

REDEEMED FROM THE EARTH? ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE AND SALVATION THEOLOGY IN AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY¹

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Abstract

The growth and development within African Christianity have attracted the attention of Christian theological researchers in recent decades. However, this has obviously not witnessed a corresponding growth in environmental theology. This paper argues that this is due to the human-centred and otherworldly nature of the thinking about salvation – a way of thinking which African Christians have not only inherited from missionary Christianity but also radicalised. The paper argues that for African Christians to better configure salvation theology to creation faith there is the need for configuring Jesus Christ through an ecological lens and consequently correlating the implications of the theological claims to salvation wrought through Him to the salvation of creation. Consequently, in this paper, I do a theological ecological anatomy of salvation theology in African Christianity, as it is currently, and explore a constructive configuration of salvation theology from the perspective of creation faith.

Key Words: Salvation Theology, Salvation, African Christianity, Redemption, Environmental Problems and Creation

Introduction

The context centres on concern and apprehension about continuing global environmental change and our awakening to the rather grim fact of the earth's groaning (Romans 8:19-22). Typified by global warming; various forms of pollution; land degradation, species depletion, deforestation, et cetera, the creation is waiting with expectation on being delivered from bondage through God's salvation. Methodologically, I enter the discussion from a mixed background of African evangelical and neo-evangelical orientation, with specific reference to West African Christianity. Thus while the views shared in this work are grounded in literature, and not entirely different from what pertains to what is generally referred to as African Christianity, it methodologically reflects its West African Christian context, but is not limited by it.

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Salvation Theology in Christianity

Although the promise of salvation and or liberation pervades all religions as their central function (Hick 1989), this has been expressed largely in relation to the human being. Christians affirm salvation mainly as an initiative that “was prompted by God’s concern that men should achieve the greatest realization of their own best welfare, culminating in their sharing in the life of His nearer presence” (Baeta 1968:13). Christian theology affirms this achievement through Jesus Christ who God sent into the world as His personal means of communication that “all men may come to understand God’s mind and heart in relation to themselves and His will concerning how they should conduct their lives” (Baeta 1968:13). This encounter with Jesus Christ, confronting the individual with his insincerity to the will of God, leads to repentance and redemption from sin, the transformation into a new person and empowerment through the Holy Spirit to live a new life. Hick (1989:44) notes that it is the “reality of people transformed, or in the process of transformation, from self-centredness to God-centredness that continues the substance of Christian salvation.” Therefore, salvation basically entails the conversion and transformation wrought in one’s life through an encounter with Jesus Christ. This understanding is crucial to salvation in Christianity.

As noted above, basic to the salvation theology in Christianity is the concept of sin and human depravity whereby “ordinary human existence is defective, unsatisfactory, lacking” (Hick 1989:32). It has therefore been the case that, in explaining salvation, Christian theology stresses alienation from God and each other. However, Snyder and Scandrett (2011) stressed that the corrective for a biblically revealed truth is that the alienation brought by sin also leads to alienation from creation (the earth) and man from woman. This alienation – now fourfold in their relationships – is what Snyder and Scandrett (2011) refer to as the ecology of sin. As it were, implied in Christian salvation theology is the traditional notion of creation “fallen” and “corrupted” from its goodness (Gen 1:31) as a result of humankind’s sinfulness. Aptly put, “creation is diseased because of sin” (Snyder and Scandrett 2011:3). The question therefore remains unanswered why Christian salvation theology, in the words of Snyder and Scandrett (2011), is characterised by the divorce between heaven and earth, and what, according to Landes (1984:140), George Hendry referred to as the “eclipse of creation” in current theology.

While providing answers to the question above is beyond the scope of this paper, some reasons are overtly obvious to gloss over. As it were, an eschatological conception of the kingdom of God which was announced by Christ, becomes instructive. Salvation is understood spiritually and heavenwards and pictured as a future blissful state in which redeemed Christians participate. Salvation in the Christian faith has been deeply eschatological and heaven-oriented to the extent that, in the words of Zerbe (1992), the cosmic shape of salvation is minimized or even entirely overlooked in Christianity. Instructive also is the belief that the salvation of humankind will be removed from this corrupted creation into a transformed and sanctified state through the justification and sanctification offered by the sacrifice of Christ. Generally, the notion that the divine restorative plan is *creation-sin-redemption*, which dominated the Western church, contrary to the *creation-incarnation-recreation* plan – which was the way the early church understood God’s redemptive plan, as it centred on Jesus Christ and the victory of the Redeemer-Creator God in Jesus – is to be noted (Snyder and Scandrett (2011).

Creation and Salvation in African Christian Theology

As it were with Christian salvation theology as discussed above, salvation among African Christians is the deliverance/redemption and healing of the human being who had displayed insincerity towards God and/or has become the victim of sin². Notwithstanding, slightly varied understandings and expressions of salvation exist in African Christianity. Typical of the African Christian is the understanding of salvation as not only from sin but also “from one’s spiritual enemies, that is the devil, evil spirits, witchcraft and other such inimical forces who are only out to ‘steal, kill and destroy’ (John 10:10)” (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:134).

Clearly, in African Christianity, salvation not only entails spiritual redemption from the “forces of darkness” (which is crucial in the African context because of the belief in pervasive evil forces and spirits), but also the experience of forgiveness of sins and a new relationship with God for the “saved” in Christ. Thus it is that the salvation wrought through Christ is the redemption from ungodly and malevolent forces within creation which predispose the human being to acting contrary to the divine will through which the human being freed enjoys the glorious grace and love of God – including the blessing to a prosperous and wealthy life (mostly defined materially). This is made possible by the Spirit of Christ’s enablement which is regarded as crucial in the salvation of the individual to enjoy the kind of salvation desired by the African – the one embedded in the African indigenous imagination – salvation as the enjoying of the abundant life in many ways here and now and the spiritual dealing with malevolent spirits that diminish the ability to have abundant life (Ngong 2010).

This radicalisation of salvation in African Christianity since the late 1970s (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005), and its continuous growth and prevalence, has been well noted and written about.³ While the literature shows that many activities and developments are taking place within African Christianity, especially with regard to the message and expression of salvation in terms of churches and numbers, there remain a few troubling tendencies, notably the divorce of salvation from creation. Conspicuously, the material space within which the redeemed person lives, moves and has his being, has been taken for granted. Attending the burgeoning growth of Christian mission in Africa is the “lack of theological reflection on the complex but crucial connection between creation and salvation” (Golo 2012:314).

Against the backdrop of the groaning creation, and very much so, against the background of the oft-cited African’s closeness to and consciousness of the creation, the question whether the God who saves humankind is interested in the salvation of creation, comes to mind. Indeed whether the saved humankind has been saved from the earth or whether (s)he has a role to play in the redeeming and healing of creation remains being asked. These questions become necessary because the salvation message, which is the core of the message and mission of the church, has been very much spiritually centred and on

² For the neo-Pentecostal variants, which are rather rife in Africa and seeding into the many other forms of Christianity in Africa, see Golo, “Creation and Salvation in African neo-Pentecostalism” in Conradie (2012), *Creation and Salvation Vol. 2: A Companion of Recent Theological Movements*.

³ See for instance the Part Three of the anthology edited by Adogame, Gerloff and Hock (2008) *Christianity in Africa and the African Diaspora*, with submissions by Ojo Mathews, Philomena Mwaura, Roswith Gerloff and Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu on contemporary developments in African Christianity especially at the Charismatic/neo-Pentecostal front. See also Ayegboyin (2011) “New Pentecostal Churches and Prosperity Theology in Nigeria”, Ogbu (2003), “‘Globalisation’ and Religion: The Pentecostal Model in Contemporary Africa.”

the innermost being of the human person (Ngong 2010) at the expense of pressing debilitating issues, such as ecological destruction in Africa. In light of the ecological crisis facing Africa, theological activity cannot continue with a theology of salvation that splits it from creation theology as if they were separate. The fallen state of the creation, concluding the depraved nature of man are to be understood as the context for grasping fully the salvific grace of God, through Christ.

Following from the discussion, the ecological negligence in African Christian salvation theology, largely correlates with the predicament within global Christianity. However, it is important to note that one cannot fully comprehend the divorce between creation and salvation in African Christian theology until one appreciates at least two notable developments within African Christianity. The one is embedded in the African cosmology and the Christian response to it and the other related to missionary history and missions in Africa.

Firstly, to a large extent, exploring African Christians understanding of salvation cannot be done without understanding their conception of the cosmos. Generally, great numbers of Africans with a religious orientation believe that the African cosmos is vivified with spirit beings, both good and malevolent. Of specific concern to African Christians, especially neo-evangelicals, is the presence of evil spirits in the cosmos which do not only constrain the human person from rebelling against God but also in themselves work against the freedom and liberty of the believer to live a fulfilled Christian life.⁴ As with the indigenous religion, this is highlighted by the belief that there are intrinsic correlations between the invisible and visible realms (Ter Harr 2005). Malevolent spirits, therefore, may act to enslave and oppress human beings. In the light of this, when African Christians talk about salvation the redemption from the influences of such malevolent spirits is emphasised.

Consequently, salvation through Jesus Christ means being redeemed and transformed into a new person (2 Cor. 5:17). It also means freedom from those malevolent spirits indwelling the cosmos. As one would naturally expect, the result is the turning away from the creation and waging war against the negative spirit forces within it, while marching towards the eternal kingdom to be revealed. Evidently, a belief that is core in mainstream Christian salvation theology, and which has been reinforced in Africa through an imperialist method of Christianisation, has truly found a home in Africa. This has been further reinforced by the growth of (neo-) Pentecostal Christian groups in Africa.

Secondly, the mercantilist manner of presenting the salvation message in Africa left the impression that the earth does not matter, save as a means of achieving salvation. Characterising missionary activity was trade, production and consumption into which the converts (African Christians) were immersed – an orientation to life that the African Christian is finding difficult to let go. In the case of Ghana for instance, although the missionaries represented missionary Pietism as a non-materialistic form of worship, their expectations that their African converts adopt Western lifestyles, mystified their own actions (Meyer 2002). An example was the Norddeutsche Missiongesellschaft (NMG) where NMG missionaries were critical about converts' adoption of trade as a profession and about the pleasures of consumption, but they allowed Africans to sell raw materials to Western trading companies and to buy commodities from them (Meyer 2002). The submission is

⁴ See Asamoah-Gyadu's (2005) treatment of this belief among Ghanaian charismatics, with his emphasis on the Lord's Vineyard Ministry. Biblically, this finds grounding in Ephesians 6:12. Gerrie ter Haar (2005) observes this spiritual orientation of African neo-Pentecostal even beyond Africa, when she studied the True Teachings of Christ's Temple in the Netherlands

that this “promotion of work for money, and the subsequent incorporation of people into world trade, either as producers of raw materials or as consumers of Western commodities, was part and parcel of the propagation of the new lifestyle” (Meyer 2002:249).

The result is an anthropocentric utilitarian notion of salvation that has reduced the earth to commodification, with no spiritual significance, save an abode of demonic spirits which must be overcome if humans would live in prosperity – an environmentally disastrous worldview. This is because natures indwelling ‘demonic’ principalities and powers are obstacles to the progress and transformation of the redeemed – a notion that is predominant of various forms of neo-Pentecostalism in Africa, both within and outside traditional Pentecostalism.⁵ Hence, salvation theology in contemporary Africa has not succeeded in sustaining the oft-said value system of the African and ways by which the African interprets and reconstructs meanings and systems of value – not least the way the African conceives of creation and the world (Sindima 1990).

It is therefore not surprising that years after the church in the West is widely responding to the crisis of climate change in various forms and even competing theological orientations, such as existing between the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN) and the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation in the US, African Christianity is still yet to engage actively with environmental activism. Indeed this is very much the case with academic theology in Africa which lays claim to taking the African worldview and cosmology serious, yet is reluctant to reflect on the creation when theologising on salvation theology, which ironically has been at the forefront of African theology.⁶

Christ and Creation: Configuring the Creator-Redeemer Christ of the Creation

Paul noted, “so we preach Christ to everyone. With all possible wisdom we warn and teach them in order to bring each one into God’s presence as a mature individual in union with Christ” (Col. 1:28). It is instructive to note that African Christian theology is dominated by engagement with the person of Christ. Pobe (1979) observes that Christology is at the heart of the encounter between Christianity and culture in Africa.⁷ This engagement with Jesus Christ seems to suggest a certain priority attached to the message of salvation among African theologians. As noted earlier this central Christian conviction is that “God has decisively wrought salvation for all in and through Jesus Christ” (Bosch 1991:393). Considering the structural challenges in Africa, one would have thought that this conviction correlates with the aspirations of African Christians. However, the dominance of a

⁵ See Omenyo (2006) *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism* on his discussion of how what was traditional thought as Pentecostal belief and spirituality have found a home in the different mainline and/or mission-instituted churches in Ghana.

⁶ This is not a suggestion that the churches in Africa are utterly unaware or silent on climate change issues. For instance the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Ghana has received international awards as a pacesetter in such activities in Africa and others such as SAFCEI and NECCSA in South Africa can be mentioned. However, the concern is that they are relative latecomers and/or new entrants on the scene. This has been the criticism powerfully made against African theology by Mante (2004) *Africa: The Theological and Philosophical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis*. It is also that while one hears individual or group pastoral comments and communiques on environmental change and degradation, these are yet to metamorphose into active groups and activisms as they are hardly conspicuous within the African terrain. Similarly, this is not to denigrate earlier eco-theological works in Africa before the turn of the century such as those of Pobe (1985), Sindima (1990), Asante (1994), Obeng (1999) and Gitau (2000) and a number of latest developments in the field.

⁷ See also Stinton (2004), Nyamiti (1999), and Mugambi and Magesa (1999).

Christocentric focus of African theology in the various expressions of salvation such as inculturation, liberation, feminism and reconstruction has been expressed anthropocentrically. From the perspective of creation faith, the question whether there is any relationship between the salvation announced by Jesus Christ and the creation of God becomes worth posing. In other words, has the purpose of Christ anything to do with the mission of God, which is: How do we relate with Jesus' call to salvation with concerns for the creation of God.

Schmid (1984:111) avers that what Israel as a people "experienced in her history and what the early Christian community experienced in relation to Jesus is understood and interpreted in terms of this one basic theme," the healing of the creation and sustaining it. A basic understanding of this purpose of the Creator God and the Redeemer God-incarnate (Christ) against this background is crucial. Christ and his redemptive act – his teaching, death and resurrection – was itself the continuing of the redemption-creation and creation-redemption mission of God. Williams (1996) writes:

God the Son is the instrument of creation. It was through the Son, the eternal word of God, that the universe came to be.... Surely since the Son is also God, and God is the creator, He is totally involved in creation. But his function is not that of being the fountainhead of creation. Rather, He is the medium or instrument through whom God the Father does his creative work. Now having made this important refinement, we can rightly rejoice in the fact that everything comes through the Son. This means that the same One who has redeemed us was the channel through whom all things came into being.

Evidently, the presence of the kingdom in Jesus means the restoration (healing) of creation's wholeness has already begun in an earnest and substantial way, although the kingdom shall not be manifested in its totality and perfection until God's final triumph (Zerbe 1992). In relation to the creation, Jesus Christ, "the one who reflects the brightness of God's glory and is the exact likeness of God's own being, sustaining the universe with his powerful word" (Heb 1:3a GNB), remains the centre that holds together the human and non-human creation. Indeed he sustains creation through the redemption, recreation and healing of relationships of alienation. Therefore in Jesus Christ the salvation and healing of both humans and non-humans – the creation – is complete because the "biblical doctrine of redemption through the cross presupposes the doctrine of creation" (Snyder & Scandrett 2011:55). Here, the redemption work of Christ Jesus is holistic, with the understanding that the purpose and plan of God is "to bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head" (Eph. 1:10 GNB). It is for this reason that Snyder and Scandrett (2001) aver that the redemption that Christ brought cannot be fully understood biblically unless the full story of creation is kept in purview, not just that human creation alone.

Snyder and Scandrett's (2001) notion of salvation as "creation healed" is particularly instructive here, because it connects appropriately with the African concept of health and life, which are largely ecological and cosmic. This is much more so when African Christians understand salvation as healing, with one of the most popular attributes of Jesus Christ in African Christianity as a *healer*. In the African worldview health is not measured only along the parameters of physical wellness or infirmity but against the backdrop of broader relationships such as social, familial, environmental and spiritual (Owuahene-Acheampong 1998). Maintaining a healthy relationship with society as a large family, the natural environment, spirit beings and, of course, personal care/hygiene, is crucial for guaranteeing wellbeing. This is what makes a healthy person in a healthy society. Thus, the logic of *oikos*, would be said to be prevalent in African societies, at least in determining health and

its absence. The various attributes conferred on Christ by African Christians – healer, priest, chief, warrior, provider, protector, et cetera – are therefore helpful in understanding how all things are reconciled in Christ (Col 1:20 and Eph. 1:10) and how in Christ all things hold together. Interestingly and instructively, African salvation theology already highlights that the healing that Jesus provides extends beyond physical healing to include any kind of brokenness including jobs, business failures, finances and relationships, both marital and social.

For instance, and specifically related to healing, although the natural world hardly featured in their salvation theology, African Christians are known for their use of trees, herbs and many other aspects of creation (such as retreats into forests and solitary quiet sublime spaces) in seeking personal healing – salvation. Theologically, this is with the view that everything is reconciled and made right – redeemed – in Christ. Therefore, through Christ, the use of the creation and its elements can provide salvation for the African Christian but the salvation of creation itself through Christ hardly occurs in the theology and, until recently, occurring in a limited way. It therefore become truly necessary to drive home that, as noted earlier above, it is within the biblical vision that creation itself features and is featured within the redemption and recreation plan of God which was carried out and completed by Jesus Christ. Consequently, and considering the holistic wellbeing and health ontology of the African which correlates with the holistic redemption mission of Christ, it must be emphasised that Christ's salvation includes the natural world within which we encounter Christ and his salvation.

Rethinking African Salvation Theology in Light of Global Environmental Change

What then do the views expressed about Jesus Christ, the kingdom announced by Jesus Christ and/or the salvation wrought through him, imply for the way we think about salvation? In light of the fact that the integrity of life (creation) hangs in a balance in a world of global dynamics, Schweiker (2004:5) questions; “Can the religions respond to this new situation, advance human flourishing and protect the earth?” He suggests that the response will not be only those contributions that religions can make to global ethics in terms of common norms and attitudes as well as beliefs about human dignity. But it will also be “in terms of what has been most suspect in religion, during the modern age, namely, the moral significance of myth” (Schweiker 2004:15). Within Christianity, much more so within African Christianity, the creation stories of the Bible and creation faith offers credible entrances into the rethinking of salvation theology in an age where the integrity of life is threatened by global environmental change.

In light of the groaning (sickness) of the earth, what has become evident in African salvation theology can be summed up in the words of Snyder and Scandrett (2011:xv) as follows:

... the church has a misdiagnosis problem. On the one hand, we have insisted that sin is comprehensive (*total* depravity), but on the other hand we have not adequately explored the meaning of sin as a moral and spiritual infection (*total depravity*).... Consequently we have failed to see that God's cure is as comprehensive as the disease. We have ignored or bypassed key biblical insights regarding both the nature of the problem and the nature of the solution because we have overlooked the biblical theme of sin as disease.

The question confronting us is how then African theologians and the church reflect on the themes of creation and salvation in Christianity in this age so that we are better able to pull a thread across them as ontologically interrelated in the redemption mission of Jesus Christ. I suggest three of such closely related reflections that connect creation to salvation theology.

Creation as the Stage for the Drama of Salvation

As earlier noted, African Christians, especially neo-evangelicals, have the tendency to leave creation behind on their forward march to *Zion, the city of Gold*, with the belief that the earth and earthly existence is temporal. This can be nothing else than an unbiblical and faulty theology, if not heretical; for it ignores beliefs of the new-Creation which will be on this earth. The African cosmos may be inhabited by malevolent spirits and ‘fallen’ in Christian parlance. Nonetheless, this does not reduce creation less the good entity which God created and sustains and, as we shall see in the next section, which God uses for the salvation of His own. Fedler (2006) underscores that irrespective of the fact that sin is endemic in the world; the created world itself is not evil. She notes that because God loves and cares about the world and happenings within it as well as our material created bodies, and not only our spirits, it is not enough for Christians to focus on the spiritual wellbeing of themselves.

It is informative that the world which God created is that which confronts and presents itself to humankind as the stage on which salvation plays out through a personalised relationship with the Creator-God. Farmer (1948:68) writes:

First, if there is to be a cooperation, along with tension and resistance, between the human will and the divine will – without which, as we have insisted, the relationship would not be personal – then it would seem that there must be a sphere which is neither man nor God but in which their wills meet and achieve, or fail to achieve, an active and creative concurrence with each other. Stating it from the human side, we may say that it is essential to man’s status as a personal being and to his sense of the significance of his moral life, that he should be called upon to make choices, and decisions which make a difference and are not merely play-acting; in particular it is essential that he should be able to refuse to do God’s will not merely in the abstract or in imagination, but in such wise that his refusal involves that *pro tanto* God’s will is not done.

It is within the creation, irrespective of how corrupted it has become, that the God self and will is revealed (Romans 1:20), to the freewill of the believer who seeks a personalised relationship with God. God’s eternal and universal rule are fundamentally expressed within the creation; they guard and maintain order in the creation and both the OT and NT testify that God’s rule is crucial for continuing order in the natural and human worlds; and affront to and rebellion from God’s rule cause breakdowns in the natural and cosmic order (Zerbe 1992).⁸ Indeed, the reverse is true that the blessings that follow the obeisance of the rules are “nothing more than a harmonious (*heil*) world order given in creation” (Schmid 1984:110).

In other words, one can risk averring that without the created order as a contested space where the freewill of human beings interacts with distractions away from the divine will, God’s salvation will basically not be required. This is because sin and rebellion would not have existed. Therefore salvation is built into the fabric of creation, very much so in its

⁸ Here Zerbe (1992) identifies texts such as Mark 13:24-25; Rev. 6-19; Ps. 24:4-6.

corrupt and fallen state and essential for negotiating the self will and the divine will. Thus in our relationship with the creator God, who in the long run saves/liberates, creation becomes symbolic for our redemption, even if indirectly. Farmer (1948:72) notes: "The principle is sometimes called the sacramental principle. It is that God deals with men, communicates Himself to them, through symbols. He does this in order that they may have room to grow as persons, and may enter into truly personal relations with God." Bluntly stated, corrupted creation tests our resolve to love, relate to and submit the self to the Creator God or to love ourselves and other things within the creation and distant ourselves from God. This does not imply God intends to injure frail and weak humanity within the circle of its influence. According to Farmer (1948) it is rather that God does not want to overwhelm finite creatures which he seeks to shape into personal life, with constant pressure for which reason "He has withdrawn himself behind symbols. Neither for man's thinking, nor for his loving, does He present Himself as a single, unmediated, divine object ... So He speaks to the man through the world, through the system of society and nature in which He has placed him" (Farmer 1948:73).

Thus the African Christians' refusal to engage the natural world in its theology of salvation betrays the human will to estrangement from God himself and his will – the obeisance to which is itself crucial to salvation and a life of God-centredness.

Creation as Salvation, Salvation as Creation

Embedded in the African Christian understanding of the cosmos is the belief in the cosmic struggle between malevolent spirits, on the one hand, and the Holy Spirit (the spirit of God) and angelic figures, on the other. In this battle, African Christian affirm, God, through His spirit and angels, will ultimately win decisively. This belief offers an opportunity for them to reflect on the created order as the area where the saving work of God through Christ is evident. In agreement with the first point discussed above, because sin 'hijacked' the creation through various guises and has continued to dominate and oppress humankind, God entered into creation through the Redeemer Christ and His spirit in order to redeem humankind and to renew creation. Therefore, through Jesus Christ, God entered into creation with the purpose of giving creation direction and to save and reconcile humanity to the Godself, his fellow beings and the created order.

For the purposes of the discussion below, it becomes crucial at this point to work with a definition of creation "as the bringing of the universe into existence by God. It is a calling into being that which did not exist before" (Williams 1996:98). Although it seems plausible to suggest that the purpose of God in creation is to manifest the glory of God (Williams 1996), it is precisely the case that an integral aspect of the glory of God is his power to redeem and establish a people and the created order (creation) and to draw the creation to Himself. This is in order that He might communicate His glory and power of redemption, liberation and establishment. It is indicated that the basic theological motif of creation faith, according to the OT when it speaks of creation, is that creation faith does not achieve an independent status but rather does so in connection with faith in Yahweh's saving and redeeming and/or liberation activity in history (Schmid 1984).

The notion of God as a saving-creator, whereby creation serves as salvation and salvation as creation, according to Schmid (1984), is supported from the history of religion from the ancient North East, which supports two basic views. The one is that the myth of creation has its setting within the annual ritual of the New Year's festival where the assumption is that only through the recitation of the myth there is the assurance that the New Year will take a new course with a revival of nature and fertility. The argument is that

creation myth does not actually deal primarily with the origin of the world, but rather with the present world in which the people live and how this belief sustained their flourishing. The other view Schmid (1984) and Anderson (1984) identify as the order that has been established through the act of creation, which is not necessarily the renewal of creation as much as it is for the order of the state. As noted in the motif of *Chaoskampf*, the God of creation creates as part of the process of saving, redeeming and liberating out of an unstable and chaotic environment that is debilitating to the flourishing of the human and nonhuman creation (Schmid 1984, Anderson 1984). Therefore, God's intervention in order to replace chaos with calmness through ordering it (creation) in itself is an act of salvation/redemption, just as the Redeemer Christ (the incarnated God) has come to set order in the creation and life of those who have accepted Him (John 10:10) and to re-create them anew (2 Corinthians 5:17) from the chaotic bondage of sin and rebellion. Notably, Scripture consistently identifies God's glorious work through Jesus Christ by the Spirit with both creation and redemption, and commonly joins the themes of creation and transformation (Snyder and Scandrett 2001).

Although Landes (1984) disagrees with the creation-out-of chaos motif, because Genesis 1 and other OT texts describing Yahweh's cosmic creation do not portray creation as brought about from a chaotic condition that required their liberation, he agrees that there was an impression from the Mesopotamians that "the creation of the world was at the same time a liberation, a freeing of the ordered cosmos from the ever-present menace of primordial chaos" (Landes 1984:136). This intrinsic creation-salvation relationship is further attested to by the redemption and the final making (creating) of a people – Israel. The story of the Exodus, wilderness wandering and the final annexing of the land were carried out through not only human actors but also forces and elements of nature such as plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, moon and stars standing still, which were all employed in God's great redemptive work (Landes 1984).

Therefore, evidently, through the redemptive/saving acts of God a people were born (created) just as Christians were through Jesus Christ. Salvation, therefore, is a world-making (creation) history just as creation theologically is redemptive. Landes (1984:137) asserts that in the case of Israel, "the cosmic Creator was also a Liberating Creator, whose creative power was extended into history, not for the purpose of either continuing or redoing creation, but for creating a people through liberating deeds and a covenant commitment, from which they would become enfranchised into a new service, the service of their creating and redeeming God." For this reason, he concludes that thus for Israel "Yahweh's creation power in history was at the same time his liberation power, and they must be held together. One could not be properly understood without the other" (Landes 1984:137). It is against this background that one cannot but agree with Conradie (2005:19) that "creation could be viewed as God's continuous redemptive acts towards the *telos* of creation, while redemption could be understood as a creative process in which God allows something new to emerge out of a world infected by sin." Creation is salvation as salvation is creation.

Saved Humanity as Participants in the Divine Plan of Saving Creation

As noted earlier, the divorce between heaven and earth has been triggered by the Christian understanding of sin in relation to creation. This largely accounts for reasons why salvation has been spiritualised (focusing on the innermost of the human being) and heaven focused. To the contrary, Snyder and Scandrett (2011) indicate that what salvation is, is rather about the mending and overcoming of this divorce for now and the future, because ultimately "salvation means the final marriage of heaven and of earth in the New Creation" (Snyder

and Scandrett 2011:3). This idea finds resonance in the assertion by Schweiker (2004:26) that:

by drawing together creation and new creation a bold revision is made in Christian moral convictions. Creation as a distinctly theological idea includes, but is more than ‘nature.’ Creation so defined extends the realms of responsibility to all people. Additionally, the transformation and renewal of conscience – the primary mode of our beings as moral creatures – is precisely how best to live within the reality of God’s gracious creative activity. It is to live in the new creation.

By expanding the horizon of understanding creation as a theological idea, it also fosters the understanding that the redemption of the Christian carries a responsibility to working towards renewing creation as part of the re-creation process. Salvation will therefore mean that “Christians who have been redeemed, re-birthed and transformed by the same grace and power of God, are to work to overcome the deep-seated forms of chaos in contemporary society that have degraded God’s creation” (Golo 2012b:338). Hick (1989:45) rightly notes that “Jesus’ teaching was not simply a vivid picture of the ‘amazing grace’ and re-creating love of God. It was at the same time a profoundly challenging call to a radical change (*metanoia*), breaking out of our ordinary self-enclosed existence to become part of God’s present and future kingdom.” This is crucial for the sustainability of creation because the creation “moves, as it were, in harmony with the history of mankind – in destruction as well as in restoration and consummation” (Brunner 1942:417); and how we intervene in creation determines its sustainability and renewal.

It demands no apology to emphasise that, from a distinctive Christian stewardship perspective, which largely reflects the African Christian views as well, the human person is *in* the centre (not *the* centre) of creation with complex capabilities and is distinct from the natural world. This, in itself, does not lessen or take away responsibility in any way, save it borders on an anthropocentric understanding of stewardship (man being *the* centre). It must, however, be emphasised that the human being has a relationship with and responsibility to taking care of the non-human and to “make decisions about what will be done with the earth” (Beisner 1994:3), as a mark of a faithful steward. This is vital because of the danger that human beings, in their encounter with the world, may reject their duty of stewardship toward the Creator God, resulting in problems as we currently have. The understanding is that “the salvation (re-creation) of the human being, who forms part of creation, may be understood as an on-going redemptive and transformative work of God” (Golo 2012:338). Consequently, understanding salvation as God’s grace of renewal and transformation places the responsibility on saved humanity to keeping in focus the view that within God’s economy “the salvation of human beings plays a central role in the redemption and transformation of the whole” (Snyder and Scandrett 2011:66).

Conclusion

Africa continues to suffer from structural problems such as poverty, ill-health and a ravaging environmental change – all consequences of the fourfold alienation. Particularly, the degradation and destruction of the created order strains our relationships with the creator God. Consequently, it is necessary that the community of those saved through Christ in Africa become faithful stewards focusing on a liberating salvation message that seeks the well-being of humans and the sustainability of the earth. Creation is the neighbourhood and place offered to us by the Creator-God and the Redeemer God (Christ – where we exercise our free will (for salvation is all about free will to draw nigh to God). The silent existence of God behind and within the creation makes it inexcusable for the

Christian faith in Africa to treat it as peripheral to the economy of God, irrespective of how evil-possessed creation is considered. As it were in the gift of the ten talents (Matt. 25:15-28), what strikes and sustains a relationship between the master and the steward is the 'good' that the master has entrusted to the servant's care. Such is the creation in which we live and which we encounter as the medium of interacting with those who are willing to trade off their self-centredness with God-centredness.

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