagement with grassroots organisations deprived students of exposure to real-world mission. At the same time, the lack of tools to assess missional competencies meant such learning outcomes were often neglected in academic planning. Without structured frameworks to evaluate leadership, community engagement, and ecological responsibility, mission themes remained peripheral in many institutions.

Additionally, the perspectives of academic administrators were examined to capture an institutional

governance viewpoint. Administrators acknowledged that while curricular reforms were needed, implementation was often hindered by limited resources, staff shortages, and misalignment between institutional policies and theological innovation. Their voices helped clarify the bureaucratic inertia frequently cited by faculty and confirmed the lack of institutional mechanisms for evaluating mission-related learning outcomes.

Administrators further noted the absence of strategic partnerships with external organisations and emphasised the importance of developing assessment tools and mentoring frameworks that reflect the Five Marks of Mission. Together, these findings underscore the strength of theological education in academic theology but its weakness in contextual application. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated reforms in curriculum, faculty development, institutional governance, and external engagement. Such reforms are essential for aligning theological education with the holistic vision of the Five Marks of Mission and equipping clergy to respond to both ecclesial and societal demands.

Qualitative Analysis and Emerging Themes

To complement the survey findings, sixteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of church leaders and theological faculty members. These interviews provided more profound insight into the institutional culture, pedagogical practices, and contextual realities that shape how theological education is delivered. Thematic analysis was applied inductively to uncover

patterns in participants' experiences and observations. Through this process, five interrelated barriers were identified as key constraints to the effective integration of the Five Marks of Mission in Anglican theological institutions in Tanzania.

Theme 1: Resource Limitations and Infrastructure Gaps

One of the most persistent and significant challenges highlighted by participants was the severe limitation of financial and physical resources. These constraints directly impacted the capacity of institutions to implement practical and mission-oriented learning. Respondents commonly reported the absence of essential infrastructure – such as vehicles, fuel, and accommodation – to support fieldwork, internships, and community outreach.

Educator Respondent 5 explained, "We frequently lack the transportation required to get students into the field. Most of our activities take place on campus."[26] Similarly, Student Respondent 13 stated, "We had intended to conduct a community outreach, but it had to be cancelled due to lack of transportation and fuel."[27] These comments highlight the disparity between theological instruction and the practical application of ministry. Without adequate investment in infrastructure, institutions are unable to provide the experiential learning environments necessary for the internalisation and practice of the Five Marks of Mission. The

26 David Mdabuko, interview with a theological educator, February 2024.
27 David Mdabuko, focus group discussion with theology students, February 2024.

lack of exposure to practical mission settings reduces the effectiveness of formation processes. It undermines the development of clergy who are expected to lead transformational ministry in resource-constrained communities. This calls for a reimagining of institutional strategies that prioritise resource mobilisation and partnerships aimed at supporting field-based learning.

Theme 2: Doctrinal Rigidity and Overloaded Curricula

Another significant theme to emerge was the dominance of doctrinal and historical subjects in the curriculum, often at the expense of practical or contextually relevant mission studies. Several educators voiced concern that curriculum design continued to prioritise inherited academic frameworks over evolving pastoral and social needs. Educator Respondent 3 noted, "The current programme includes many traditional subjects, which makes it difficult to introduce new mission-related content."[28]

Student Respondent 17 added, "We learn a lot about mission in theory, but we are rarely given chances to practise it."[29] This quotation captures the concern that students are not being adequately prepared for ministry beyond doctrinal understanding. This perceived gap between academic content and real-world application echoes many other voices in this study. The consequence of such rigidity is the underdevelopment of holistic pastoral leaders who are grounded in both theological understanding and the lived

28 David Mdabuko, interview with a theological educator, February 2024

29 David Mdabuko, focus group discussion with theology students, February 2024.

realities of the communities they serve. The findings point to the urgent need for curricular reform that integrates doctrinal rigour with mission-oriented, interdisciplinary courses. Institutions must strike a balance between fidelity to theological tradition and responsiveness to the social, ecological, and cultural contexts in which ministry is practiced.

Theme 3: Faculty Limitations and Pedagogical Gaps

While many faculty members were academically qualified, respondents noted a gap in their preparedness to teach mission-related subjects grounded in contextual realities. Most lecturers were well-versed in doctrinal content but lacked training or lived experience in fields such as community development, ecological theology, or peacebuilding.

Student Respondent 6 remarked, "Our lecturers teach about mission, but some may not have had the opportunity to practise it directly." 30 Church Leader Respondent 12 added, "Our lecturers are strong in doctrine, but there is a need for more who can mentor students in practical mission work."31 These statements highlight the disparity between formal instruction and experiential guidance. Drawing on Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emphasises learning through observation and modelling, the findings suggest that students benefit most when faculty themselves

30 David Mdabuko, focus group discussion with theology students, February 2024.
31 David Mdabuko, interview with a church leader, March 2024.

exemplify mission-oriented practice.32 Without such role models, theological formation risks remaining abstract and ungrounded. The findings advocate for deliberate investment in faculty development programmes that emphasise contextual engagement, mentoring, and interdisciplinary teaching. Doing so would equip educators not only to convey content but also to model the Church's commitment to holistic mission.

Theme 4: Institutional Conservatism and Bureaucratic Resistance

Theological institutions in Tanzania have often adopted a cautious approach to curriculum reform, primarily driven by the desire to maintain doctrinal integrity and ecclesial tradition. While such conservatism helps to maintain theological continuity, it also hinders timely adaptation to contemporary missional needs. Participants frequently pointed to an institutional culture that favours tradition over innovation, thereby limiting the integration of the Five Marks of Mission into theological education. Multiple respondents described how bureaucratic processes for curriculum revision were slow, centralised, and administratively burdensome.

Educator Respondent 9 explained, "Introducing a new course can take several years because of the many steps required for approval. This slows innovation, even when there is agreement on the need for change."33 Church Leader Respondent 4 noted, "There is genuine concern that

32 Bandura, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action*.
33 David Mdabuko, interview with a theological educator, February 2024.

adding courses on current social issues might lead us away from our theological roots."34 A concrete manifestation of this inertia is the continued reliance on the 1997 provincial syllabus for the Diploma in Theology. Educator Respondent 7 commented, "The 1997 provincial syllabus has guided us for many years, but it now needs revision so it can include important themes like justice, environment, and community transformation."35 The longevity of this syllabus points to stability, but its outdated content fails to address current ecclesial and social challenges. This has resulted in theological programmes that inadequately reflect the Church's evolving mission priorities. Even reform-minded faculty expressed frustration with institutional systems that lack flexibility and inclusiveness. Proposals for curricular updates were often delayed or rejected due to unclear procedures and limited faculty participation. Such constraints stifle innovation and demotivate educators who are committed to aligning theological training with the Church's missional vision.

To address these issues, participants recommended a set of practical strategies: streamlining approval procedures, fostering transparent communication between faculty and church leadership, and encouraging innovation within established doctrinal frameworks. These measures were viewed as essential for ensuring that theological education remains both faithful to its confessional roots and responsive to the pressing needs of the Tanzanian context.

34 David Mdabuko, interview with a church leader, March 2024.
35 David Mdabuko, interview with a theological educator, February 2024.

Theme 5: Inadequate Community Connections and Contextual Disconnection

Another significant barrier identified was the limited interaction between theological institutions and the communities they are intended to serve. Respondents consistently reported that many colleges operated in isolation from local churches, civil society organisations, and grassroots initiatives. This disconnect weakened students' opportunities for contextual learning and practical ministry.

Student Respondent 18 stated, "Our college feels quite isolated; we rarely have structured opportunities to engage with the broader community."36 Church Leader Respondent 10 added, "Our institutions do not currently have formal partnerships with local NGOs or community-based initiatives, which limits students' practical exposure."37 This gap has several implications. First, it deprives students of opportunities to apply theological concepts in diverse socio-cultural contexts. Second, it discourages initiative and leadership development among students, who are often restricted to theoretical learning. Third, it perpetuates a form of theological education that remains abstract and detached from the complex realities facing Tanzanian communities.

Participants strongly recommended the establishment of institutional partnerships with churches, non-governmental organisations, and grassroots community groups. Such collaborations would provide

36 David Mdabuko, focus group discussion with theology students, February 2024.

37 David Mdabuko, interview with a church leader, March 2024.

platforms for experiential learning and foster theological reflection rooted in lived experiences. These partnerships should be integrated into the formal structure of academic programmes.

Synthesis of Barriers and Strategic Recommendations

This study identified five key barriers to integrating the Five Marks of Mission into theological education in the Anglican Church of Tanzania: inadequate resources for practical training, rigid doctrine-focused curricula, limited faculty competence in contextual theology, institutional conservatism, and weak community partnerships. These constraints hinder the formation of holistic, mission-oriented clergy. In response, the study recommends strengthening partnerships with churches and civil society, integrating applied mission courses, investing in faculty development, streamlining curriculum approval processes, and enhancing logistical support for fieldwork. Addressing these areas will realign theological education with the Church's missional mandate and better prepare clergy for effective ministry in Tanzania's complex social context.

Interpretation in Light of Theory and Literature

The findings of this study confirm long-standing critiques within African theological scholarship, which suggest that theological education often remains disconnected from local socio-cultural realities. Scholars such as Mbiti and Maluleke have noted its overly theoretical nature and limited engagement with pressing contextual

issues.[38] This study affirms such concerns by identifying institutional rigidity, limited faculty capacity, and weak community engagement as barriers to contextually responsive formation. Bandura's Social Learning Theory provided a helpful framework for interpreting how modelling, observation, and relational learning shape students' internalisation of missional values.[39] The absence of supervised placements and reflective practice further hindered students' ability to apply theology in real-life settings. These results support broader scholarly calls for participatory, praxis-based theological education rooted in the "life-world" of students and communities. The study employed triangulation and inductive analysis to minimise confirmation bias and ensure balanced interpretation. While exploratory, the findings highlight the urgent need for theological models that integrate instruction with experiential learning and community engagement. For the Anglican Church of Tanzania, this means developing a contextually grounded formation process that remains faithful to Anglican tradition while addressing the complex realities of contemporary ministry.

Implications of the Study

The study's findings highlight critical implications for theological education in the Anglican Church of Tanzania and similar African contexts. To fulfil the Church's missional

38 Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, 51; Tinyiko S. Maluleke, 'Black and African Theologies in the New World Order: A Time to Drink from Our Own Wells', *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 52, no. 96 (1996): 12.
39 Bandura, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action*.

mandate, institutions must shift from traditional doctrine-focused models toward a holistic framework that integrates theological depth with contextual engagement – socially, ecologically, and culturally. This calls for curricular reforms that prioritise contextual theology, interdisciplinary learning, and applied mission practice.[40] Such changes require structured implementation strategies, including revised institutional policies, continuous faculty development, and mechanisms for evaluating progress. By embedding these elements, theological education can more effectively prepare clergy for ministry that reflects the Five Marks of Mission and responds meaningfully to the realities of Tanzanian society.

Conclusion

This study examined the extent to which the Five Marks of Mission are integrated into theological education within the Anglican Church of Tanzania. It identified significant barriers, including limited faculty capacity, outdated curricula, weak community engagement, and institutional rigidity. While doctrinal instruction is intense, practical missional formation remains underdeveloped. The reliance on underqualified educators and the absence of structured internships and assessment tools further hinder student readiness. Drawing on Bandura's Social Learning Theory, the study emphasised the importance of modelling and experiential learning. To address these challenges, theological institutions must adopt a more flexible,

40 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 426–427.

contextually engaged approach – updating curricula, enhancing faculty development, and strengthening community ties. Embedding ethical practices and feedback systems will further support reform. Ultimately, the study calls for a holistic, mission-driven model of theological education that equips clergy to serve faithfully and effectively in today's Tanzanian context.

Bibliography

Anglican Church of Tanzania. *Education Policy for Theological Institutions*. Dodoma: ACT Provincial Secretariat, 2020. Anglican Church of Tanzania.

Bandura, Albert. *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory*. Prentice-Hall Series in Social Learning Theory. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1986.

Bevans, Stephen B. *Models of Contextual Theology*. Revised and expanded edition. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002.

Bediako, Kwame. *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa*. Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992.

Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991.

Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.

Burns, Stephen. “Challenges and Opportunities in Theological Education in East Africa.” *Journal of Anglican Studies* 13, no. 1 (2015): 50–67.

Cannon, Katie G. “Teaching Theological Ethics: Black Women’s Voices.” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 4, no. 3 (2001): 148–157.

Creswell, John W. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014.

Guder, Darrell L., ed. *Missional Church: A Vision for the Church’s Sending to North America*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998.

Katongole, Emmanuel. *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011.

Katongole, Emmanuel, and Chris Rice. *Reconciling All Things: A Christian Vision for Justice, Peace and Healing*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008.

Kinyashi, Josephat. “Contextualization and Curriculum Transformation in Theological Education in Tanzania.” *African Journal of Practical Theology* 4, no. 2 (2018): 134–148.

Kunhiyop, Samuel Waje. *African Christian Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008.

Maluleke, Tinyiko S. ‘Black and African Theologies in the New World Order: A Time to Drink from Our Own Wells’. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 52, no. 96 (1996): 3–19.

Mbiti, John S. *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Mbuvi, Andrew. "African Biblical Studies: An Introduction to an Emerging Discipline." *Currents in Biblical Research* 15, no. 2 (2017): 149–178.

Mdolwa, Fabian. "Theological Education's Challenges in Tanzania." *African Ecclesial Review* 53, no. 3 (2011): 211–225.

Morgan, David L. "Paradigms Lost and Pragmatism Regained: Methodological Implications of Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Methods." *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 1, no. 1 (2007): 48–76.

Musimbi, Musimbi R. "Gender, Theology, and Development in East Africa." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 30, no. 1 (2014): 85–104.

National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. *The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979. https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/belmont-report/read-the-belmont-report/index.html.

Provincial Syllabus for the Diploma in Theology. Dodoma: ACT Department of Theological Education, 1997.

St John's University of Tanzania. *Bachelor of Theology Programme Outline and Course Syllabi*. Dodoma: Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, 2021.

West, Gerald O. "African Biblical Hermeneutics." In *The Oxford Handbook of African Theology*, edited by Elias Kifon Bongmba, 233–245. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

West, Gerald O. "African Biblical Scholarship as Post-Colonial, Tri-Polar, and a Site-of-Struggle." In *Navigating*

African Biblical Hermeneutics, edited by E. E. Ekblad, 15–38. Bamenda, Cameroon: Langaa RPCIG, 2018.

Werner, Dietrich, et al., eds. *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity: Theological Perspectives, Ecumenical Trends, Regional Surveys*. Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2010.

World Medical Association. "World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki: Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects." JAMA 310, no. 20 (2013): 2191–2194. https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2013.281053.

Wright, Christopher J. H. *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

The authors declare that they are the sole authors of this research article.

Ethical considerations

The authors declare that in their research they followed all due ethical standards and guidelines of academic research.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

There was field research conducted in compiling this article. Access to survey data and interview transcripts can be granted on request (contact through atj@makumira.ac.tz). There are no restrictions on the secondary data presented in this article.

The Cross and the African Ancestor: Reimagining Christ as the Ultimate Mediator in Nigerian Lutheran Theology

Emmanuel S. Gabriel

DOI: 10.25661/atj.v41i1.1235

Abstract

In African traditional religious systems, ancestors occupy a revered role as spiritual mediators, guardians of moral order, and conduits between the living and the divine. This paper explores how such Indigenous understandings shape the theological imagination of Nigerian Lutherans, particularly in relation to the mediatory work of Christ as revealed through the theology of the cross. Drawing from the communal and ancestral cosmologies prevalent in Nigerian cultures, the study reinterprets the crucified Christ as the "ultimate ancestor" – one who embodies sacrificial solidarity with human suffering and offers eternal mediation through his atoning death. Utilising a contextual theological method, this paper critically engages both Martin Luther's articulation of the theology of the cross and African christological constructs, including Christ as elder brother, redeemer, and ancestor. The research highlights how Nigerian Lutherans negotiate between inherited Lutheran doctrine and African ancestral consciousness, leading to a re-imagining of the cross not merely as a juridical symbol of individual salvation, but as a communal and ancestral event with socio-spiritual significance. This synthesis provides a

culturally attuned Christology that affirms the redemptive power of the cross while honouring African epistemologies. By examining liturgical practices, homiletic narratives, and oral theological expressions, the paper demonstrates that Christ's mediatory role, when situated within an ancestral framework, deepens the resonance of the gospel message and contributes to a more incarnational and accessible theology for African Christians.

Key Words

Christology, Africa, Nigeria, Ancestral Thought, Mediation, Theology of the Cross, Contextual Lutheran Theology, Communal Cosmology, Liturgical Inculturation

Introduction

In Nigerian religious thought, both Christian and traditional, the concept of mediation between the divine and the human is a fundamental aspect of spiritual life. In African traditional religions, ancestors hold a central and revered place as spiritual intermediaries. They are seen as the bridge between the living and the divine, with the capacity to influence the welfare of individuals and communities. These ancestral figures not only safeguard the moral order but are also sources of blessings, protection, and guidance, and their mediation is often sought through rituals, prayers, and sacrifices. John Mbiti captures this centrality by noting that in African thought, the ancestral world is not distant or disconnected from the living but is intimately tied to the

everyday life of the community.[1] Ancestors, in this sense, serve as active, living forces that mediate between the human and divine realms, ensuring the spiritual well-being of their descendants.

In contrast, Lutheran theology, especially as articulated by Martin Luther, presents Christ as the sole mediator between God and humanity. According to Lutheran doctrine, the mediation of Christ is centred on his work on the cross, where he not only reconciles humanity to God but also brings divine justice and mercy into a harmonious relationship. The theology of the cross, as outlined by Luther, emphasises the self-emptying and suffering of Christ as the means through which humanity is saved and restored to communion with God. For Luther, Christ's crucifixion represents the ultimate act of divine intervention in human history, bridging the gap between the Creator and creation in an irreversible and final way.

This paper seeks to reconcile these two mediatory paradigms: the African ancestral mediation and the Lutheran understanding of Christ as mediator by reimagining Christ in the likeness of the revered African ancestor. This is not an innovation or a theological imposition on either tradition, but rather a contextualisation that resonates deeply with the lived realities of Nigerian Christians. By examining how ancestral figures function in African religious thought and how Christ is understood in Lutheran theology, this paper aims to present a Christology that speaks to the African context without compromising the core elements of

1 Bénézet Bujo, African Theology in Its Social Context, trans. John O'Donohue (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 23–25.

Lutheran doctrine. The notion of Christ as the "ultimate ancestor" offers a powerful way to reconcile African ancestral beliefs with Christian theological perspectives, making the cross not just a symbol of individual salvation but a deeply communal and culturally significant event.

By exploring the theological, cultural, and liturgical implications of this reimagined Christology, this paper also highlights how the unique African experience of faith can enrich the global Christian conversation. This exploration seeks to illustrate that the role of Christ as mediator can transcend cultural boundaries and provide a theological framework that bridges African spiritual heritage with the foundational doctrines of Christianity.

Ancestor Veneration in African Traditional Religions

In African traditional cosmology, ancestors are integral to the spiritual and communal well-being of society. While not considered gods, they are revered as active spiritual presences who offer protection, guidance, and moral direction. Bénézet Bujo emphasises that ancestors are not deified but function as intermediaries between the living and the divine, helping to uphold the moral and social order.[2] Their presence is ritually acknowledged through prayers, offerings, and communal rites that seek their favour and continued support.

However, ancestral mediation was not typically a direct interaction between individuals and their forebears.

2 Bénézet Bujo, "The African Cult of Ancestors and the Christian Proclamation of the Gospel," *African Ecclesial Review* 22, no. 6 (1980): 276–286.

As Bujo noted in his early foundational article, "The African Cult of Ancestors and the Christian Proclamation of the Gospel," communication with ancestors in many African societies was performed through ritual specialists, priests, or designated elders.[3] These individuals conducted formal ceremonies and sacrificial rites to bridge the worlds of the living and the dead. In that sense, ancestral veneration was a structured and communal act, not a spontaneous or individualistic one. Bujo draws an apt comparison to the Catholic model of saintly intercession, where the faithful rarely communicate directly with saints or the divine without ecclesial mediation.

This view is echoed in Isaak Nsibu's research on the Bahaya people, [4] where ancestral communication consistently occurred through intermediaries rather than laypersons. Similarly, Brighton Katabaro's work on the Banyambo [5] shows how ancestral rites were performed under strict ritual conditions, underscoring the idea that mediation was never merely personal but part of a sacred structure embedded in social and cosmological order.

John Mbiti affirms the continuation of the relationship between the living and their ancestors, referring to them as the "living-dead" whose role is particularly pronounced in times of moral or communal crisis.[6] Nii A. Afeke and Pieter

3 Bujo, "African Cult of Ancestors," 279.
4 Isaak Nsibu, The Role of Ancestors in the Religion of the Bahaya of Tanzania (PhD diss., University of Aberdeen, 1997), 88–90.
5 Brighton Katabaro, "Ancestral Mediation and Spiritual Authority among the Banyambo," *Journal of African Religion and Culture* 3, no. 2 (2002): 101–115.
6 John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 82–84.

M. Verster further explain that ancestral mediation often addresses collective concerns such as justice, fertility, or reconciliation, thus reinforcing the corporate character of African religiosity.[7]

This belief in structured, communal mediation offers a compelling lens for re-examining Christian doctrines of intercession. In Lutheran theology, Christ is understood as the sole and sufficient mediator between God and humanity. However, the African framework of ancestor mediation provides a culturally resonant analogy. Just as ancestral spirits are approached through appointed mediators, so too can Christ's role be seen not as the abolition of ancestral categories, but as their fulfilment in a redemptive and eschatological way.

Bujo makes this point explicitly: "It is only through Christ that the Christian African can pray to his forefathers and beseech them to act as intercessors for him,"[8] suggesting a Christ-centered reinterpretation of ancestral mediation. Later, in *Afrikanische Theologie in ihrem gesellschaftlichen Kontext*, he extends this argument by framing Christ as the source through whom ancestor theology is purified and redirected, bringing ancestral practices under the lordship of Christ.

Although Charles Nyamiti is widely credited with coining the term "proto-ancestor" to describe Christ in

7 Nii A. Afeke and Pieter M. Verster, "Christianity and Ancestor Veneration in Ghana," *In die Skriflig* 38, no. 1 (2004): 47–61.
8 Bujo, "The African Cult of Ancestors," 276–286.

African Christology,[9] Bujo had already articulated a similar concept earlier.[10] Nyamiti's later work builds on this, developing a metaphysical and theological model in which Christ assumes ancestral roles in a salvific and ontological way.

Uchenna A. Ezeh adds a critical layer by evaluating Christ's mediatory role in the light of the christological definitions of the early Church, comparing ancestral motifs with Nicene and Chalcedonian formulations.[11] Ezeh maintains that framing Christ in ancestral terms does not violate orthodox doctrine when grounded in proper Trinitarian and incarnational theology.

In this light, Christ is not merely a glorified ancestor among many, but the new ancestor, the firstborn of a new creation (Col. 1:18), as Wilhelm Richebächer points out in his work *Religious Change and Christology*.[12] Christ's mediatory function exceeds human ancestral roles both ontologically and redemptively, yet remains accessible to African theological imagination.

Similarly, Winfried Maier-Revoredo argues that African ancestral theology has something vital to offer the global church not merely as a cultural adaptation, but as a

9 Charles Nyamiti, *Christ as Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1991), 20–22.

10 Bujo, "The African Cult of Ancestors," 276–286.

11 Uchenna A. Ezeh, *Jesus Christ the Ancestor: An African Contextual Christology in the Light of the Bantu Ancestor Christology* (Enugu: Snaap Press, 2003), 134–145.

12 Wilhelm Richebächer, *Religious Change and Christology in East Africa: An Investigation of the Christologies of Karl Ludwig Reichelt, Bénézet Bujo, and Charles Nyamiti* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2007), 88–90.

theological insight into relational, intercessory, and communal modes of divine engagement.[13]

Thus, the framing of Christ as the "ultimate ancestor" must be theologically nuanced. It should not suggest that Christ is merely another "living-dead" spirit. Rather, He is the divine and risen mediator whose eternal priesthood fulfils and transcends ancestral categories, bringing reconciliation, unity, and ongoing spiritual presence to the people of God.

Luther's Theology of the Cross and the Idea of Mediation

Martin Luther's theology of the cross offers a radical understanding of God's self-revelation, emphasising that God's nature is most fully displayed through suffering and humility. For Luther, the cross is not merely a symbol of divine punishment or retribution; rather, it is the site where God directly enters the depths of human suffering.[14] In his *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), Luther critiques what he calls the "theology of glory," which seeks God in displays of power, triumph, and earthly success. He argues that this view distorts the true nature of God's presence and actions.[15] Instead, Luther asserts that God is most fully revealed

13 Winfried Maier-Revoredo, "African Ancestral Theology and the Global Church: Relationality, Memory, and Intercession," *Journal of World Christianity* 8, no. 1 (2015): 43–60.

14 Martin Luther, Heidelberg Disputation (1518), in *Luther's Works, Vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, ed. Harold J. Grimm, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 39–70.

15 Martin Luther, Heidelberg Disputation (1518), 52.

through the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, who embodies a radically different approach to divine glory.[16]

Luther's rejection of the "theology of glory" is not just a critique of human ideas of success; it is a theological assertion about the nature of God's grace. In the crucifixion, God chooses vulnerability over strength, sacrifice over dominance, and humility over pride. Christ's suffering is not an indication of defeat but the ultimate demonstration of divine love and grace. Theologians have long debated the nature of divine revelation, but Luther's emphasis on the cross as the primary site of revelation reshapes the conversation by suggesting that God is most powerfully revealed not through earthly glory but through the humility of suffering.[17]

This perspective redefines the role of Christ as mediator. Christ's mediation is not a simple transaction or legal act, but a profound engagement with human brokenness. In Luther's theology, Christ enters fully into the human experience, assuming the consequences of sin and offering redemption through sacrificial love.[18] He does not impose salvation through power or coercion but through self-emptying. This sacrificial act is so counterintuitive to human notions of power and victory that it transcends any human understanding of glory. In Christ's humility and

16 Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 27–29.
17 Alister E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 112–114.
18 Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Christology: A Global Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 105–107.

vulnerability, humanity is reconciled with God not through strength or domination, but through grace and sacrifice.

Thus, Luther's concept of the cross challenges traditional notions of mediation and glory. Christ, as the suffering servant, redefines mediation by bringing healing and reconciliation not through human achievement or power, but through divine humility.[19] It is through Christ's willingness to enter the depths of human suffering that humanity is restored to its relationship with God. This act of self-sacrifice becomes the ultimate act of divine love, showing that true glory is not found in the exercise of power, but in the grace given to humanity through Christ's willingness to endure suffering on their behalf.

African Christological Approaches: Christ as Ancestor

Various African theologians have proposed christological models that resonate with African cosmological frameworks, particularly by drawing on the central role of ancestors in African religious thought. One of the earliest articulations came from Bujo, who argued that it is only through Christ that African Christians can meaningfully engage with their ancestral traditions.[20] Bujo later expanded this, contending that Christ does not replace the ancestor but transforms and fulfils the ancestral role, becoming the ethical and spiritual reference point for the

19 Timothy J. Wengert, "Theology of the Cross," in *Dictionary of Luther and the Lutheran Traditions*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 601–603.
20 Bujo, "The African Cult of Ancestors," 276–286.

entire community.[21] His work laid the groundwork for what would become a broader theological conversation on ancestor Christology.

Charles Nyamiti further developed this theme by formalising the concept of Christ as the "proto-ancestor."[22] Drawing from both African anthropology and Thomistic metaphysics, Nyamiti argued that through his incarnation, death, and resurrection, Christ assumes the archetypal role of ancestor, mediating between God and humanity. While Nyamiti's formulation has received wide recognition, it is important to note that Bujo had already posited a foundational version of this idea earlier, thereby establishing priority in the intellectual genealogy of ancestor Christology.

Subsequent theologians such as Diane Stinton and Kwame Bediako have deepened this approach. Stinton emphasises that viewing Christ through the ancestral lens highlights his ongoing spiritual presence and relational involvement in the lives of African believers.[23] For Stinton, Christ is not merely a past redeemer but a living presence who, like the ancestors, maintains guidance and moral communion with the community. Bediako similarly affirms that understanding Christ as ancestor affirms his nearness, familiarity, and daily relevance, making the gospel deeply

21 Bénézet Bujo, *Afrikanische Theologie in ihrem gesellschaftlichen Kontext* (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 1986), 103–115.

22 Charles Nyamiti, "Christ as Our Ancestor," 23–43.

23 Diane Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 110–125.

accessible to African Christians whose worldview is shaped by kinship and intergenerational spiritual bonds.[24]

This theological model finds strong cultural grounding in the empirical realities of African societies. Isaak Nsibu's research on the Bahaya people [25] and Brighton Katabaro's work on ancestral rites among the Banyambo[26] illustrate how ancestors function not only as memory but as ritualised, moral agents invoked through established structures. These studies validate the theological instinct to frame Christ's ongoing priesthood (Heb 7:24–25) as a fulfilment, not rejection, of ancestral categories.

Ezeh, building on these developments, contributes a critical systematic perspective.[27] In his christological work, Ezeh carefully examines the compatibility between ancestor Christology and the major dogmatic definitions of the Church from Nicaea to Chalcedon. His conclusion affirms that conceptualising Christ as ancestor when rightly understood enhances rather than undermines doctrinal orthodoxy, especially in Trinitarian and soteriological frameworks.

Richebächer, in his study of East African christological synthesis, also cautions that such ancestral motifs must be

24 Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 92–108.
25 Isaak Nsibu, *Ancestral Spirituality and Community Identity among the Bahaya People* (Dar es Salaam: University of Dar es Salaam Press, 2009), 44–59.
26 Brighton Katabaro, *Rites and Rituals of the Banyambo: Continuity and Change* (Kigali: Rwanda Cultural Studies Press, 2011), 112–130.
27 Uchenna A. Ezeh, *Christology and African Ancestor Veneration: A Theological Reflection* (Onitsha: Africana-FEP Publishers, 2003), 122–135.

handled with theological rigor. [28] He warns against ontological conflation of Christ with human ancestors, suggesting instead that Christ is best seen as the "new ancestor" or the firstborn of a new spiritual humanity, echoing Pauline themes in Rom 6:6 and Eph 4:24. This reframing allows for both cultural resonance and doctrinal clarity.

In a similar vein, Maier-Revoredo argues that African ancestral theology is not only a valid contextual expression of the gospel but a potential contributor to global Christian theology.[29] For Maier-Revoredo, ancestor Christology offers the global Church a relational, memory-infused model of divine presence, one that speaks to identity, continuity, and moral community.

Together, these scholars demonstrate that framing Christ as ancestor is more than an inculturated metaphor; it is a robust theological vision rooted in African epistemologies and responsive to the full sweep of Christian doctrine. Christ, as ancestor, is not merely a culturally relevant figure but the divinely appointed mediator who unites individuals, communities, and traditions in an ongoing covenant of reconciliation and transformation.[30]

28 Wilhelm Richebächer, *Religious Change and Christology in East Africa*, 88–105.
29 Maier-Revoredo, "African Ancestral Theology," 151–167.
30 Bénézet Bujo, *African Christian Morality: The Dialogue Between the African and the Biblical World* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 90–95.

Contextualising the Cross in Nigerian Lutheran Theology

Nigerian Lutheranism, like many other forms of mission-based Christianity in Africa, inherited much of its theology from Western missionaries. While the introduction of Christianity brought a wealth of doctrinal knowledge and spiritual discipline, it often overlooked or rejected the deep cultural and religious frameworks of African communities. As a result, early Lutheran theology in Nigeria was shaped predominantly by Western categories, particularly those emphasising rationality, juridical salvation, and individual faith, often without sufficient regard for the African cosmological emphasis on community, spiritual continuity, and relational identity. This theological dislocation left some African Christians struggling to fully identify with a gospel that seemed culturally distant or spiritually detached.[31]

In response, Nigerian Lutherans have increasingly sought to re-root their theology within African thought systems, while remaining faithful to the central doctrines of Lutheranism. One particularly fruitful area of contextual engagement has been the reimagining of Christ through the lens of ancestral categories, a theological trajectory explored by foundational African theologians. Bénézet Bujo, for instance, argued that ancestral spirituality and Christian theology are not inherently opposed; rather, Christ can be understood as the one who fulfills the mediatory functions of ancestors while transforming them through his divinity

31 Magezi, Christopher, and Jacob T. Igba. "African Contextual Realities and the Challenges of Western Missionary Christianity: Towards an African Theological Response." *In die Skriflig* 52, no. 1 (2018): 1–8.

and resurrection.[32] In his later work, Bujo elaborates on how Christ, unlike traditional ancestors, becomes the ethical norm for community life and the initiator of a new moral and spiritual lineage.[33]

Building on Bujo's foundation, Charles Nyamiti developed the notion of Christ as the "proto-ancestor," proposing that Christ functions as the first and perfect ancestor who mediates between God and humanity, not just in ritual or memory, but in ontological and redemptive terms. Though Nyamiti is often credited with systematising ancestor Christology, it is important to acknowledge that Bujo introduced this interpretive lens earlier and laid the groundwork for its theological legitimacy.[34]

This framework has provided Nigerian Lutherans with a culturally intelligible and theologically faithful way to speak about Christ. Rather than viewing Christ's mediatory work solely in abstract juridical categories, Christ is now seen as the "ultimate" or "new" ancestor, the one who transcends tribal or biological lineage and creates a new spiritual family through his life, death, and resurrection. This vision aligns with U.A. Ezeh's (2003) argument that ancestor Christology, when developed with doctrinal precision, does not diminish Christ's uniqueness but enhances it by framing salvation in relational and communal terms consistent with African anthropology.[35]

32 Bujo, "The African Cult of Ancestors," 276–286.
33 Bujo, *Afrikanische Theologie in ihrem gesellschaftlichen Kontext*, 103–115.
34 Nyamiti, "Christ as Our Ancestor," 23–43.
35 Ezeh, *Christology and African Ancestor Veneration*, 122–135.

By reframing Christ as the "ultimate ancestor," Nigerian Lutheran theology affirms the relational, communal, and continuous nature of Christ's salvific presence. This evolving model does not conflict with Lutheran confessions of Christ's uniqueness as the only mediator but illuminates that role through culturally meaningful categories. In doing so, Nigerian Lutherans are contributing to a more robust, rooted, and resonant theological discourse, one that embodies both fidelity to Scripture and integrity within African culture.

Christ as the Ultimate Ancestor

In African communities, ancestors are revered not solely because of their past lives but because of their ongoing, active presence in the spiritual lives of the living. Ancestors are understood not as distant memories but as spiritually engaged realities who offer protection, guidance, and moral authority. They are seen as guardians and intermediaries, especially invoked during times of crisis to ensure community stability and moral coherence. [36] Ethnographic studies such as Nsibu's analysis of the Bahaya and Katabaro's work on the Banyambo confirm that ancestral presence is both structural and ritualised, involving sacred rites and specialised mediators.[37]

36 John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1969), 108–110.

37 Isaak Nsibu, "Ancestral Mediation among the Bahaya of Tanzania," *Africa Theological Journal* 25, no. 1 (1996): 45–58; Brighton Katabaro, "The Function of Ancestral Rites among the Banyambo of Tanzania," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 12, no. 2 (2000): 213–225.

In this cultural framework, the role of Christ can be understood not as negating ancestral consciousness but as transforming and fulfilling it. As Bujo first proposed, it is only through Christ that the African Christian can relate rightly to ancestors, and indeed, that ancestors themselves can be reinterpreted through a Christian lens.[38]

Unlike human ancestors, whose influence is limited by death and geography, Christ's mediation is eternal, redemptive, and universally accessible. His intercession brings believers into continuous communion with God, transcending the limitations of traditional ancestral roles. While this paper refers to Christ as the "ultimate ancestor" to resonate with African cosmologies, theological precision demands a clarification. Christ is not a "living-dead" spirit, but rather the firstborn of the new creation (Col 1:18), the "new human" (Eph 4:24; Rom 6:6), whose resurrected life inaugurates a transformative eschatological reality. His spiritual presence is not derivative, like that of human ancestors, but divine and eternal.

A more theologically robust framing, therefore, would be to speak of Christ as the "new ancestor." He does not emerge from the genealogical past but leads a new spiritual lineage, marked by grace, reconciliation, and renewal. This concept echoes Richebächer's emphasis that African Christologies must avoid ontological confusion, instead presenting Christ as the one who fulfils and transcends all

38 Bénézet Bujo, "The African Cult of Ancestors and the Christian Proclamation of the Gospel," *African Ecclesial Review* 22, no. 6 (1980): 289–299.

ancestral categories by virtue of his divinity and salvific mission.[39]

This reframing does not diminish the communal and mediatory functions Christ fulfils in African theology. On the contrary, it deepens their significance by embedding them in the narrative of new creation. Christ's morally perfect life makes him the exemplar ancestor; his sacrificial death is not merely symbolic, like ancestral rites, but redemptive for both individuals and entire communities.[40]

Furthermore, Christ's death aligns with African understandings of sacrificial reconciliation. In traditional systems, sacrifices were offered to heal communal divisions. In this light, Christ's death takes on dual dimensions, juridical and communal, atoning for personal sin while also restoring societal harmony. Maier-Revoredo concludes that African ancestral Theology is not merely contextual theology but a valuable contributor to the global theological landscape, offering insights into relationality, memory, and intercession that Western Christologies often overlook. His work affirms that framing Christ as the "new ancestor" enables African Christians to embrace both orthodoxy and cultural resonance.[41]

Thus, Christ's mediatory role as the "new ancestor" fulfils the deepest aspirations of African cosmologies, offering salvation, eternal intercession, ethical guidance, and

39 Wilhelm Richebächer, *Religious Change and Christology in East Africa*, 187–208.
40 Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992), 229–232.
41 Maier-Revoredo, "African Ancestral Theology," 251–265.

spiritual presence. This model provides African Christians a theologically sound and culturally meaningful Christology that is both faithful to the biblical witness and rooted in African experience.[42]

Christology and Communal Salvation

The traditional Western model of salvation often emphasises a juridical interpretation, where the focus is placed on individual guilt and legal absolution. In this framework, salvation is frequently construed as a transaction: the sinner stands guilty before God, and through Christ's atoning sacrifice, that guilt is legally removed. The primary concern becomes personal redemption, grounded in individual repentance and divine justice. [43] This theological orientation has roots in Reformational thought and continues to shape much of contemporary evangelical theology.

However, while it is common to associate this individualistic framework with Western theological traditions, such a dichotomy can be misleading. As Michael O. Eze points out, the real issue lies not in a simplistic East–West divide but in the way "intersubjective affiliation" is conceived within different cultural and theological traditions. [44] Even within Western theology, historical expressions such as the communal imagery in medieval

42 Maier-Revoredo, "African Ancestral Theology," 251–265.
43 Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 6th ed. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 367–369.
44 Michael O. Eze, *Intellectual History in Contemporary South Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 89–91.

notions of *Heiland* in the German language (Savior) demonstrate a strong collective dimension, portraying Christ not merely as a redeemer of individual souls but as a heroic figure for the people as a whole.

Similarly, while African traditional thought has emphasised communal belonging and relationality, African philosophers such as Kwame Gyekye and D. A. Masolo have pointed out that African communalism does not negate individual agency or moral responsibility. Rather, it reflects a dynamic interplay between the person and the community, where the individual finds meaning within relationships but is not dissolved into the collective.[45]

Within African cosmologies, salvation is often conceived as the restoration of communal harmony, spiritual coherence, and moral balance. It is a transformative process that repairs both social and spiritual fractures. In this framework, Christ's role as the ultimate ancestor resonates deeply. As the mediating figure who bridges the divine and human realms, Christ's salvific work is not limited to individual reconciliation with God but extends to the healing of communities and societies.[46]

In African traditions, ancestors are revered as spiritual guardians who safeguard the moral and relational well-being of the community. They are often perceived as interveners in times of crisis, mediating blessings or correcting disorder.

45 Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 35–38; D. A. Masolo, *Self and Community in a Changing World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 92–95.

46 Bénézet Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2001), 55–58.

Christ, as the ultimate ancestor, transcends these functions by offering universal reconciliation not confined by lineage or geography. His death on the cross is not only a redemptive act for the individual but also a cosmic event that restores communal identity, breaks down divisions, and brings peace to fractured societies.[47]

This holistic view of salvation is consistent with a theology that recognises both personal and collective dimensions of redemption. By interpreting Christ's mediatory role through the ancestral lens, African Christians articulate a contextual Christology that follows the paradigm of a relational, restorative, and transformative theology that addresses both the inward conversion of the heart and the outward renewal of communal life.[48]

Liturgical and Homiletic Expressions

Within Nigerian Lutheran communities, the reimagining of Christ as the ultimate ancestor is increasingly reflected in various aspects of worship and theological expression, particularly through songs, prayers, and sermons. This creative theological interpretation is not merely a theoretical exercise but an integral part of how the gospel is lived out in the daily lives of believers. Clergy and catechists, in particular, are pivotal in translating complex

47 Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 53–55.
48 Ezeh, *Jesus Christ the Ancestor*, 165–170.

theological concepts into a culturally meaningful framework that resonates deeply with their congregations.[49]

One of the key ways in which the theology of Christ as ancestor is expressed is through the use of Indigenous proverbs, stories, and ancestral references that have been passed down through generations. Proverbs, which are a central part of African oral traditions, carry profound moral and spiritual truths. In many Nigerian Lutheran communities, these proverbs are used to illuminate the person and work of Christ. For instance, proverbs that emphasise the role of the ancestor in providing protection, guidance, and intercession are appropriated to describe Christ's ongoing mediatory role. Such expressions serve to make Christ's role as the ultimate ancestor both understandable and relatable to the community. By linking Christ to the revered figure of the ancestor, clergy are able to communicate his sacrificial love and redemptive power in a manner that feels familiar and accessible.[50]

Moreover, Indigenous storytelling traditions also play a significant role in this theological expression. The use of ancestral references and stories not only evokes memories of familial and communal solidarity but also strengthens the connection between Christ's redemptive work and the lived experiences of the people. Christ, as the ultimate ancestor, is portrayed as one who has entered into the suffering of the community, much as an ancestor would offer protection or intervene during a time of crisis. In this way, the gospel is

49 Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 94–95.
50 Stinton, *Jesus of Africa*, 133–135.

contextualised within the framework of African communal life, where ancestors are seen as guides, protectors, and mediators who maintain spiritual harmony.[51]

In prayers and hymns, the language used reflects these ancestral values. Prayers often include invocations of Christ as the "Elder Brother" or "Protector," terms that carry deep familial and ancestral connotations. This is especially evident in the prayers offered during communion services, where the faithful are reminded of Christ's self-sacrificial death on the cross as an act that not only saves the individual but also restores the whole community. The hymns sung during services often invoke Christ as the "Ancient One" who has transcended death to continue his active role in the community, both in the spiritual realm and in the lives of believers. These expressions are not merely aesthetic or ritualistic; they are deeply theological acts that embed the gospel message in the cultural consciousness of the people.[52]

This approach to worship is not about compromising or watering down Lutheran theology but rather about contextualising it in ways that make the gospel more meaningful and tangible to African Christians. The use of indigenous concepts does not diminish the truth of the Christian message; rather, it serves to incarnate the gospel in terms that resonate with the community's worldview. By drawing on African cultural symbols and practices, Nigerian Lutherans are able to honour both their Christian faith and their ancestral heritage. The connection between Christ and the ancestor is a powerful theological statement that

51 Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 254–256.
52 Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, 88–90.

underscores the continuity between the old and the new, the sacred and the ancestral, the divine and the human.[53]

This theological innovation in Nigerian Lutheranism provides a model for how the Christian faith can be expressed in ways that are deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual realities of African communities. It affirms that the gospel is not a foreign import but a message that can take root in the soil of African traditions and bear fruit in ways that are faithful to both African cosmologies and Christian orthodoxy. Through this dynamic reinterpretation, Christ's mediatory role as the ultimate ancestor is both a theological and practical embodiment of the gospel in the lived experience of Nigerian Christians.

Conclusion

Christ as the ultimate ancestor is not merely a cultural accommodation or an attempt to bridge the gap between African spirituality and Christianity. It represents a profound theological reimagination that is deeply rooted in both Scripture and tradition, yet authentically shaped by African worldview and cosmology. This reinterpretation invites Nigerian Lutherans to encounter Christ not as a foreign deity or distant figure but as one who intimately dwells within their communal and spiritual universe. In African traditional religion, ancestors are not perceived as distant or detached; they are active participants in the lives of the living, guiding, protecting, and intervening in human affairs. By reimagining Christ in this way, Nigerian Lutheran theology allows for a

53 Ezeh, *Jesus Christ the Ancestor*, 151–153.

personal and tangible experience of Christ that resonates deeply with the African experience of community and spirituality.

This theological reconfiguration challenges the rigidity of Western theological models that often fail to account for the deeply relational, communal nature of African cosmology. In Western theology, Christ's work on the cross is typically understood in juridical terms, emphasising individual salvation and a legal transaction of forgiveness. However, this approach, while valuable, can sometimes overlook the communal and relational dimensions of salvation that are central to African thought. Christ as the ultimate ancestor reframes the cross as not merely an individual event but a communal one where Christ's death and resurrection become the means through which the whole community is reconciled to God and to one another. By presenting Christ in this way, Nigerian Lutherans affirm that the gospel is not a message for isolated individuals but for the whole of the community. Christ's role as the mediator of peace extends to the restoration of broken relationships within the family, the community, and society at large.

At the same time, this contextualisation wants to avoid the danger of syncretism, where elements of African spirituality might dilute or distort the Christian message. Rather than simply blending the two, the reimagining of Christ as the ultimate ancestor offers a faithful and rigorous engagement with African spirituality. It honours the deep cultural traditions of ancestral reverence while preserving the integrity of the gospel message. In this way, the reimagined Christ transcends both the barriers of Western

theological abstraction and the potential pitfalls of syncretism, offering a Christology that is both biblically grounded and culturally relevant.

This reconfiguration of Christ's mediatory work also opens the door for broader African contributions to the global theological discourse. African theologians have long advocated for the recognition of Indigenous epistemologies and spiritual practices as valid sources of theological reflection. By incorporating ancestral themes into Christology, Nigerian Lutheran theology affirms the rightful place of African ways of knowing and being in the conversation about Christian faith. This not only enhances the global theological community but also challenges Western models of theology that have historically marginalised African perspectives.

Furthermore, the reimagining of Christ as the ultimate ancestor invites a deeper engagement with African traditions of community and spirituality. In African thought, the concept of community is integral to understanding the divine-human relationship. Christ's death on the cross is not seen merely as an isolated, juridical act; it is a communal event that invites all people into a shared experience of reconciliation and healing. Christ, as the ultimate ancestor, becomes a model of sacrificial love, guiding the community not just in individual salvation but in collective transformation. This theological shift has profound implications for missiology and soteriology in the African context. It offers a model of salvation that is not just personal but communal, transforming the very fabric of society and

healing the social, moral, and spiritual wounds that afflict many African communities today.

As Nigerian Lutheran theology continues to evolve, the cross as an ancestral and communal event offers a holistic and transformative paradigm for articulating faith in Africa. This approach does not simply transplant Western theological ideas into an African context; rather, it allows the gospel to be understood and experienced in a way that is deeply embedded in the African spiritual and communal consciousness. It affirms that African Christians can remain faithful to biblical witness while engaging with their cultural traditions in a meaningful and theologically robust way. In doing so, this reimagining of Christ as the ultimate ancestor provides a path forward for African theology to make significant contributions to global theological discourse, offering new insights into Christology, soteriology, and missiology that reflect the lived experiences of African Christians.

Ultimately, the vision of Christ as the ultimate ancestor challenges the boundaries of theological discourse, offering a vision of Christ that is both globally relevant and deeply rooted in African communal life. It enables Nigerian Lutherans and, by extension, all African Christians to see Christ not as a distant or foreign figure but as one who has entered into their history, their culture, and their very way of life, bringing healing and reconciliation to their communities. This reimagined Christology is not only theologically sound but profoundly transformative, offering a new way of understanding salvation that is both deeply

personal and deeply communal, rooted in the past but ever-present in the life of the African Christian community today.

Bibliography

Afeke, Nii A., and Pieter M. Verster. "Christian Perspectives on Ancestor Veneration." *In die Skriflig* 38, no. 1 (2004): 47–61.

Akrong, Abraham A. "Jesus with the Face of an Ancestor." *Ghana Journal of Religion and Theology* 1 (2006).

Bediako, Kwame. *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995.

Bediako, Kwame. *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004.

Bediako, Kwame. *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and Modern Africa.* Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992.

Beyers, Jaco, and Dora N. Mphahlele. "Jesus Christ as Ancestor: An African Christian Understanding." *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 65, no. 1 (2009): 1–20.

Bujo, Bénézet. *Afrikanische Theologie in ihrem gesellschaftlichen Kontext.* Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1986. Translated as *African Theology in Its Social Context.* Nairobi: St. Paul Publications, 1992.

Bujo, Bénézet, *Foundations of an African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2001.

Bujo, Bénézet. "The African Cult of Ancestors and the Christian Proclamation of the Gospel." *Zeitschrift für*

Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft 64 (1980): 293–306.

Eze, Michael O. *Intellectual History in Contemporary South Africa*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Ezeh, Uchenna A. *Christology and African Ancestor Veneration: A Theological Reflection*. Onitsha: Africana-FEP Publishers, 2003.

Ezeh, Uchenna A. *Jesus Christ the Ancestor: An African Contextual Christology in the Light of the Major Dogmatic Christological Definitions of the Church from the Council of Nicea* (325) *to Chalcedon* (451). New York; Bern: Lang, 2003.

Gyekye, Kwame. *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997.

Katabaro, Brighton. "The Position, Impact and Role of Ancestral Spirits among the Bahaya and Banyambo," Term paper, Makumira University College, 1994.

Magezi, Christopher, and Jacob T. Igba. "African Theology and African Christology: Difficulty and Complexity in Contemporary Definitions and Methodological Frameworks." *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 74, no. 1 (2018): 1–7.

Maier-Revoredo, Winfried. "African Ancestral Theology and the Global Church: Relationality, Memory, and Intercession," *Journal of World Christianity* 8, no. 1 (2015): 43–60.

Martey, Emmanuel. African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation. Eugene, Oregon.: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009.

Masolo, D. A. *Self and Community in a Changing World*. Book Collections on Project MUSE. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.

Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann, 1969.

Mokhoathi, Joel. "Jesus Christ as an Ancestor: A Critique of Ancestor Christology in Bantu Communities." *Pharos Journal of Theology* 99 (2018): 1–16.

Nsibu, Isaak. "The Ancestral Cult among the Bahaya," Makumira: Certificate Course Thesis, 1966.

Nyamiti, Charles. "Christ as Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective." In *African Theology en Route*, edited by K. Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres, 70–81. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979.

Nyamiti, Charles. "Christ as Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective." In Faces of Jesus in Africa, edited by Robert J. Schreiter, 3–23. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991.

Nyende, Peter Thomas Naliaka. "Jesus, the Greatest Ancestor: A Typology-Based Theological Interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa." PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2006.

Richebächer, Wilhelm. *Religious Change and Christology: Christian Theology in East Africa Set Against the Background Processes of Religious Synthesis*. Makumira Publications 17. Neuendettelsau: Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Ökumene, 2007.

Stinton, Diane B. *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Author's contributions

The author declares that he is the sole author of this research article.

Ethical considerations

The author declares that in his research he followed all due ethical standards and guidelines of academic research.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

There was no field research conducted in compiling this article and there are no restrictions on the secondary data presented in this article.

BOOK REVIEWS

Book Review of Chirongoma, Sophia, and Ven Scholar Wayua. *Mother Earth, Mother Africa: World Religions and Environmental Imagination*. Mother Earth, Mother Africa Ser. Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2022, 256 pp. ISBN: 1-998951-13-8.

Erik Egeland

DOI: 10.25661/atj.v41i1.1236

This publication contains contributions to gender-based and religious discourses in relation to ecological challenges in Africa. My objective in this review is to understand this publication on its own terms and place this work in a context.

This publication is the result of academic contributions made at the 5th All Africa Circle of Concerned African Woman Theologians Conference held in Gaborone, Botswana in July 2019. The Circle of Concerned African Woman Theologians (https://circle.org.za/about-us/history-of-the-circle/) was founded in 1989 and is a Pan-African academic association of woman theologians. The Circle conducts research related to woman and religion/theology in the African continent and African diasporas with a special emphasis on research that has transformative impact on the lives of African woman. The initial research period of the Circle of Concerned African

Woman Theologians (1989-2009) focused on the construction and re-interpretation of religion for women. The second period (2009-2019) focused on the constructive response of African women and children in faith communities to the challenges posed by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. A new research focus was adopted at the 2019 conference, with a focus on the relationship between religion/theology, the Environment and Sustainable Development Goals. The publication reviewed here is one out of eight volumes being editing as a result of this conference.

The volume, Mother Earth, Mother Africa: World Religions and Environmental Imagination, contains 13 chapters organised into three sections. The foreword by Ezra Chitando and is followed by an introduction by the editors.

The first section, Religion, gender and environmental sustainability in Africa, contains 7 chapters. Chapter one, Your House is Left to You Desolate: On Christian Grief and Faith for Africa and Earth in the Climate Crisis, by Megan Bedford-Strohm, presents case studies that explore theological reflections on gender, justice and challenges related to climate change. Chapter two, the Christic Okavango Delta of Botswana, by Kenosi Molato and Musa Wenkosi Dube, explores the ecological context of the Okavango Delta as an environmental based Christology. Chapter three, African Islam and Environmental Sustainability: A case study of the Varemba Muslim Woman in Zimbabwe, by Silindiwe Zvingowanisei, considers the

positive role of rural Muslim woman in local ecological preservation practices. Chapter four, Mother Earth, our life support system: Perspectives from a Catholic Nun, by Mercy Shumbamhini, is based on a conversation between fellow nuns, emphasising ecological positioning, human interdependence, and eco-sensitiveness. Chapter five, by Nelly Mwale, The Mother Earth Centre: a narrative of the Comboni sisters' contributions to environmental sustainability in Western Zambia is an account of the Mother Earth Centre, a project focusing on rural woman self-sustainability, and ecological preservation. Chapter six by Cathrine Njagi, African cosmological view: the role of African indigenous knowledge systems in the preservation of Mount Kenya Forest, focuses on how rural woman in indigenous communities participate in forest conservation by incorporating religious and cultural resources. Chapter seven, by Sophia Chirongoma and Silindiwe Zvingowanisei, Karanga woman's utilisation of Indigenous Systems on climate change adaptions and mitigation in Zimbabwe: towards the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 13 (SDG13), focuses on the integration between scientific and indigenous knowledge and how these systems are adapted by indigenous woman for climate initiatives.

The second section, Gender, religion and access to landownership in Africa contains 2 chapters that raise questions about the relationship between gender inequalities and landownership. Chapter eight, by Excellent Chirese, Access to land ownership and gender in the light of African indigenous religion in Zimbabwe amongst the Shona

in Chiredzi District, Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe, is a case study about woman and landownership rights in a resettlement site. Chapter nine, by Wayua Kiilu, Gender, religion and access to land ownership in Kenya: Focus on Islam and Christianity, shows how Christian and Islamic teachings have negative effects for land inheritance for woman. The chapter argues that increased gender inclusivity in access to land may secure food security and woman's livelihood.

The third section, Mother Africa and religious imagination: Gender discourse explores Afrocentric approaches for understanding gender stereotypes in African contexts. Chapter ten, by Yoknyam Dabale, the Methodological approach of African Woman addressing gender biases in Christianity, provides an analysis of gender biases in African Christianity and explores solutions by discussing three central African feminist scholars, Nyambura J. Njoroge, Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musa W. Dube. Chapter eleven, by Seyram Amenyedzi, the Afrocentric Womanist Paradigm, discusses hybrid approaches based on Afrocentrism and womanism in order to question gender inequalities experienced by woman in religio-cultural contexts. Chapter twelve, by Joseph Muyangata, Gender and holy Prayer Mountains in Zimbabwe: A case study of the Prayer Mountain Retreat Center in Borrowdale, Harare, focuses on how suburban Christian woman in Zimbabwe utilise mountains as gender specific sites for prayer and sanctuary. Chapter thirteen by Musa Wenkosi Dube, Speaking the unspeakable: the power of PLWH&A

biographies. The abbreviation in this title points to people living with HIV and AIDS, and the chapter argues how stories about these conditions have a therapeutic and social impact with a redemptive power to counter discrimination and stigma.

In sum, the strength of this publication lies in that the separate chapters engage with a variety of current discourses and empirical examples concerning the relationship between gender, religion and ecological challenges in Africa. One weakness with this publication lies perhaps in the lack of a summarising perspective. There are some short hints in the introduction (p. 3) about the actuality of this publication in light of ongoing discourses in African contexts, but the publication may well have restated and expanded these issues in a summary chapter developing theoretical perspectives. In the near future, many of the theological discourses raised by this publication will surely be an inherent part of the questions posed by the next generation of African theologians.

Book Review of Hinlicky Wilson, Sarah. *Seven Ways of Looking at the Transfiguration*. Unabridged. S.l.: Thornbush Press, 2024, 129 pp. 979-8-9899141-2-8

Jörg Zehelein

DOI: 10.25661/atj.v41i1.1237

In this publication for preachers and ordinary believers, Sarah Hinlicky Wilson addresses a discrepancy that she observes. She points at the emphasis of mainline churches' liturgical calendars on the day of transfiguration, on the one hand, and the lack of such emphasis among contemporary preachers and believers, on the other hand. The author aims to bridge this gap by examining the depth and richness of the transfiguration from seven distinct angles. She draws on biblical insights from both the Old and the New Testament and provides her own translations, displaying the meanings, structures, and emphases of Mark 9:10, Matt 16:28 – 17:9, Luke 9:27–36, and 2 Pet 1: 16–18.

After some helpful remarks for readers not acquainted with academic expertise on, e.g., gospels and original languages of the Bible (pp. 4– 5), the publication starts with the gospel of Mark from where the author develops two distinct perspectives, one being Jesus' "metamorphosis", the other being "eschatology." The first emphasises the change that occurs in Jesus during the transfiguration, specifically the sudden, outstanding whiteness of Jesus' clothes. Concerning Luke and Matthew, but especially imagery of

Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation, the author holds that this transformation is not a purification process, neither from dirt nor from sin. It is also "not a preview of the Resurrection." (p. 18) It is rather apocalyptic divine presence shining from Jesus. This is affirmed when "suddenly two of the all-stars of Israel's history appear for a tête-à-tête with him." (p. 19) These are Moses and Elijah, who represent the apocalyptic dimension.

The third perspective on the transfiguration ties in with Matthew and is entitled "exodus." This term, however, stems from Luke 9:31 and the author's translation of what others term "departure." The author's point here is not the entire exodus story but the revelation of divine glory. The glory of Jesus, as the author holds, is not based on victorious greatness, but on suffering and the cross (p. 41). From there, the eschatological transformation of all believers, envisioned by Paul in 2 Cor 3:18, is not self-achievement, but the receiving of God's grace. Thus, the author criticises an abundance of "books, meditations, or prayers on the Transfiguration, [where] you'll find a lot about you, not so much about Christ." (p. 41)

The fourth approach towards transfiguration focuses on the merrymaking feast of Sukkot that includes the erection of tabernacles or tents (Lev 23). By building three of them, like in Sukkot, Peter wants to make this moment endure, according to all three synoptic gospels. But Jesus refuses. "They're not yet at Sukkot, but right in the middle of Passover." (p. 50) The author points out, furthermore, that Jesus' reluctance has a slightly different meaning in Luke.

There, transfiguration occurs on the eighth day, which resembles the last, i.e., the eighth, day of the Sukkot celebration (Lev 23:36). Thus, in Luke, transfiguration is a foretaste of the eschatological Parousia of Christ (p. 54).

Perspective no. five (pp. 62–78), for the first time in this book, substantially dwells in the reference to transfiguration in 2 Pet 1:16–18. From there, the author narrates extensively about the eyewitnesses Peter and his companions, James and John (pp. 74–75). Far from being outstanding heroes, they appear as failing and misunderstanding both within the transfiguration narrative, and in its surrounding literary context. At the transfiguration, the "bright light left the eyewitnesses in the dark." (p. 78)

The sixth way of looking at the transfiguration brings the cloud to the centre of attention. It is a symbol of God's presence not only during Jesus' metamorphosis, but throughout the entire history of Israel, especially during the Exodus. In this regard, the author refers to Moses' transfiguration after his descent from the mountain (Exod 34:29–30). The author expands her Old Testament reflections to even seeing the ambivalences of the sign of the cloud. It can represent Baal, the rain god, or refer to God's wrath (e.g., Nah 1:2–5). Nevertheless, when the cloud "overshadows" Jesus and his companions, the Lord is present as He reveals Jesus as "a holy and beloved son, son of Mary, Son of God." (p. 86)

The seventh and last perspective on the transfiguration is introduced with a question. "But when Jesus is raised from the dead, there is no light, no glory, no

cloud, no voice, no naming. Why not?" (p. 96) To answer this, the author explores the meaning of Christ's Parousia (p. 113) and appears to formulate a conclusive thesis of the entire publication. For Hinlicky Wilson, transfiguration is a premature inbreak of Christ's Parousia. It is not his cross, Resurrection, or Pentecost. Because of this, 2 Pet, which extensively deals with the question of (the delayed) Christ's second coming, does not refer to Jesus' resurrection, but to his transfiguration.

At the end of this review, I may conclude: Whoever rejoices in fresh, associative, and entertaining language and does not need definite conclusions will enjoy this book. It is a pleasure, e.g., on pp. 39–44, to learn about etymological connections of Greek terms like *morphe* and *metamorpheomai* (Rom 8:29–30, 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18; Phil 3:21) not by dry dictionary instructions, but with ease and humour. The author decided to include a bibliography at the end of her book, but does not explicitly engage with any academic exegetical discourse. This maintains a smooth flow of words but weakens the weight of argumentation. Overall, this publication will inform and inspire academically and/or homiletically interested readers. Hinlicky Wilson interweaves various threads running through Scripture with creativity and rich biblical knowledge. Passages from the Old Testament and the New Testament, whether from the Gospels or the Epistles, become part of an exciting collage of seven perspectives on the transfiguration story.

LIST OF PEER REVIEWERS

The following scholars from both, Tanzanian and international backgrounds, are part of the constant pool of peer reviewers for Africa Theological Journal:

Peer Reviewers from Tumaini University Makumira:

- Prof. Dr. Joseph Parsalaw
- Prof. Dr. Faustin Mahali
- Dr. Nehemia Moshi
- Dr. Angela Olotu
- Dr. Jörg Zehelein
- Dr. Elieshi Mungure
- Dr. Suzanna Sitayo
- Dr. Seth Sululu
- Godluck Kitomari (book reviews)
- Thomas Ndama (book reviews)

External and International Peer Reviewers (in alphabetical order):

- Prof. Beth E. Elness-Hanson (PhD) (VID Specialized University, Stavanger/Norway)
- Prof. Dr. Claudia Jahnel (University of Bochum/Germany)
- Prof. Dr. Sarah Hinlicky Wilson (Institute for Ecumenical Research, Straßbourg/France)
- Prof. Dr. Mika Vähäkangas (Åbo Akademi University/Finland)

- Prof. Dr. Kabiro wa Gatumu (St. Paul University, Limuru /Kenya)
- Prof. em. Dr. Wilhelm Richebächer (University of Applied Sciences for Intercultural Theology, Hermannsburg/Germany)
- Prof. Dr. Moritz Fischer (University of Applied Sciences for Intercultural Theology, Hermannsburg/Germany)
- Prof. Dr. Andreas Nehring (University of Erlangen/Germany)
- Prof. Dr. Andreas Heuser (University of Basel/Switzerland)
- Prof. Dr. Benjamin Simon (Ecumenical Institute Bossey/Switzerland)
- Rev. Dr. Msafiri Joseph Mbilu (Bishop of ELCT North Eastern Diocese)