

Christianity and Shona Religion and Ecology: An Ethical-practical Perspective

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Abstract

The biggest single threat to ecology and biodiversity is human-induced climate change. This study assesses ethics and attitudes in an African context for coping with climate change. This assessment takes place within an ethical-practical framework functioning within the mutuality model of interreligious dialogue. Christianity and Shona religion are brought into dialogue with one another to create a conversation on how to deal with ecology. As the main source of livelihood in Zimbabwe and the whole of Africa, agriculture has been affected by climatic changes. Disease outbreaks, floods, and droughts are on the rise since the world is experiencing severe temperature rise. In addressing the ecological crisis religious considerations must be taken into account. The pivotal role of religion in issues of climate change and environmental conservation hinges on religious ethics and religion's ability to inspire its adherents to have environmentally friendly attitudes. Christianity and Shona religion can collaborate on addressing ecological problems since they have shared sets of ethics.

Key words: religion, ecology, climate change, attitudes, ethical practical bridge, mutuality model, interreligious dialogue

Introduction

Environmental ethics continue to make news in different parts of the world. There have been striking changes in climate patterns in the past decades. Of major concern is the permanent damage posed by pollution, which will be difficult to correct. The extinction of plants and animals that humanity is witnessing attests to the dilemma. Different schools of thought have tried to identify causes as well as solutions. Attempting to provide answers to the problems of climate change requires an all-inclusive approach. Since the whole world is looking for solutions to address the challenges leading to climate change chiefly due to global warming, religious actors need to be accorded space in policy making.

This contribution aims to emphasise the ethical contribution religions can make to the debate. As two examples, Christianity and Shona religion are discussed. It is thus the task of this study to explore the adaptive strategies for coping with climate change by looking at those religious beliefs and practices in Christianity and Shona religion, and formulate an eco-friendly ethic that offers a positive attitude to nature. Recommendations are offered on the possible ways in which religious traditions can be recruited in the fight to save the environment for posterity. The conversation between Christianity and Shona religion is set against the backdrop of the ethical-practical bridge taken from the mutuality model of interreligious dialogue. The purpose is to create spaces for conversations: a conversation between Christianity and Shona religion, and a conversation between religious ethics and ecology.

Theoretical Framework

The mutuality model is one of the four models of interreligious dialogue that Knitter identifies (2005). According to the mutuality model there are many true religions, and they should engage in dialogue with each other. The purpose of dialogue is understanding, which does not necessarily mean agreement but rather refers to sharing perspectives. It is clear that

globalisation has brought people from diverse backgrounds into close contact. Animosity between strangers is the product of the failure to understand the 'Other'. This hostility has also turned detrimental in that failure to coexist in peace with others affects relations between people and between people and nature. Freeman explains:

The problem arises when one is exposed to various religions without having any knowledge of the histories, traditions and principles of these religions. It is possible that this exposure without knowledge can create a problem when people from different religions are forced to live and work together. This problem can possibly be cleared up, or at the very least be unravelled, by an openness to dialogue. (2017, 151)

Dialogue becomes the bridge that crosses the gap between exposure and lack of knowledge that Freeman (2017) refers to. The mutuality model is considered the best model to bridge the gap between religions because it realises the necessity of having dialogue between religions. In the proposed dialogue the dialogue partners are considered equals. This implies no supremacy or hegemony, nor superiority of religions. All religions need to listen to the other in an attempt to understand. This creates the possibility of space of equality and consideration of collaboration (Freeman 2017). The mutuality model has as its purpose achieving better understanding of other religions.

When considering the mutuality model, one needs to be aware of the three bridges: the philosophical-historical bridge, the religious-mystical bridge, and the ethical-practical bridge (Knitter 2005). These bridges explain the connections between religions.

The ethical-practical bridge refers to the ethics of each religion. This implies the moral stance taken by religions on those who suffer in society (Freeman 2017). People in all religions face suffering in their existence that makes religions seem irrelevant. Such suffering includes

poverty, victimisation, violence, depravity, drought, hunger, and patriarchy. The existence of suffering and the challenge of easing this suffering becomes the common ground for all faiths 'where they must take a stand, a common stand' (Knitter 2005, 137), in this case a stand against ecological degradation.

This bridge endeavours to open the possibility of dialogue between religions in order to eliminate suffering and injustices. The bridge creates a platform for different religions to talk, given that both act for the relief of the same eco-human sufferings as a part of their global agenda. Knitter (2005) argues that this enables more progressive talks between religions on their experiences and beliefs. Once the Other is engaged, religions can together engage on a shared ethical platform to address social and environmental problems.

The Problem

Human activities are causing severe environmental damage at an alarming rate. Humanity is on a destructive path that, without rapid efforts to halt it, threatens life on earth. The major problem is that despite the availability of technologies and practical solutions offered by scientists to correct the environmental wrongs, no definitive action is producing sustainable solutions.

The ferocity of the human assault on earth is so breath-taking and the horrific consequences are occurring so quickly that they defy the human capacity to recognise them, comprehend their global implications, and organise an appropriate and timely response (Gore 2007). The ways in which religions can propose positive attitudes toward nature and promote sustainable developmental programmes are under investigation. This is based on the understanding that God's creation was made good (Genesis 1: 10, 18, 21, 25, 31). As a result of human interference with nature the design and intention of God in creation has been disturbed. Further, due to human interference with nature the climate has been changing

rapidly over the past decades. Religion also played its part in the degradation of the environment. As White puts it, 'the very roots of our ecological crisis are religious' (1969, 42).

While some religious considerations may have been responsible for some of the destructive attitudes toward nature alongside political and economic considerations, humanity must be careful to avoid sentimentalism that will cloud our judgment in trying to reduce the impact of climate change. There is clearly a paradoxical relationship between religion and the environment inasmuch as religions may have contributed to the depletion of the environment. In fact, it is interesting to note that politics and economics are given room to rectify their own wrongs as evidenced in the attempts to concur on some political deals, incentivising nations to comply with agreements signed on climate change, and the funding for the fight against these problems.

Religion seems to have not been allowed the same benefit as with politics and the natural sciences to make binding resolutions in world climate governance. Religions can evoke a kind of awareness in people that is different from scientific or technological reasoning. In their diversity the religions of the world each offers a unique set of moral values and rules that can guide human beings in their relationship with one another, as well as with the things around them. Therefore, the study of these beliefs and practices toward the environment from a religious perspective is of great significance (Dwivedi 1993).

Climate change impacts communities worldwide. However, the severity of the impact is felt more intensely in deprived communities such as in Africa. A decolonised approach requires that we look at communities previously deprived of a voice. To gather data interviews were conducted with a selection of Shona people living in Zimbabwe in order to listen first-hand to the voices of people experiencing the result of climate change, as well as being excluded from the efforts to address the climate dilemma.

Climate and Livelihood in Zimbabwe

Climate in Zimbabwe varies by altitude. It is dry and tropical and is divided into four seasons: the rainy season, the postrainy season, the cool dry season, and the warm dry season. Rainfall and temperature conditions are greatly affected by relief and altitude, that is, the height above sea level. Temperatures are affected by latitude, the distance from the equator and altitude.

Normally places in low latitudes have high temperatures. The remaining areas in the central region have high altitude and low temperatures.

Demography

Demography is the study of human population dynamics that encompasses the study of the size, structure, and distribution of populations and how populations change over time due to births, deaths, migration, and aging. Demographic indicators are important and informative in explaining world events, and should be turned to first in order to come up with definitive environmental solutions. The witnessed population increase has had adverse effects on the environment.

Three major demographic and settlement changes occurred with the coming of British settlers to Zimbabwe around 1896. First, white settlers' acquisition of large plots of land for commercial agriculture until the 1950s resulted in a situation in which much of the land was owned by 1 percent of the population, with limited access for the vast majority of the rural population. Second, during the colonial period the development of industry in towns and cities, especially Harare and Bulawayo, meant that men migrated to urban areas, leaving women and children in rural areas. The third major change involved the age profile of the population. A sharp drop in mortality rates and longer life expectancy meant the population sharply increased.

Livelihood

Income security has dwindled substantially such that the majority of the people now rely on agriculture and other related subsectors for sustenance. People's livelihoods are mostly dependent on rain-fed agriculture, with only a few commercial farmers doing both dry land and irrigation farming.

Gold panning is a form of livelihood for the majority of people living in the rural areas of Zimbabwe. Deep tunnels have been dug beneath major roads and cities, especially the town of Kwekwe in the Midlands province. Further, in almost all the provinces the environment was degraded to alarming levels due to poor mining techniques. Trees were destroyed, and rivers and bodies of water were contaminated with mercury.

Vending is another form of livelihood that has taken its toll in Zimbabwe. In the research conducted by Ndiweni et al. (2014), the informal sector was rapidly growing in line with the rate of unemployment as people sought ways to sustain themselves. Firewood vending is also on the rise. Trees are cut in large numbers in order to sell firewood. The problem has been increased by the erratic supply of electricity power. In all urban areas wood is an expensive commodity that people resort to when power is cut.

The Shona People

The Bantu-speaking peoples first moved into the central area between the Limpopo and Zambezi rivers, what is now called Zimbabwe, some two millennia ago (www.encyclopaediaofreligion.com). The term 'Shona' is applied to the indigenous inhabitants of this region, excluding the two western provinces of Matabeleland north and south that are inhabited by the Ndebele-speaking people. The Shona people are the dominant ethnic group in Zimbabwe, comprising about eight million people, which is about four-fifths of the country's population.

Shona religion traditionally focuses on the relationship between the living, the spirits of the dead, and the creator God locally known as *musikavanhu*. This is a vital component of the Shona religion. Constant communication with the spirit world is respected and is conducted through ritualsⁱ. The spirit world includes the spirits of strangers, deceased ancestors, ancient heroes, spirits of the land, and a high god who is known by a variety of names. He is too remote to be concerned with the affairs of humans and is only accessible through rituals (ibid). This fervent belief in spirits has helped the Shona people live in harmony with the environment. Religion is thus the product of the thinking and experiences of African women and men who formulated religious ideas, beliefs, and practices based on the life situations and circumstances they faced to safeguard the life of the individual and that of the community.

Safeguarding sacred places is enabled by set morals and values. In many African societies it is believed that their morals were given to them by the creator God, called *Mwari*, from the very beginning. This therefore provides an unchallenged base for the morals. It is further believed that some of the departed and the spirits keep watch over people to make sure that they observe the moral laws and are punished when they break them deliberatelyⁱⁱ. This additional belief strengthens the authority of the morals. Since the morals of each society are embedded in its customs, traditions, rituals, beliefs, and practices, people assimilate them as they grow up and become participant members of their community

The resilience of Shona religion is partly due to the role that is played by religious officials. These are the people who conduct religious matters such as ceremonies, sacrifices, formal prayers, and divination. In most cases they are trained women and men who are well versed in religious affairs and are respected by the community. They include the *mhondoro*, the spirit mediums. They hold offices such as priests, rainmakers, diviners, and kingsⁱⁱⁱ. Without these figures religious activities would neither exist nor function properly, and much of the religious wisdom in people would be forgotten. They are the human keepers of the religious

heritage, morals, and ethics of a society. They are an essential part of Shona religion since without them it would grind to a halt and people would not benefit from it.

The social and political organisation of religion's influence on the Shona people plays a pivotal role in shaping and strengthening these people's attitudes. In Shona religion, well-being, and cosmology there is a causal connection between the community and its physical environment^{iv}. Among the Shona the real owners of the land and all that is on it is the tutelary spirit *Mwari* the creator God, and the various territorial ancestral spirits. As such, the land belongs to the spirits and is considered sacred. It is sanctified by its possession by spirits whose remains are interred in it^v. According to Ranger (1967), the system of the spirit mediums expresses the common African idea that the increased power of the dead, their ability to communicate more freely with the divine, and their role as protectors of the land and the people is respected. The dead are thought to form tender bridges between the living and the divine, and thus maintain harmony with the environment.

The Shona People's Attitudes toward Nature

In Africa religions are not concerned with metaphysics but with the this-worldly (p'Bitek 1993). People experience religion as actively part of the experienced world. As a result, Shona people enforce practices for the good of the environment and in practice. These practices should be considered in the global fight against climate change since they focus on attitudes that do not harm the environment. For the Shona people everything in life has something to do with religion because religion permeates all the aspects of life and is thus not easy to isolate. All of nature is invested with a mystical religious quality that unites the natural world and humanity. Everything in the world, be it animate or inanimate, forms part of a living community. This holistic understanding of reality holds that all elements in nature—animals, plants rivers, mountains, and caves, among many more—have religious significance and must

be treated with respect. In this holistic understanding of reality there is no place for the abuse or destruction of nature.

In order to establish the Shona attitudes toward nature the following aspects are addressed: the land, water, trees, forests, and animals. In Shona society religion has always been a source of environmental preservation and played an integral role by linking people to their environment, and thus imbues them with knowledge and values that make caring for the environment a priority. Caring for the environment requires values determined by ethics. Religion occupies a unique place in ascertaining environmentally friendly attitudes. Spiritual attachment to all visible things is key in safeguarding the environment.

The basic tenets of Shona attitudes toward nature are best reflected by their worldview that put great emphasis on the spiritual realm. The Shona worldview implies the African concept of pan-vitalism, that is, the belief that the universe has life (Taringa 2014). In this organic relation between humans and nature harmony is required to maintain equilibrium. The myths that explain the origins of human beings such as the *guruuswa* myth show that all things originated from the same ancestors, exhibiting a monistic understanding of unity among all reality. Therefore, like most Africans, the Shona people are kin to all creatures, gods, spirits, and nature (Taringa 2014). In this way the spirituality of Shona religion is very important in ecological conservation.

Shona religious beliefs play a pivotal role in determining the positive values and attitudes toward nature and should be crucial components of any efficacious environmental policy involving the Shona community. Religious taboos and restrictions could take the place of scientific explanations of environmental degradation (Bishau 1997). In the Shona worldview human beings and nature are bound together by one moral order and the ultimate sanction for morality resides in the sacred authority.

Like everything else in Shona society, traditional African ecology is inseparably linked with traditional religion. Environmental protection is sanctioned by God as its creator and the ancestors of the land. The Shona people have long been known for traditional practices that are profoundly ecological. For example, attaching sacredness to forests minimises the rate at which forests are cleared for pasture and agriculture. Shona religious ideas are very much about relationships, whether with other human beings, the 'living dead', animals, cleared land, or the bush. The idea of totemism among the Shona people is a principle that seeks to create a cosmology that takes the existence of nonhuman entities seriously.

In promoting life, Shona religion is closely connected with the environment because it is through a healthy environment that life is enhanced. For example, in the event of a drought Shona belief holds that something of a spiritual nature is wrong, and corrective action has to be taken quickly in order to restore harmony. The local traditional leadership is quick to summon all subjects to a gathering called *dare* to discuss a way forward and make amends with the wounded environment. That sense of urgency is lacking in this modern scientific world where political persuasions and economic gains hinder meaningful progress and urgent action to work toward a sustainable developmental approach.

For the Shona people the land and water are regarded as precious gifts from *Mwari*, the great creator. Shona people have a very strong connection with the land not only as an economic resource but also as a home and a place for sacrifice and offerings to God and the ancestors. This explains the push behind the rise of Nehanda Nyakasikana, the revered spirit medium who masterminded the first Chimurenga, the war in then-Rhodesia against the British occupation that subsequently led to armed struggle. The land was at the centre of the discussion even at the Lancaster House Conference in London on 21 December 1979 (www.panapress.com/The-Lancaster-House-Talks). This is just one example of how the entire African continent values land. When the Shona people, and more specifically Zimbabweans,

struggle or fight for land they do not simply struggle or fight for economic gains but for social, moral, and religious motives to retain that which had been unlawfully taken away from them^{vi}.

For the Shona people land is a sign of ownership and identity. Land provides identity and a space to express a unique existence. In almost all ethnic groups in Zimbabwe every mature man is supposed to have a piece of land allocated to him by his father or family elders on which he will build his home, raise his family, and grow crops to sustain his life and that of his family. Land is strongly connected to life, and therefore people have the moral responsibility to take care of it. Shona people attach great value to land as a gift from *Mwari*. Land has religious significance and is therefore regarded as sacred.

Besides land, the Shona people regard water as a symbol of life. Watering places are approached with great respect and most water sources belong to the community. It is therefore an offense and an antisocial act to cultivate near those places, and offenders are brought to justice at the chief's court. Trees around such places are not allowed to be cut and vegetation is well preserved to ensure that water is not contaminated and the spirits of that area are not disturbed. In order to protect these places and the water from being polluted by humans, myths, taboos, proverbs, idioms, and riddles were formulated to educate people about the importance of those places and make people aware that such places must be preserved.

Trees and forests are believed to have spiritual attachment and are regarded as deeply spiritual entities. Taboos were developed that prohibited the unnecessary cutting down of certain trees and the destruction of forests. In Shona cosmology the belief in the sacredness of trees and forests is strong. Sacred groves encompass vast mountain ranges and rivers, and these places are inhabited by ancestral spirits who stand guard (Taringa 2014). As Gelfand puts it, 'So strong is the feeling among the Shona that when one is entering a strange area in a forest, mountain or a beautiful spot, one is not allowed to comment on it lest he or she upsets the ancestral spirits of the region' (1972, 54).

Such sacred forests are called *dambakurimwa*, meaning forests that must not be cultivated, and *dambakutemwa*, meaning forests whose trees must not be cut. In Shona religion it is morally wrong to cut down trees in sacred places. In this way forests and woodlands are protected. The forests are seen as places of abundant life, places for reverence and honour to the extent that nobody is allowed to disturb the forests because one would thus be disturbing life. Sacrifices are offered to divinities, to God and to the ancestors who are venerated in Shona religion. Traditional Shona people worship *Mwari*, the giver and sustainer of life, in order to maintain the ecological balance. Through the traditional rites of the community, ceremonies, sacrifices, and prayers, people established a good relationship with the environment. Such attitudes toward the environment are very positive since they ensure its conservation.

Shona people are able to relate to nature through totemism. Here certain taboos are attributed to certain animals, mountains, valleys, swamps, rivers, and plants. The expression of totemism sets apart some animals, sacred groves, or plants for certain kinship affinity, religious, or medicinal purposes whose potency, value, and efficacy are determined by their nature. These beliefs and taboos help in environmental preservation because people refrain from using natural resources carelessly. Some totemic beliefs and taboos attached to certain animals, trees, and places helped in the preservation of certain animal and plant species. For example, in the *Korekore* ethnic group those who are named after the names of certain animals are not allowed to kill them or hunt them for meat^{vii}. In Shona societies all the animate beings are viewed as creatures of God. This explains why many myths and stories use animals as the main characters. Animals are respected as part of the whole creation. These animals are not carelessly killed, which helps to maintain the natural balance of the ecosystem.

The way through which the Shona people manage and make use of natural resources is very important. These resources are handled with great care because the people's livelihood

directly depends on them. As a result, the care of the environment and legitimization of government policies must be directly linked to the local people. Effective and definitive steps toward climate change adaptation and mitigation requires meaningful participation of the local peoples (McLean 2012). An important aspect of broadened participation has been the increased engagement of local communities in global governance. Local people are able to mobilize and transform themselves into a group with significant influence in setting international standards (ibid). Indigenous peoples are so effective in implementation and operational contexts because they can provide implementation tailored to specific conditions balancing on cultural and religious pillars.

Many Shona religiously driven environmental protection campaigns are being performed in southern parts of Zimbabwe, including firefighting, planting indigenous and fruit trees, and environmental education and conservation methods. The aim of these activities is to return to the traditional methods that protect the environment. Traditional leaders play a pivotal role in educating communities on the importance of land conservation. This is usually done at the chief's courts. Awareness campaigns are conducted in every seasons. Toward summer people gather and are informed on the dangers of stream bank cultivation and unnecessary cutting down of trees. Those seeking to extend their farms seek permission from the legal custodians of the land and are instructed not to cut all the trees. In fact, they are required to leave big trees on the piece of land they will be clearing. In winter people are taught about the dangers of veld fires, which is one of the most environmentally damaging events.

The advice that elders and chiefs give exhibits a particular awareness of the close relation between humans and nature. The interdependence between humans and the environment is emphasised and manifests as responsibility for maintaining an equilibrium with nature.

Tree planting is one of the many projects being done by the Shona people at the local level that are intended to facilitate small-scale forest management. The Shona people introduce indigenous tree species that are not found in their locality to cover the bare ground. Today exotic trees such as gum trees and pine trees are the most frequently planted trees because they grow quickly in comparison to indigenous trees. The Premium Tobacco Company in Hurungwe has also made inroads in regard to reforestation. Each household is given a bag containing a Criton Keane, a huge and fast-growing tree that will be used in the curing of tobacco in the future. The success of this project will save the forests from further demise because at the moment tobacco production is the primary factor in the destruction of forests.

The Shona people grow small grain crops like sorghum, which provides much-needed nutrients and calories to many impoverished communities. This crop is durable and resistant to heat thus making it a valuable crop in times of drought. High yields are realised without irrigation. As such, small grains like sorghum have been staple foods for poor rural peoples for hundreds of years.

Before the coming of industrial based farming implements the Shona people had their own way of growing crops, a method called *Makawa*. In this method people dig small holes in which seeds and manure are placed. Organic matter is vital in the sense that no chemical content is used. Inorganic fertilizers and weed killers have a negative impact on the soil and water systems since they pollute water bodies and thus destroy aquatic life. This method is good for preserving soil, unlike tilled land that is easily washed away by erosion. The other benefit of this method is that soil organisms are not destroyed, which keeps the ecosystem in balance. This method is gaining momentum in the Midlands province. This is an attempt to return to traditional nonenvironmentally damaging farming techniques. These efforts are proving to be highly successful.

It is clear that the knowledge on farming techniques transferred from one generation to the next needs to be preserved. A shared feeling of responsibility contributes to a concern over sustainability. Protection of indigenous knowledge becomes just as important as protecting the farmable land.

An indigenous knowledge system is a body of knowledge for a particular group of indigenous peoples within a specific geographical setting that has survived for a long period of time (Mapara 2009). It is knowledge with an inherent connection to one's surroundings, and provides a base for future generations to understand weather variables (Materer, Valdinia, and Gilles 2001). Local weather and climate are predicted, assessed and interpreted through locally observed variables and human experiences. These knowledge systems have helped the Shona people to cope with climate uncertainties like drought.

An example of indigenous knowledge pertaining to weather prediction is the observation of fruit trees. A fruiting *Mugang'acha* tree is believed to point to late rains and the possibility of drought, a fact that was corroborated by interviewed elders.

Other trees like the *dysprosmespiliformis mushumha* and *parinari curatellifolia muhacha* are also good weather indicators. The more fruit they bear the more likely late rains and drought are. If they bear little fruit it is believed that there will be enough rain. Indigenous peoples intimated that the abundance of fruit from these trees is understood as nature's way of ensuring that humanity and animals survive in times of scarcity. This is held as a valid claim by most indigenous peoples because the majority of elders interviewed confirmed that during the 1947, 1982, 1992, and 2002 droughts people survived by eating wild fruit together with food aid they received from the government and nongovernmental organisations.

Traditional leaders play an important role in environmental conservation in Africa. They have been and continue to be the pillars of environmental conservation in Zimbabwe, as enshrined in the new Zimbabwe Constitution adopted in 2013^{viii}. It has been observed in this

study that since precolonial times traditional leaders play a pivotal role in moulding a socially and morally just society in Africa as a whole. Cases are brought to the attention of the village heads, headmen, or even to the chiefs for execution of justice. It was carried out in accordance with the dictates of cultural values and norms^{ix}. These traditional leaders were and still are referred to as custodians of land. It is their duty to make sure that all the land under their jurisdiction is conserved well (Parliament of Zimbabwe, Traditional Leaders Act, Chapter 29:17 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe).

The absence of these leaders in traditional societies would contribute to the demise of traditional knowledge and practices of responsible farming techniques. As the leaders are also guardians of indigenous knowledge, they are the carriers of knowledge to be consulted when advice on nature preservation is needed.

Christian Attitudes toward Nature

The writings of Plato and Socrates had a profound influence on the way Christians view material elements compared to spiritual ones. For Plato humans have a dual nature consisting of matter and spirit (Russel 2010). Socrates went further, suggesting that the body is of lesser value compared to the superior value of the spirit (Russel 2010). According to Beyers (2016), this antimaterial position created an aversion for anything encountered through the senses. All material matter therefore is there to sustain the human body; there is no intrinsic value in nature. This eventually led to a utilitarian outlook on nature (Beyers 2016).

It can be noted and asserted that the exploitative view that has generated much of the environmental crisis, particularly in Europe and North America and subsequently in Africa, is a result of the teachings of late medieval Christianity that conceived humankind as superior to the rest of God's creation and everything else as created for human use and enjoyment. One of the ways to address the ecological crisis is thus to reject the view that nature has no reason to

exist except to serve humanity. The proposition has compelled the writers to explore the basis of this argument that religion can be blamed for the ecological crisis, and try to provide possible ways through which the crisis can be rectified.

The researchers have sought to respond to the negative assertions by developing a Christian ecological ethic that inspires environmental responsibility by encouraging the adoption of those attitudes that do little harm to the environment, such as planting trees and conserving woodlands. Certain nature-friendly attitudes and injunctions have recently emerged to counter attitudes of dominion. Some mainline Christians have gone back to stewardship to understand it not as domination but as caring for and cooperating with nature, while others appeal to Genesis 2:15 that talks about ‘tilling and keeping’ to the Sabbatical laws for the land, and to the ministry of Jesus as care and compassion. Austin summarizes positive biblical teachings on the environment as follows: ‘The Bible’s ecological perspective is remarkable for it brings nature within the community of covenant love and moral responsibility. The Lord tends a landscape which though often injured by human oppression, yearns to flourish under just treatment and beyond that, to respond compassionately to human needs’ (1998, 18).

Like other religions that originated in the Middle East, Christianity, based on the Bible as the primary text, views reality as the creation of one true God who transcends the created order (Young 1997). The creation is good as created by God. Humanity has been charged with the care of all creation and the responsibility for maintaining the divinely wrought harmony (ibid.). One of the many convictions of faith that gives meaning to Christians is an awareness of the sacramental dimension of all creation (Santa Ana 1998). For Christianity, care for creation is unavoidable, and thus demands collective efforts of caring for one’s neighbour and caring for the social and the natural world. Christian faithfulness requires humanity to live in a right relationship with the whole created world. This means living within the natural limits of the created world, caring for it as an integral part of God’s creation, and tending to nature in

order to increase and use its bounty without destroying it so that it provides for successive generations (ibid.). The existence of humans as part of godly created matter is closely bound to the fate of the earth.

For Christian theology attitudes toward nature have been formed through the doctrine of creation, a doctrine grounded on the belief that the world is real, surrounding us and forming the environment (Holm and Bowker 1994). This view is very important because the reality of the world lies at the heart of Christian theology. It focuses first on the relationships between humans, and second on their responsibilities to the environment (ibid.). The very idea of relationships provides a framework of creation in the book of Genesis. Everything is created according to its own kind and is related to all other kinds of things in an orderly way. Harmonious relationships with the natural world constitute God's perfect plan in the world. The close relationship between the environment and humans is an important fact when we turn to the second key word in the Christian doctrine of creation, responsibility, which involves moral issues that are closely linked to the Ten Commandments (ibid.). Christian morality is anchored in faithfulness and also requires humanity to live in harmony with the created order. People are obliged to treat the rest of creation as an integral part of God's plan to care for creation.

Christian responsibility toward the environment is also theologically motivated. God came down from heaven to enter this worldly reality and live as a human. This states something of the close connection between immanence and transcendence—God entering the world. Upon dying Jesus enters the realm of the dead and is resurrected from the dead to temporarily reside among humans before ascending into heaven.

Through Jesus, God from the heavens above descends and enters the earthly reality, connecting the place where humans live with the spiritual realm and emphasising an

interconnectedness with all reality, the spiritual, the earthly, as well as the realm of the dead. God is the God of all reality.

Ethics and Religion

Religious ideas, beliefs, and practices influence the moral life of people in a number of ways.

First, they provide the perspectives through which the world is understood and explained.

People do not see the world as it is but rather as they expect it to be. In other words, they see it through a veil of ingrained beliefs, opinions, and assumptions (Heywood 2007). Whether consciously or unconsciously, people subscribe to sets of religious beliefs and values that guide their behaviour and influence their conduct.

Religious beliefs and worldviews thus set goals that inspire responsible moral conduct.

Religious ideas also help by shaping the nature of human conduct in line with the moral demands of society and the environment^x. Like many societies in Africa, Shona religion is founded on a set of cultural principles that are unquestionably respected by all^{xi}. Religious worldviews act as a form of social cement, providing social groups and the society at large with a set of unifying beliefs and values that they follow daily. These values reflect the life experiences, aspirations, and interests of the community and therefore help to foster in the minds of people a sense of belonging and solidarity^{xii}. Shared values contribute to agreement on how the environment can be saved.

Religious ideas have succeeded in binding different social groups together. Shona religion establishes sets of moral principles and beliefs based on restrictions and taboos that prohibit people from doing anything regarded as an antisocial act, including killing anything that one does not eat, harming others, or unnecessary cutting of trees. By so doing social order, peace, and stability are realised and obedience to societal norms is enforced through aligning all values to the Supreme Being and thus conferring them with unquestionable obedience from

the people. It is clear that a harmonious coexistence, not only with other communities, but with nature itself and all spiritual beings, is envisioned in Shona religion.

Shona religion has a rich traditional heritage that is ecologically friendly. In Shona cosmology the land is not only an economic resource but a home and a place for sacrifice to the creator God. The concept of *Unhu/Ubuntu*, which focuses on doing that which is good to others who in turn reciprocate, has enabled the conservation of wildlife species. Humanity not only includes acting positively toward other human beings, but also includes positive human conduct in life toward all existence. Humanity is encouraged to take that which they need for daily use and to spare that which they do not need for future use. Animism and totemism have helped keep the wildlife population at sustainable levels in Shona societies over the past decades because the knowledge of their environment helps the Korekore-Nyombwe people to direct the course of their lives as they try to live in harmony with nature (Mangena 2012).

Christianity shares similar attitudes of reverence for created matter. When acknowledging that earth is created by God to sustain human existence, Christians can exist interdependently with nature. Christianity is not to replace Shona traditions; Christian values can enhance the Shona values and ethics.

Conclusion

The Shona and Christian religious beliefs and practices are environmentally friendly. There are some constructive belief systems and practices in both religions that engender environmentally friendly attitudes toward the environment. Those attitudes that are negative to environmental conservation were also noted. This article highlights those activities of the Shona people that are intended to safeguard the environment. This article thus aims to emphasise that practices that are environmentally friendly must be tapped in order to help local communities cope with climate-related problems. Their concern with environmental conservation should not be

misconstrued as shifting focus to religion but rather as emphasising the relationship between humans and the natural world, thus enabling and engendering positive attitudes toward nature.

Although Christianity and Shona religion are equal, they are not similar. Both religions share a set of ethics that creates awareness of the necessity to act in reverence toward nature, create harmony, and maintain an equilibrium with nature. In this way Christianity and Shona religion can together contribute to providing ethics on formulating and enacting policies that contribute to alleviating the disastrous effects of climate change.

Both Christianity and Shona religion have externally motivated reasons for ethical behaviour, not the internal motivation of selfish self-interest. Both are motivated to act in a responsible way in treating nature, based on veneration for the Creator.

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Interviews

Interviewee	Date of interview
Dewa, H.	10 May 2017
Magura, K.	7 March 2017
Moyo, S.	2 December 2017; 3 June 2018
Mutimutema, K.	6 December 2017
Spirit Medium Majokoro, T.	10 May 2017
Zinyemba, B.	6 December 2017

ⁱ Spirit Medium, Majokoro, interviewed on 10 May 2017 in Guruve

ⁱⁱ Spirit Medium, Majokoro, interviewed on 10 May 2017 in Guruve

ⁱⁱⁱ Spirit Medium, Majokoro, interviewed on 10 May 2017 in Guruve

^{iv} Dewa interviewed on 10 May 2017 in Hurungwe

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- ^v Dewa interviewed on 10 May 2017 in Hurungwe
 - ^{vi} Magura interviewed on 10 May 2017 in Hurungwe
 - ^{vii} Spirit Medium Majokoro interviewed on 10 May 2017 in Guruve
 - ^{viii} Village head Zinyemba interviewed on 6 December 2017 in Chinhoyi
 - ^{ix} Mutimutema interviewed on 6 December 2017 in Chinhoyi
 - ^x Moyo interviewed on 2 December 2017 in Masvingo
 - ^{xi} Moyo interviewed on 2 December 2017 in Masvingo
 - ^{xii} Moyo interviewed on 2 December 2017 in Masvingo