

SNAKES IN AN AFRICAN EDEN: Towards a theological ethic for ecotourism and conservation

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Abstract

In literature on conservation and ecotourism the image of Eden is often evoked to describe Africa. The dissonance between this image and the realities of Africa subverts conservation and ecotourism. The author retrieves the imagery of Eden to develop an ethic for ecotourism and conservation by recognising the temptation of the snake as an appeal to control creation with reference only to our needs, desires and self-interest. Conservation and ecotourism have been severely distorted by this temptation. The Biblical images of Eden, creation consummated by the Sabbath and Israel's prophetic hope are investigated to develop a multifaceted portrayal of God's purpose for creation - shalom. Ecotourism can actualise shalom if it: limits human mastery of creation; protects the integrity of creation; enables the experience of harmony with creation, resists the commodification of the creation; facilitates the appreciation and celebration of creation's goodness; empowers the powerless; and enables people to benefit from creation's abundance. Such an actualisation of shalom subverts modernity and is a sign of a new socio-cultural matrix.

1. Introduction

During a visit to Mkuzi game reserve in Kwazulu/Natal, a friend and I observed the dynamic life present at a watering hole. We listened intently to the sounds of the African bush, were awed by the majesty of Inyala bulls as they came to drink and delighted by warthogs rampaging through the bush in a wild game of chase. As we sat enthralled with wonder of it all, my friend, a visitor from Germany, commented that this was like paradise. Consciously or unconsciously she had invoked an image that Africa often conjures up in the minds of the world's elite. Africa is 'paradise' or 'Eden' where the elite can experience nature as it was prior to human intervention. Africa symbolises the possibility of escape from the artificiality of the industrialised urban world to experience a lost harmony with nature. It is the 'wild' *other* that stands in contrast to the 'civilisation' of the dominant socio-cultural matrix. An *other* that both attracts and repels the members of the world's elite. Positively it is the last Eden to be enjoyed before it is destroyed by forces of global economic development. Negatively the people of Africa are 'wild' and 'uncivilised', people who are 'incapable' of sharing in the progress of the modern world.¹

Perceptions of Africa's otherness, in its negative and positive dynamics, have moulded the dominant approaches to conservation. The positive image of Africa as an unspoiled Eden lies behind many of the attempts by Europeans and North Americans to dominate Africa's

1. This is not to attribute to my friend, Dr Caroline Schröder, the views that I describe as typical of the world's elite. Her understanding is far more nuanced and critical. This essay is dedicated to her in memory of a wonderful holiday and in gratefulness for her friendship.

conservation agenda (cf Anderson and Grove 1987, Bonner 1993).² The negative image pervades attempts to respond to threats to Eden from expanding populations, social conflict and socio-economic development. The dialectic between these images of Africa's otherness exposes the profound dissonance between the image of Eden and the ecological, social and economic realities of Africa.

Within Africa there is an increasing recognition of the importance of conservation, yet all is not well with the game parks of Africa - Africa's Edens. The socio-economic realities of most countries place severe constraints on conservation efforts. The financial resources of African nations are consumed by the demands of debt repayment, structural adjustment and development. There is no money for conservation. A situation that is exacerbated by a lack of infrastructure and high levels of corruption. It seems as if Africa's Edens will only be preserved if they pay for themselves and contribute to socio-economic development.

In response to this challenge, ecotourism is often promoted as the primary means to protect the remnants of paradise. Moreover, it is argued that well-managed ecotourism could provide surplus revenue that will enable African countries to liberate themselves from deprivation and dependency in an ecologically sustainable manner. In a context of socio-economic deprivation, entrepreneurs have seized on ecotourism as a financially lucrative and politically correct alternative to industry and agriculture. Ecotourism promises much but has not always delivered on its promises. In many instances the interests of conservation, development and commercial tourism appear to be irreconcilable. In some cases the rhetoric of ecotourism has been used to legitimate projects that are ecologically destructive and socially unjust.

Many of the problematic features of ecotourism arise out of invocation of the image of Eden combined with a commodification of creation inherent in many forms of ecotourism. Eden can now be bought and sold to the highest bidder. However, if it can be bought and sold, is it still Eden? For a genuine Eden is a place to escape from the dominant socio-cultural matrix. More fundamentally the dissonance between the image of Eden and the realities of Africa distorts many ecotourist policies and projects. The development of an adequate ethic and praxis of conservation and ecotourism for Africa is thus dependant upon the problematisation of the dominant image of Eden, and the construction of an alternative ethical vision.

2. Snakes alive - the creation of Africa's Edens

During the previously mentioned visit to Mkusi we enhanced our encounter with and experience of creation by walking through the veld. My revelling in the wonders of creation was rudely interrupted by the cry of 'Snake'. Jumping wildly, I returned to earth to discover a cobra some 30 centimetres from my point of take off. There were snakes in this African Eden just as there were in the biblical narrative, though in this case the voice of the women saved the man from immanent danger.

While the elite of the world picture Africa as Eden, they fail to perceive the snakes that lurk within their preconceived image. The beautiful and harmonious appearance of the African bush as it is experienced by the tourist conceals the reality of struggle, danger and death lying beneath the surface. This is true of social as well as the natural realities of Africa's Edens. The Genesis account of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the

2. The image was used by the founding warden of Kruger National Park, James Stevenson-Hamilton, (Stevenson-Hamilton 1937) and is often invoked in the titles of popular literature. (Balfour 1990, Dennis & Schules 1995, DiSilvestro 1994).

accompanying temptation by the snake provides a symbolic key to interpret the social realities particularly as they shaped the creation of Africa's Edens.

The significance of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil has been a matter of major debate (cf Hamilton 1990:163-166, Wenham 1987:62-64, Westermann, 1984:242-248). I will develop the implications of what, in my opinion, is the most adequate interpretation of the symbol. First, the ban on eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil places a limit on human use of the earth. While Yahweh gave all the other trees in the garden to the primeval couple they were prohibited from eating the fruit of this tree. In eating of the tree Adam and Eve rejected Yahweh's limitations on their use of the earth and claimed the right to use whatever they liked in the pursuit of their own self-interest. Second, the phrase 'the knowledge of good and evil' is a claim to moral autonomy. By eating of the fruit the primeval couple claimed the right to make decisions as to what is right and wrong without reference to the creator God. The temptation of the snake was thus that Adam and Eve should claim the right to control creation and determine its use with reference only to their own needs, desires and self-interest. It was the sin of 'anthropocentrism' (cf Callicott 1991:122-126). The developing Biblical narrative unfolds the impact of this striving for the autonomous control of creation as the dominant members of society exploit their fellow creatures, human and otherkind, in the pursuit of their own interests.

3. The Snake and the creation of Africa's Edens

The march of modern western culture across the globe since the sixteenth century has been decisively shaped by this dynamic. Central to the meta-narrative of modernity is the motif that human well-being is defined in terms of economic prosperity attained through the control and manipulation of nature by autonomous humans. Paradoxically, this path to freedom and prosperity became the path to oppression and slavery. Only 'autonomous humans', that is white middle class males, obtained freedom and prosperity. The rest of humanity was categorised as 'closer' to nature and subjected to manipulation and control by the elite (cf Field 1998a). The freedom and prosperity of the world's elite have been bought at the expense of disempowered human beings and the non-human creation. The ecological degradation and social injustice that characterise the present global order are a direct consequence of the dominance of modernity. The emergence of the African Eden both as an ideological construct and as it was concretised in game parks is a direct consequence of the forces of modernity expressed through colonialism (cf Beinant & Coates 1995, Mackensie 1988).

Africa's Edens are as much a product of colonialism and modernity as the industrialisation, agro-business and economic expansion that threatens the continued existence of Africa's wildlife. While pre-colonial societies exploited, used and sometimes destroyed the flora and fauna of Africa, their impact was limited. Large scale degradation was prevented by the lack of destructive technology, a relatively small population, and a world-view that encouraged a harmony between humanity and the non-human world. The arrival of European colonists rapidly changed the dynamics of the relationship between the human population and Africa's fauna and flora resulting in ecological devastation.

In the pursuit of wealth and power the European colonists established control over a region and its people in order to extract from it its economic wealth for the benefit of the elite members of their society. Africa's wildlife was a valuable resource in the attainment of this goal. There was a very profitable trade in animal products such as ivory, skins and ostrich feathers. Many colonial enterprises began with European

traders purchasing animal products from the indigenous inhabitants. Trading, however, could provide only a limited supply of these products, when the demand outstripped the supply it had to be supplemented by hunting. The introduction of firearms escalated the exploitation of wildlife. As the animals were destroyed so the colonists were forced to penetrate further and further into the continent. This exploitation of animal products thus motivated and financed continued colonial expansion.

In Southern and East Africa the hunters were followed by settlers who hunted for food and to protect their livestock. They converted large tracts of land, that had once teemed with wildlife, into farms. Fauna that threatened their crops, animals and grazing were eliminated. Local people were driven from their land; confined to reserves, and subjected to the control of the colonial government in order to ensure a constant supply of labour. The land and all its inhabitants were brought under the control of the colonists to promote their own economic benefit.

The colonial explorers and hunters produced written and oral versions of their experiences in Africa. These stories, which contrasted Africa's 'unspoilt' 'wild' character with the industrialisation and urbanisation of nineteenth century Europe, resonated with the rising spirit of Romanticism. Thus the dream was born; the people of Europe could experience a renewed relationship with nature if only they could escape to Africa. Africa had become Eden within the minds the European elite.

It was this image of Eden that attracted a colonising elite who came to explore and hunt in the 'untouched wilderness'. Yet it was at this time that the need to conserve Eden became apparent for it was fast disappearing before the advance of the colonial economy. Eden had to be protected for the benefit of the colonial elite. Laws were enacted to protect trophy animals from extinction and to reserve hunting for the elite. Legitimate hunting was defined as that carried out by the European elite, with firearms, for sport. The indigenous people and colonists who hunted for food were forbidden to hunt and defined as poachers. The introduction of legislation to protect wildlife was followed by the establishment of game reserves where it could be preserved. In the reserves certain species were protected, managed and controlled for the benefit of the hunting elite. Outside these areas they could be hunted at will. Many predatory species were declared to be vermin and concentrated efforts were made to eliminate them even in the reserves. Eden was to be protected by subjecting it to the control of the colonial government to satisfy the self-interest of the elite. The character of the emerging game reserves was thus influenced and warped by the temptation of the snake.

In the first two decades of this century the scenario changed. Many game reserves were transformed into national parks. Yet here the snake was active. In South Africa there was increasing pressure to develop the land set aside for game reserves. Countering this pressure was a move to create national parks and in particular what came to be the Kruger National Park. The motive of many significant figures was the conservation of wildlife. Yet the creation of a national park was deeply intertwined with the socio-political dynamics of the day; in particular Afrikaner nationalism and the desire to unify the English and Afrikaans populations into one white nation. The creation of Kruger National Park played an important symbolic role as the place where the people of the new white nation could go and enjoy the experience of Africa as it was when their ancestors first penetrated into the interior. Eden became a carefully controlled environment for the primary benefit of the white nation and foreign tourists (cf Carruthers, 1989, 1995).

4. The Snake and the development of Africa's Edens

The captivity of Eden to the forces of modernity is still manifested in three significant features. The first is the attitude to the indigenous inhabitants, the second is the commercialisation of conservation and the third is the management of wildlife in the game reserves.

Eden and the indigenous people

The image of the African Eden is an Africa without its indigenous inhabitants. In the early encounter between white hunters and the indigenous inhabitants, the indigenous inhabitants were often allies in the commercial exploitation of the fauna. When the wildlife population declined and the colonial elite moved to sport hunting, the indigenous population were perceived as competitors. Conflict arose between their subsistence hunting and attempts to conserve game for the exclusive benefit of the colonial elite. Initially, pockets of the indigenous population lived within the game reserves but they were prohibited from hunting, even in times of dire need. At a later stage the indigenous inhabitants were forcibly removed from areas proclaimed as game reserves or national parks (cf Association for Rural Advancement 1991, Bonner 1993). Africa was only in its 'natural' state when its indigenous inhabitants were absent. The colonists who were responsible for the wanton destruction of the wildlife now assumed the moral high ground and blamed the decrease in wildlife on the indigenous inhabitants struggle to meet their basic needs for food, clothing and protection.³

The commercialisation of Eden

Throughout Africa today, as governments face the escalating costs of socio-economic development, there is an increasing emphasis on the commercial utilisation wildlife. The fauna and flora of Africa are being turned into consumables to be used in the pursuit of economic growth. Ecotourism is often advocated as the major means of exploiting the economic potential of fauna and flora.

There are a considerable variety of approaches to ecotourism, many of which are bound up with the destructive features of modernity and the global economy. It is the unjust world order that creates a wealthy elite who can experience Eden. This wealthy elite then use ecologically destructive means of transport to travel to distant destinations in order to enjoy 'harmony' with nature. In most cases the tourists, who come to enjoy harmony with nature, only do so from the comfort of fenced encampments and the safety of cars. Often they can only enter the area if they have taken precautions against malaria. Hence it is only by importing the conveniences of modern industrialised urban culture that they experience Eden.⁴ These Edens are not an escape from modernity they are an extension of it.

The management of Eden

While game parks give the appearance of being Africa in its pre-colonial state they are carefully managed entities. The ecological dynamics of pre-colonial Africa were dependent

3. Non-Africans continue to have a major influence in directing the policy and practice of conservation in Africa. In many cases their approach has been dominated by attitudes shaped by colonialism. The fear that the independent African states would not conserve their wildlife contributed to the rise of a number of major conservation organisations (cf Anderson & Grove 1987, Bonner 1993: 39-159).

4. A blatant examples of this is the proposal to turn 236 000 ha of southern Mozambique into ecotourist playground for wealthy foreigners with facilities such as hotels, a golf course, a marina, flying boats and a steam train (cf Koch 1997).

upon the interaction of fauna and flora over a wide area in response to various natural phenomena. The modern Edens are enclosed within fences and surrounded by farmland. Thus the maintenance of the ecological dynamics of the area is dependent upon careful management. In these Edens the fauna and flora are under the mastery of human society.

Africa as Eden, as an image in the minds of the world's elite and as it has been concretised in the many game parks of Africa, is thus the creation of modernity. In many cases it expresses the desire of the world's elite to control creation for their own self-interest. The snake of the biblical narrative has been very active in the creation and development of these pseudo Edens that are integral part of the dominance of modernity (cf Birch 1990).

5. Eden and the subversive memory of God's purpose for creation

The symbolism of Eden can however provide an alternative approach to ecotourism and conservation that subverts the popular perception of Africa's Edens. The Eden narrative portrays an image of God's purpose for creation. Other images and motifs within the Biblical witness enrich, illuminate and expand the concepts derived from this image enabling us to develop a multifaceted portrayal of God's intention for creation. The function of these images is not to portray an original paradise to which we can return. Rather they are a subversive memory of God's future for creation that stands in contrast to the Biblical peoples experience of life. They emerge in different places in the Biblical witness, critiquing the status quo; directing the people of God to their future hope, and encouraging them to actualise God's purposes in their own contexts.

There are three significant sets of images that contribute to our understanding of the purpose for creation. They are the Eden motif; creation consummated by the Sabbath, and Israel's prophetic hope. By examining these different sets of images and the tensions between them we can come to an understanding of this multifaceted purpose. This subversive memory of God's future provides a vision of the relationship between humanity and the rest of creation that ought to inform a Christian theological ethic of ecotourism and conservation.

6. Eden - The garden sanctuary

Eden, in the Genesis narrative, is not a game park it is rather a fecund garden sanctuary in the middle of an arid land. Yet it does portray facets of God's ideal for the relationships between God, humanity and the rest of creation that are relevant to our concern.

The garden overflows with fecundity and beauty; it is a place where every human need and legitimate desire can be met. Yet it is not a place of unending leisure; Adam is commissioned to work in it. The commission given to Adam is specific. He is to 'work' and 'care for' the garden. Phyllis Tribble argues that: 'To till the Garden is to serve the Garden; to exercise power over it is to reverence it ... to keep ... is an act of protection ... not ... possession.' (Tribble 1978:85) The one created from the earth is to serve and protect the earth and its creatures.

In the garden humanity lives in harmony with its fellow creatures and fellowship with God. The garden is described using symbolism drawn from Ancient Near Eastern sanctuaries. Eden is the dwelling place of Yahweh where he lives in communion with his creatures (cf Wenham 1986, 1987:85-91). It is here that Yahweh declares that it is not good that the man should be alone and creates the woman as an equal but complementary partner for the man (cf Hamilton 1990:18-19, Tribble 1978:90, Westermann 1984:227). Their nakedness and lack of shame portray a relationship of mutual vulnerability and trust. This

harmonious human community is open to the animals as fellow creatures of the earth. This is portrayed in the account of Adam naming the animals in the hope of finding a partner. While no suitable partner is found, there is nevertheless an affinity and kinship between the Adam and the animals. More than this, in naming them Adam includes them within his world (cf Westermann 1984:228). Thus in Eden the primeval couple form an egalitarian community as they fellowship with Yahweh, rejoice in each other's company, live off the abundance of creation, revel in the beauty of Yahweh's creation and share companionship with their fellow creatures of the earth. But they do not control or own Eden, it is Yahweh's garden, and their access to its resources is restricted. There are boundaries which must be observed if they are to achieve true fulfilment within the garden

7. Creation consummated by the Sabbath

The first creation narrative portrays other dimensions of God's purpose for creation through its unique seven day structure.⁵ The seven days, symbolising completion and perfection, are a literary device that re-emphasises the repeated declaration 'And God saw that it was good.' It is significant that the plants and animals are declared to be good without reference to their usefulness to humanity. God recognises their value and dignity as they are in themselves prior to and regardless of their secondary value to human beings as sources of food, clothing and energy. While the complete creation is declared to be very good on the sixth day the narrative reaches its completion on the seventh day; the goodness of creation is consummated on the day that God rests.

The seventh day is both the completion of the days of creation and the striking exception to them. The pattern of six days followed by a seventh is used in a number of places in the Old Testament to emphasise that the seventh day is the climax of the period (cf Heyers 1984:77). God's work of creation reaches its climax and fulfilment on the seventh day when God celebrates creation and rests in the company of God's creatures. Thus Jürgen Moltmann argues that 'the whole work of creation was performed *for the sake of the sabbath.*' (Moltmann 1985:277 the emphasis is Moltmann's.) The Sabbath actualises God's purpose for creation. Yet the opposite is also true; the Sabbath is for the sake of the whole creation. Through the regular Sabbaths creation is restored and reinvigorated. It is thus empowered to give greater, fuller and more dynamic expression to God's purpose for it.

The significance of the seventh day is unfolded in the Israelite laws relating to the Sabbath day, the Sabbath year and the year of Jubilee. These laws provide a framework in which the relationships between God, humanity and the earth can be renewed and revitalised enabling creation to flourish as God intended it to. On the Sabbath day, God was to be worshipped, and all strata of human society and domestic animals are to rest. The Sabbath year was for the whole of creation; the land, the animals and human beings are to rest. Human beings and animals (including wild animals) are to live off creation's natural abundance when the land was left to be itself in its integrity as God's creation. It was also a time of socio-economic transformation as slaves were freed and debts cancelled. In the year of Jubilee the land, the animals and humans were to rest, slaves were to be freed and land was to be redistributed. The combined goal of these laws was to maintain a just and equitable human society; to promote the flourishing and rejuvenation of the non-human creation, and to integrate fellowship with God into the rhythms of life. During the Sabbath times humans were to cease activity that intruded in and altered the non-human creation.

5. Claus Westermann states 'P had no predecessor for this new arrangement. There is no creation story that is arranged in a succession of days.' (Westermann 1984:89).

They were to relax in dependence on the fecundity with which God had blessed creation as they stood back and worshipped the God who was manifested in the glories of creation.

8. Israel's prophetic hope

In hopeless situations in the life of Israel, the prophets proclaimed the hope of the coming of God. Just as God had acted in the past, God would act in the future to restore and transform Israel and the entire community of creation. The prophets portrayed this hope through a kaleidoscope of multidimensional images. These images explore and elaborate diverse motifs drawn from the Eden narrative, the Sabbath laws and other Biblical traditions. While the images resist systemisation, together they mutually enrich, complement and clarify each other, providing us with a dynamic and complex impression of God's purpose for creation.

At the centre of the prophetic hope was the renewal of God's presence and relationship creation. This renewal was centred on the people of Israel and their land, but it overflowed to transform the nations and the entire creation. The prophets used a variety of images to describe this renewal of God's presence and relationship with creation. They spoke of the outpouring of the Spirit; of the establishment of a new covenant; of God's glory returning to the temple, and the knowledge of God covering the earth. These images portray different aspects of the central reality that God's purpose for creation is that God will be present among and live in fellowship with God's creatures.

As a consequence of the renewed presence of God human life will be transformed and healed. The sick will be healed, the blind will see and the lame will walk. Oppression, injustice and war will be removed. Human society will be characterised by justice, righteousness and peace. In response humanity will celebrate with great joy. This expectation of the transformation of humanity reaches its climax in the hope of the resurrection of the dead.

The non-human creation will also be transformed and reach its full potential in unheard of ways. The prophets described pictures of agricultural abundance, of the deserts becoming fertile fields and of the fertile fields becoming forests. Peace will be established in the animal kingdom as the wolf and the lamb lie down together. This peace extends to the relationship between humanity and the dangerous animals. There is an element of tension, as some passages speak of the removal of wild animals. However, both images portray the removal of the threat to humanity posed by elements of creation. Humanity will live in harmony with a flourishing non-human creation.

The New Testament writers use these multifaceted images to describe the significance of Jesus Christ. In his life, ministry, death and resurrection the prophetic hope has broken into history. It is now proleptically present though the work of the Spirit and will come in all its power and fullness at the parousia when the present heavens and earth will be transformed into the new heavens the new earth.

Clearly these diverse, sometimes contradictory and often surreal pictures are not intended to be taken as literal statements about the future. Rather they portray with verve, exaggeration and diversity the magnificent hope for creation that transcends the human imagination. What is important is that they integrate the flourishing of creation, the establishment of social justice, human well-being and pleasure, and the presence and worship of God in a dynamic and multidimensional vision of the future.

9. Shalom for all creation

The Hebrew word 'shalom' is a useful designation for the multifaceted portrait of God's purpose for creation that arises from the interaction of these different dimensions of the Biblical witness. Shalom is the well-being and wholeness of a person or community (cf Duchrow & Liedke 1987, Wolterstorff 1983, Yoder 1987). As the purpose of creation it is the flourishing of the whole community of creation as its members live in harmony with each other and in relationship with God. Succumbing to the temptation of the snake destroys shalom as it shatters the relationships between God, humanity and the rest of creation. In response to the reconciling work of Christ shalom is proleptically present in history through the work of the Spirit.⁶

The task of a theological ethic is the actualisation of concrete penultimate expressions of shalom within history as signs of the ultimate eschatological, actualisation of shalom. Penultimate actualisations are inherently contextual as they attempt to transform a particular situation to enable it to give fuller expression to God's purpose for creation. As *penultimate* and *contextual* actualisations of shalom they entail imperfection and compromise. As *actualisations* of shalom these compromises must push society in the direction of a fuller actualisation of shalom.

The hope of shalom is an alternative vision of the nature of human well-being that subverts the values and power structures of modernity (cf Field 1996:240-259, 1998a, 1998b). It is a vision of a human society that finds its fulfilment in joyful personal relationships, the creation of a thriving human community, the pursuit of justice and equity in society, in enjoying fellowship with God, in living in harmony with our fellow creatures and promoting the flourishing of the entire community of creation. This stands in direct opposition to the dominant motif in the meta-narrative of modernity that human fulfilment is to be found in the increased possession and consumption of objects produced through the control and manipulation of creation. The hope of shalom demands and inspires the transformation of society in accordance with God's purpose for creation. It ought to motivate a struggle for a new socio-cultural matrix that more fully actualises shalom. In this context a theological ethic for ecotourism and conservation must promote the contextualised penultimate actualisation of shalom. To use our earlier terminology it must promote the establishment of concrete expressions of Eden in the context of the realities of contemporary Africa. If Africa's game parks become concrete expressions of shalom they will become 'liberated zones' (Birch 1990:25) that subvert the dominance of modernity and become signs of new socio-cultural matrix.

10. Actualising Eden: Contours of theological ethic for ecotourism and conservation

The vision of shalom provides the contours of a theological ethic for ecotourism, conservation and development. Africa's game parks will actualise Eden to the extent that they give concrete expression to these contours.

6. Traditionally Protestant theology has described the purpose of creation as the glorification of God. God's glory is the display of the character of God. The pattern life of the triune God is characterised by; dynamic life, diversity, mutual dependency, reciprocity, mutual delight and the enhancement of particularities through relationships. Creation manifests God's glory when it actualises in many diverse but finite ways the pattern of life of the Trinity. Shalom is thus an actualisation of the divine pattern of life (cf Field 1996:65-90 & 124-127).

Limiting human mastery of creation

However human dominion over creation is interpreted, the vision of shalom limits human mastery over, interference with and alteration of the non-human creation (cf Field 1996:166-169 and Van Zyl 1991:208). The primeval couple are not the owners of Eden rather they are those who serve and guard Yahweh's garden. They may make use of the garden's bounty but are forbidden to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, even though it appears to be very desirable. These limitations are reinforced and expanded in the Sabbatical laws that forbid human interference in and alteration of the non-human creation at certain times. In addition the wisdom traditions portray God as giving certain portions of land to the non-human creation for their well-being (Job 39:5-8 and Ps. 104: 16-18). An important component of the realisation of shalom is human inactivity, allowing the non-human creation to be itself in all its integrity.

Game parks can function as actualisations of this dimension of shalom. While the restrictions of space and financial viability severely limit their potential in this regard, it is vital to include areas where and/or times when the non-human creation can be liberated from all human control and interference. Ecotourism can never be the sole legitimation for the creation of wildlife reserves. Creation must be liberated to be itself in all its wildness without alteration or interference by human beings (cf Rolston 1992).

Protecting the integrity of creation

A related dimension is the protection of the integrity of creation. The primeval couple are given the task of serving and protecting the garden. The Sabbatical laws make provision for the land to rest and for the well-being of domestic and wild-animals. The prophetic hope portrays all plants and animals sharing in God's goal for creation. God's concern and care are further expressed in laws that provide for the care of flora and fauna (Deut. 20:19-20 & 22:6-7). The wisdom literature describes God as caring and providing for all creatures (Job 38-41 and Ps. 104). Human beings, as bearers of the divine image, are called to reflect God's concern for creation thus to conserve bio-diversity.

If game parks are to actualise shalom then a primary function must be the conservation and protection of the fauna and flora regardless of their commercial value or aesthetic appeal. Ninetieth and early twentieth century conservation efforts are justly criticised for their attempt to conserve certain species valued as trophies through the elimination of predators. Yet in the contemporary world greater attention is often given to those species that evoke empathy amongst humans or those that have great tourist appeal. Many other species that are threatened with extinction do not receive the same attention. Mike Burton, of the Two Oceans Aquarium, comments on the conservation of the coelacanth:

It is very difficult to get money to conserve an animal that you cannot see and which tourists can't pay to go and look at ... people love conserving the hot and furrries, but they don't like conserving the wet and slimies. (Bartlett 1997:35).

The vision of shalom, with its emphasis on a concern for all creation, ought to motivate extensive and inclusive conservation efforts.

This emphasis is reinforced by ecological biology that has demonstrated the interdependence of all living creatures. The elimination of one part of the fabric of creation has major repercussions in other parts of the fabric. In this regard one must be careful of adopting a static understanding of creation. Ecosystems are constantly changing and developing in response to a multitude of internal and external stimuli. Species have evolved and changed, and are continuing to do so. To conserve the integrity of creation is far more

than conserving individual plants or animals or even specific species. It is to protect and enhance the potential of creation to continue to develop in all its variety and divergence. But it must also be recognised that the promotion of *penultimate* actualisations of shalom might entail intervention to protect some species from the consequences of confining large animals in relatively small areas.

Commercial viability through ecotourism can therefore never be the only criterion used in the establishment and management of conservation areas. Species of animals and plants have value regardless of their apparent lack of economic value. On the other hand there are cases where ecotourist projects and resorts have been detrimental to the well-being of the flora and fauna that are supposed to be protected (cf Bonner 1993:163-203). While compromises are inevitable, a primary consideration must be the protection of creation's integrity. Ecotourism ought to function within the broader context of the protection of creation's integrity.

Experiencing a penultimate harmony with creation

The preservation of certain areas from all human interference is a dimension of a concrete actualisation of shalom but on its own it does not actualise the divine purpose for creation. The vision of shalom portrays human beings living in a harmonious relationship with a flourishing non-human creation. In an increasingly urbanised and artificial world we are being alienated from the earth and its creatures. While we must await the eschaton for the wolf and the lamb to lie down together, aspects of a harmonious relationship between humanity and our fellow creatures can be realised within history. This recognition problematises all understandings of the Edenic ideal as being the absence of human presence and interaction with the non-human creation. The ideal of the absence of humanity from the non-human creation is a product of the colonial mindset in which the indigenous inhabitants were perceived to be a threat to the remnants of the wildlife that had been destroyed by the colonists. As a portrayal of pre-colonial Africa it is a figment of the western imagination.

The forced removal of the indigenous inhabitants from the game parks was the result of attempts to give concrete expression to the ideal of the absence of human population. Yet these people had lived in a symbiotic relationship with the flora and fauna for generations. Their absence has resulted in the construction of pseudo Edens that conform to the images of western culture. After they are moved these people often continue to experience the dangerous consequences of living in proximity to a game park. Their crops, herds and even their lives are threatened by wild animals. The result of all this is that they are alienated from the conservation of wildlife. While precautions need to be taken for the safety of the people and the preservation of the wildlife, it is possible for local communities to be actively involved in the process of conservation and ecotourism, and through their involvement to recover a dynamic relationship with creation (Cf Bonner 1993:13-35 & 254-278).

Ecotourism provides another opportunity for a penultimate actualisation of harmony with the rest of creation. This is particularly true for urbanised population. Through ecotourism such people can, in a limited manner, enter into a relationship with the non-human creation. The possibility of experiencing such a penultimate realisation of shalom will depend on the nature of the ecotourist resort. Facilities need to be constructed for the protection and, in some cases, comfort of the tourist but the aim of such facilities ought to be that the tourists can encounter the non-human creation. However the facilities can become barriers between the tourists and the non-human creation reducing the tourists

experience to the observation and objectification of wildlife. This is particularly true when the construction of ecotourist resorts has been the mere translocation of all the luxuries and excesses of the consumer society into a location in the veld.

In most cases ecotourism is the privilege of the middle-class and wealthy elite. It is they who can afford to travel to the ecotourist destinations and pay, the often exorbitant, prices of many resorts. However a specific requirement of the Sabbatical legislation was that all; servants and masters, rich and poor; should enjoy the Sabbath rest and a revitalised relationship with the land. The continued exclusion of the working classes and the poor from experiencing a renewal of their relationship with creation denies them the possibility of living a more fulfilled human life. The continued alienation of such people from the rest of creation has long term consequences for the conservation of wildlife as it reinforces the attitude that conservation is the concern of the elite. The actualisation of shalom requires that concentrated efforts must be made to extend ecotourist opportunities to those communities that cannot afford the expense of contemporary resorts.

Resisting the commodification of the creation

The vision of shalom portrays the non-human creation as valuable in and of itself, without reference to its usefulness to humanity. In Genesis 1 God recognises that creation is good prior to the creation of humanity. The non-human creation is so valuable to God that God has included it in the goal for creation and will take it up into the eschatological fulfilment of that goal. This stands in stark contrast to the contemporary world where human beings are perceived as possessing inherent value but the value of the rest creation is determined by its usefulness to humanity particularly as this can be measured in economic terms. The actualisation of shalom demands that the inherent value of all creation must be recognised and affirmed even when there is no benefit for humanity.

The contemporary emphasis on the sustainable utilisation of wildlife has merit, particularly in countries that lack the financial resources to conserve their fauna and flora. However, if it is not carefully qualified it will become another expression of the destructive dynamic of modernity. The major danger is the influence of the ideology that humans have the right to control all creation for their economic benefit. In reality this often means the benefit of the elite. When this ideology dominates then creation becomes, at best, a resource to be used for the promotion of human well-being and, at worst, a commodity to be used to satisfy the self-interest, vanities and extravagance of the elite. The commodification of creation through an over emphasis on its commercial value is a denial of its intrinsic value and a reduction of its God given purpose. Creation ought to be preserved for its own sake and not for its contribution to the economic wealth of human beings. It is only once the intrinsic value of creation is appreciated that we ought to examine its possible commercial value.

Appreciating and celebrating of the goodness of creation

The vision of shalom emphasises the aesthetic value of creation. The trees in Eden are described first as 'pleasing to the eye' and then as 'good for food' (Gen. 2:9). The first creation narrative ends its description of God's creative activity with the statement that all that God had made was 'very good'. Claus Westermann proposes that '[w]e can hear in this sentence the overtone: '...and see, it was very beautiful.' (1971:63). This emphasis on the aesthetic value of creation is reinforced by Jesus words about the splendour of the flowers of the field (Matt. 6: 28-29) and by the great nature Psalms (see Ps. 19, 104 & 148). In particular the Psalms emphasise that the beauty of creation displays the glory of God.

Throughout the biblical witness, from the theophany at Sinai, through the great nature Psalms to Jesus going to hills to pray, God reveals Godself through creation and fellowships with humanity within the sanctuary of creation (cf Douglas 1984, Gata 1980). The earth with its diverse creatures in their dynamic life, awesome grandeur, intricate complexity, breathtaking beauty and delicate vulnerability is an actualisation of the beauty of the triune God.

The urbanised and industrialised world often obscures the beauty of creation through its artificially created environments and ecological devastation. Ecotourism provides the opportunity to escape the deadening affects of this world in order to be awed by the wonders of creation and to celebrate its abundant goodness. As we celebrate creation so our thoughts and emotions ought to be directed to the Creator whose magnificence it displays. Ecotourism makes it possible for people to turn away from the business of life, to rest and contemplate the wonders of creation. It thus provides the opportunity to encounter and fellowship with God, as the people of Israel did during the Sabbatical periods.

Empowering the powerless

The Sabbath principle promoted the empowerment of the powerless as it cared for creation. Fundamental components of the Sabbatical legislation included the redistribution of land, the cancelling of debts and the freeing of slaves. These laws provided for the maintenance of a just and egalitarian society; they prevented the wealthy few from amassing great wealth, and provided resources for poor to enable them to make a fresh start on their own land. They were intended to be a regular means of redistributing wealth by empowering the powerless to assume responsibility for their own well-being. In these laws there was no separation or conflict between the interests of the poor and the interests of otherkind. The prophets reinforced this ideal when they looked forward to a day when God would act to liberate the oppressed, empower the powerless and establish justice for all. Justice is integral to any actualisation of shalom.

One of the major problems with ecotourism as it functions in contemporary Africa, is that it often further disempowers the powerless, enriches the elite and provides for the comfort of wealthy tourists. Wealthy people are charged exorbitant fees to have the privilege of enjoying the beauties of creation. These fees then go into the bank accounts of prosperous tour operators, resort owners and, in some cases, corrupt officials. The poor and powerless local population are often deprived of the sources of actual or potential income in order to create the tourist destinations and conservation areas. In many cases they are in turn exploited and objectified by tourists wanting to satisfy their own image of traditional Africans. The result is the degradation and dehumanisation of the poor.

Ecotourism only expresses shalom to the extent that it promotes the empowerment of the powerless, and the redistribution of wealth. It can be structured to empower local communities by giving them an effective voice in, or even control over the management of ecotourist destinations. If a large part of the revenue generated from ecotourism is redirected to the local communities then ecotourism can become an effective means for redistributing wealth from the elite of the world to the needy and disempowered communities. The fundamental question to be posed to all ecotourist ventures is: 'Who benefits from them?' A vague answer that they promote the economic growth of the country as a whole is not sufficient. If they are to actualise shalom they must redistribute wealth to

the poor; empower the powerless, and contribute to the creation of a more egalitarian society.⁷

Negatively ecotourist ventures that oppress, denigrate and disempower the indigenous communities must be rejected as contrary to the vision of shalom regardless of their economic success, their provision of rest for the elite or even their creation of opportunities to worship the Creator. Ecotourism built on foundations of injustice, such as the forced removal of people, or which promotes injustice through the objectification of people and a denial of their access to resources does not actualise shalom.

Benefiting from creation's abundance

Adam and Eve were permitted to benefit from the fecundity of Eden. The first creation narrative states that God has given the plants of the earth to humanity and the animals for food. During the Sabbath years the rich, the poor and the animals lived off the natural abundance of the land. The prophets looked forward to a time when creation would overflow in its abundant provision for humanity's well-being. Hence the actualisation of shalom includes humanities making use creation's abundance to promote the well-being of the human community. But this is not an unrestricted access to creation. God gave the land of Canaan to the people of Israel that they might benefit from its abundance but the benefits they received, and even their occupation of the land, was dependent on them actualising shalom through faithfulness to the covenant. Benefiting from creation only actualises shalom when it is a component of a fuller actualisation that includes the other dimensions discussed above.

It is in this context that the sustainable utilisation of wildlife ought to be practised. The slogan of 'sustainable utilisation' has been used to cover wide variety of practices. While it has been used by those seeking to find solutions to the complex problems of conservation in poverty stricken communities it has also been used to promote the unregulated exploitation of creation. To further complicate the issue the legitimate interests of poor communities have been used by those who wish to exploit creation in their promotion of the unimpeded pursuit of profit. Sustainable utilisation must therefore be integrated into a more comprehensive ethical vision. Only when justice is promoted, and creation respected, its integrity guarded and its flourishing promoted; ought its abundance to be used for the benefit of the human community. Such benefits will range from the development of ecotourism, the provision of jobs, the use of certain plants and animals, and the sale of wildlife products.⁸

The issue of who benefits from such ventures is of vital significance. Priority must be given to the poor and powerless members of local communities, particularly if they have been excluded from the land and its benefits in the past. These people ought to have access to protected areas for the harvesting of plants and, in some cases, animals used in traditional medicines, food and other products.⁹ Profits made from other products sold to tourists ought

7. For examples see Bonner 1993:13-35 & 254-278, Boonzaier 1991:155-162.

8. The issue of hunting remains a vexed one and requires another paper. The hunting of animals to provide food or protection to poor communities is very different from the sport or trophy hunting for the pleasure of the elite. In certain circumstances it could be argued that the profits from the latter can be used for the benefit of the poor.

9. See Eddie Koch's (1997:26) discussion of the role that the harvesting of wildlife products for traditional medicines can play in conservation.

to be used for the benefit of local communities. Sustainable utilisation that primarily benefits the rich and powerful is a denial of shalom.

11. Establishing Eden and subverting modernity

To the extent that game reserves and national parks actualise shalom they become African Edens that subvert the dominance of the modernity and the global economic order, and point toward a new socio-cultural matrix characterised by justice and equity in society and the flourishing of the non-human creation. However, to the extent that they merely reflect the dominant ideology of the pursuit of economic growth through the mastery of creation they are captive to modernity with all its ecologically destructive dynamics. As such they are expressions of the temptation of the snake.

The creation of contextual penultimate actualisations of shalom will always involve a dynamic tension between the ideal and what is practical in a particular context. Compromise is inevitable but such compromises must draw a particular situation toward a fuller actualisation of shalom. Theological ethic must operate within the tension between idealism and the realism. As Charles Villa-Vicencio states:

Responsible political theology *must* be utopian and priests must be turbulent and (annoyingly) visionary in even the most socially responsible societies. And yet, the church must *also* be realistically committed to what is attainable *here* and *now* as part of a greater vision. (Villa-Vicencio 1992:31).

If the vision is lost then the project becomes captive to the dominant order, if one does not compromise then it becomes impossible to actualise shalom at all. If game parks are to be penultimate actualisations of shalom they must reflect this tension. In doing so they will subvert the dominant order and point towards the establishment of a new social order that better reflects God's purpose for all creation.

The socio-economic realities of Africa in general and South Africa in particular demand that compromises must be made but the nature of these compromises must be determined by the vision of shalom. The most fundamental issues facing conservation efforts in Africa are the lack of financial resources; corruption amongst the officials entrusted with the protection of wildlife, and the urgent need to provide for the socio-economic needs of the people. If the fauna and flora of Africa are going to survive then they will have to pay for their own protection. Thus the ideology of the sustainable utilisation of wildlife through ecotourism and the sale of wildlife products has begun to dominate African approaches to conservation. However the slogan of sustainable utilisation can be used to cover a wide range of practices that are in conflict with the vision of shalom.

A game park committed to the sustainable utilisation of wildlife actualises shalom if the following dimensions are present.

- First, if the beneficiaries of the utilisation of wildlife are poor and powerless in general and the local community in particular.
- Second, if the local community is involved in the life and management of the game park and are not forcibly removed from it.
- Third, if the tourist facilities are developed in such a way as to do as little damage to the life of the flora and fauna.
- Fourth, if sustainable utilisation does not become an excuse for exploitation and destruction of wildlife for the benefit of the tourists, tour operators and the local elite.

- Fifth, if the experience offered to the tourist enables them to experience harmony in relationship with the non-human creation as they appreciate its beauty.
- Sixth, if it facilitates the protection of creation's integrity. In all this the ultimate purpose must never be lost sight of.

As rural communities struggle to respond to the competing interests of business, environmentalists and the community; the church has an important role to play in promotion of this alternative vision for ecotourism and conservation. In many rural areas they are one of the few community institutions with a national voice. The church needs to act as the voice of the voiceless as these communities engage and even confront government and business with regard to issues of tourism, conservation and development. At all levels of society the prophetic voice of the church needs to be heard. At a local level this means providing leadership that promotes the interests of the community in accordance with the vision of shalom. At a national level the churches are able to address the issues at higher levels of government and business.

12. Conclusion

In the midst of the suffering and economic deprivation of so much of Africa the conservation of bio-diversity appears to be luxury that cannot be afforded unless it pays for itself. In this context, ecotourism is often promoted as a solution to the conundrum of conserving bio-diversity while at the same time providing an economic benefit to the countries concerned. However ecotourism provides its own set of complex issues involving the conflict of interests between conservation, commercial tourism and local people. An understanding of ecotourism as a facet of a penultimate actualisation of shalom provides a way in which these different interests can be related to each other. This understanding provides an alternative ethic for ecotourism, which does not serve the interests of the elite members of the dominant socio-cultural matrix, but rather subverts the matrix in favour of the powerless and points to the establishment of a new ecologically sustainable and socially just socio-cultural matrix. As game parks begin to function in this manner, they will become true African Edens.

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