

## Green rituals and liturgies

Confession of sins has always played a prominent role in the healing and sacramental ceremonies of the prophetic AICs. During *faith-healing ceremonies* the healer-prophet urges patients to confess their sins. Not only is this a way of placing the afflicted under the care of the Holy Spirit, but revelation of the dark side of the patient's existence also enlightens the healer-prophet about the cause of affliction, the area in the patient's life which requires therapy (Daneel 1974:214f, 292f). The confessions of converts prior to baptism symbolically illustrate the neophyte's acceptance of the authority of the church, represented during the ceremony by the prophet listening to the confessions, as well as the final mystical authority of the Holy Spirit which induces such confessions.

Public confessions prior to taking the *sacrament of holy communion* are in a sense a mass demonstration of right-mindedness and obedience to God. In the Zionist and Apostolic movements such confessions form part of an intricate process of cleansing the church community so that it can appear worthily before the holy God during the most revered and intimate ritual expression of divine-human encounter. In the Apostolic movement of Maranke and Mutendi's ZCC confession ceremonies consist of nightlong vigils, during which prophets reveal the hidden sins of unrepentant hearts and *vaPostori* judges at the symbolic fires of judgment spend hours assessing whether the self-confessed or prophetically accused wizards (witches and/or sorcerers) are sufficiently prepared or repentant to take the sacrament. As *uroyi* (wizardry), with its destruction of human life and social relations, is indisputably evil, and the *muroyi* in many ways becomes the personification of the biblical Satan, one can understand the prophets' intense preoccupation with this phenomenon when it comes to cleansing the church in anticipation of union with the body of Christ (Daneel 1974, chapter 4; 1990:220f).

## 2.1 Confession of ecological sins, conversion and baptism

Some AAEC-affiliated prophets are already applying their newly gained insight into ecological stewardship to their moral guardianship over their churches. In the baptismal context they are increasingly revealing that the Holy Spirit expects novices not only to confess their moral sins in a society of disturbed human relations but also their *ecological sins*: felling trees without planting any in return; overgrazing; riverbank cultivation and neglect of contour ridges, which cause soil erosion – in other words, taking the good earth for granted and exploiting it without nurturing or reverencing it.

At 'Jordan' it makes sense to the newly converted to confess ecological guilt, there where the barren, denuded plains, erosion gullies, unprotected riverbanks and clouds of wind-eroded dust are clearly in evidence. Crossing the River Jordan in baptism after such confession means more than just individual incorporation into the body of Christ and the prospect of personal salvation in heaven. It also requires the new convert's commitment to helping to restore creation as part of God's plan and as a sign of genuine conversion and repentance in recognition of the gift of God's grace.

To many Independents baptism is also a healing ceremony in which baptisands drink the life-giving water of Jordan, filled by the Holy Spirit, for individual cleansing and curative purposes. It follows that the ceremony offers a unique opportunity for interpreting the Spirit as healer of both the people and the land. Baptism, therefore, becomes yet another feature of an extended ministry of healing, a changing ecclesiology. In that case, the drinking of Jordan water symbolises a shift from the baptisand's personal benefit from the Holy Spirit's healing and salvific powers to a ritual affirmation of solidarity with all creation, a new commitment, through individual conversion, to earth-healing.

It is not clear to what extent this reinterpretation of conversion and prophetically induced confession of ecological sins at baptism has really taken root in AAEC churches. However, discussions on the subject at AAEC executive meetings and the incorporation of these views into training material used at AAEC workshops point to growing consensus on what a contextualised ethical code in terms of eco-confessions should imply.



Plate 14 Jordan baptism: A prophet seeks guidance from the Holy Spirit as he prepares to direct the confession ceremony (top). A prophetic sermon precedes baptism (bottom). This context provides the ideal opportunity for a renewal of commitment to earth-care



Easier to assess is the AAEC prophets' struggle against ecological sins in the context of numerous *tree-planting eucharistic ceremonies*, in which ZIRRCO staff members and I participate regularly. During the public confessions, which form part of the green liturgy preceding the taking of bread and wine, a core group of 'green prophets' from a wide range of Zionist and Apostolic churches increasingly brand offences which cause firewood shortage, soil erosion, poor crops and the absence of wildlife as a form of wizardry (*uroyi*) – the gravest of all sins, threatening not only human survival but all other forms of life. This trend has not yet developed into a practice of separating unrepentant ecological *varoyi* from the other communicants, paralleling the pre-sacramental cleansing praxis of the Maranke Apostles (Daneel 1974:293f). Nevertheless, as the resolve of the earthkeeping churches hardens and prophets become more and more convinced that the Holy Spirit rather than human beings motivates and guides the green struggle, unrepentant ecological *varoyi* in the AICs will increasingly find themselves barred from the eucharist. Discussions with prophets, who are becoming Christian 'guardians of the land' in their own right, indicate that they are increasingly convinced that the Holy Spirit is in fact inspiring the struggle against environmental evil, and that they generally have a clear perception of who the earth-destroying wizards in their society are. These *varoyi* are considered to include people in resettlement schemes who endanger the common good by indiscriminately felling as many trees as they can for a quick profit from selling firewood; who refuse to accept the principle that firewood can only be used by those who plant the trees that supply it; who resist government conservationist measures and the tribal elders' prohibition of tree felling in the traditional holy groves (*marambatemwa*) of the ancestors; and destroyers of river banks.

The identification of ecological sin with wizardry and the insistence on public confession underscore a significant new development. They enable the church in its green struggle to identify the enemy outside and within its own ranks. Identification of the wrongdoers in turn enhances and crystallises the church's *ethical code* and *control system*. This development is reminiscent of the *chimurenga* struggle, in which counter revolutionaries and collaborators with the Smith regime were branded wizards. The task of the AIC war prophets, alongside the traditionalist spirit-mediums, was to elicit confessions from suspects dur-

ing secret *pungwe* meetings as part of a process of identifying the wizard-traitors and singling them out for punishment. Unifying the battle ranks and cleansing the guerrilla cadres of internal subversion in terms of the idiom of wizardry indicated a relentless will to succeed and survive, for *uroyi* is an evil which brooks no compromise.

In the earthkeeping churches the nuances regarding wizardry are inevitably more varied and subtle than during the war. In contrast to the execution or torture of war traitors, wanton tree-fellers or poachers of wildlife will, upon prophetic detection, either be temporarily barred from taking the eucharist or, in the event of repeated transgression of the earthkeepers' code, be excommunicated altogether. The key figures in the AAEC are only too aware of a common guilt which, in a sense, makes all of us '*varoyi*' – earth destroyers. To this they readily admit, which in itself is a sure sign of accepting collective responsibility for environmental restoration. There is a vast difference, however, between admitting guilt prior to committed participation in conservationist programmes, and deliberate deforestation or related destructive action in the face of a protective environmental code. It is this attitude of selfish environmental exploitation, regardless of the will of the community and the destruction caused to nature, which the prophets condemn as the evil of *uroyi*, to be stamped out at all costs.

Discussions about ecological *uroyi* and how to combat it stimulate emotional expressions of views which, probably more than any other kind of discourse, outline the underlying convictions in AAEC circles about the real nature of an earthkeeping church. To illustrate this point, I quote from an interview with Bishop Darikai Nhongo and his son, evangelist Samuel Nhongo, both of the AAEC affiliated Zion Christian Church (an offshoot of the larger ZCC of Bishop Mutendi). Said the Bishop:

The church is the keeper of creation. All churches now know that they must empower their prophets to expose (through Spirit-induced confessions) the *varoyi* who kill the land. These people who wilfully defile the church through their destruction of creation should be barred from holy communion. *If I was the one who owned heaven I would have barred them from entering.* The destroyers of the earth should be warned that the blood which they cause to flow (of trees, animals, etc) will be on their own heads.

All churches should now judge with the judgment of Mwari. This

takes the form of the true prophets of God exposing environmental sins (elsewhere described by the Bishop as much more serious than adultery, as it amounts to the destruction of all life). The church should be cleansed of the wilful earth destroyers who persevere in their evil ways. *This is the law of ZIRRCO!* All churches are now earthkeepers, healing the earth. Those who obstruct this work must be expelled. Their destructive characters will cause them to attack and obstruct the fighters of the war of the trees. Expulsion is a (legitimate) means of cleansing the church and our association (AAEC) from evil. If you keep readmitting such culprits your church will not advance (in the green struggle) properly. In all this we do not want merely to assert our own will, but to promote God's liberating work.

*Evangelist Samuel Nhongo:*

Simon Peter was told by Jesus that on him, Peter the Rock, the church will be built ... Jesus said: 'I give you the keys to lock and unlock!' It is in this light that I see the earth destroyers whom we expel from the church. We cannot accommodate tree fellers who persist in their evil ways. They are wizards (*varoyi*) who should be locked out of the church ...

The churches, the chiefs (AZTREC) and the government should sit down together and plan a proper strategy for this war. It must be fought on all fronts and with severity. *The church's new ecological laws should be universally known and respected!* Otherwise we will merely be chasing the wind. It is also stated in the Bible that one must leave the weeds to grow with the corn. Although this means that the church cannot judge finally in this existence, the cleansing of the church (from earth-destroying *varoyi*) must proceed lest the (green) struggle stagnates ...

*Bishop Nhongo:*

I agree that the battle must be fought in unison with the chiefs. They were installed by Mwari. It is similar to King David of Israel's cooperation with Samuel, the man of God. Their cooperation was fruitful. Likewise, we shall cooperate with the (AZTREC) chiefs because the trees are planted on their land. The chiefs will have the tree choppers sentenced in their courts and if these trespassers oppose the court's ruling, the chief will evict them from his chiefdom. The churches will also strictly apply their own laws against tree felling.

Church members who disobey those laws will, with the help of the chiefs, be evicted from the wards where they reside. Once such measures are strictly applied everybody will obey the earthkeeping laws of our churches.

The views expressed here characterise the attitudes and convictions of many AAEC key figures. The most pertinent points can be summarised as follows:

- As indicated in the previous section, the earthkeeping function of the church is indisputable. Bishop Nhongo confidently claims that the church is 'the keeper of creation'.
- The church's mission includes laying down and implementing strict rules against earth destruction. Strict environmental church laws imply authorising and empowering the prophets to expose ecological wizards during public confessions.
- Prophetic exposure is but the first step in a process of church cleansing, so as to effectively mobilise the Christian green army, eliminate subversion and realise environmental goals. Paramount is an element of judgment and punishment so that – as in *chimurenga* – the enemy outside and within can be clearly discerned. Evangelist Samuel Nhongo shows awareness that the church cannot usurp the divine function of final judgment. Yet the biblical Peter's function as holder of the keys justifies expulsion of unrepentant tree-felling *varoyi* to give impetus to the earthkeeping cause.
- The Bishop's somewhat tongue-in-cheek suggestion that, if he had a say in the matter, the destroyers of nature would be barred from heaven underscores the seriousness with which ecological sins are viewed and the church's inescapable responsibility to relentlessly oppose it.
- The proposed interaction with the chiefs is not only symptomatic of the interfaith ecumenism and AZTREC-AAEC cooperation mentioned earlier, but also indicates a resolve to act resolutely against the heartless wizards by not only excommunicating them from church but also having them expelled from their wards of residence – one of the harshest penalties imaginable.
- Not all AAEC leaders will agree with the radical punitive measures proposed by Bishop Nhongo. Some 'doves' among them will plead for a

ministry of reconciliation, which will afford exposed ecological *varoyi* the opportunity to mend their ways without undue stigmatisation.

- Finally, the militant attitudes of Bishop and son, and their use of the emerging jargon of the green struggle, leave little doubt about their commitment to what they regard as a real liberation struggle. Not only do they consider themselves the fighters of the war of the trees, but they see the church as one of its principal mobilising agencies.

## 2.2 A tree-planting eucharist

The best example of eco-liturgical innovation in the AAEC churches in the process of giving ritual expression to an emerging environmental ethic is the introduction of a tree-planting eucharist. According to the member churches' annual calendar, a tree-planting eucharist only takes place once during the rainy season, so it does not drastically change or supersede established liturgical procedure regarding the sacrament of holy communion, popularly known in the prophetic movements as *Paseka* (paschal) ceremonies. Nevertheless the practice of tree-planting eucharists is of great interest, for various reasons. First of all, the participation of diverse churches in each ceremony and the sharing of ritual officiant roles on an interchurch basis strengthen environmentally focused *ecumenism*. Second, the integration of eucharist and tree-planting makes *environmental stewardship*, which in Christian tradition has often been treated as peripheral, part of the very heartbeat of church life and biblical spirituality. Third, this ceremony highlights characteristic trends of an emerging *AIC theology of the environment*. And, fourth, the new liturgies introduced are imaginatively contextualised in terms of African religious holism and worldviews. Thus an earthkeeping model is developed which could well challenge AICs elsewhere in Africa to assimilate environmental stewardship through similar liturgical innovation.

Consider, for example, the tree-planting liturgy drafted by Zionist Bishop Reuben Marinda, former general secretary of the AAEC, at the request of the executive after careful consideration.

Preparation for the eucharist starts with digging holes for tree planting in the vicinity of an AIC headquarters or in a local congregation. In some instances the woodlot is fenced and referred to as 'the Lord's



Plate 15 Prophets and prophetesses speak in tongues as they listen to confessions of ecological sins by tree-planting communicants. All communicants are subject to the Spirit's scrutiny. Bishop Chinhangura's wife (top left) and Bishop Marinda (centre, below) listen to Spirit promptings as they pass the prophetic 'gates'



acre'. General ceremonial procedure is in the hands of the principal church leader who, under supervision of the AAEC president and general secretary, assigns various functions to dignitaries in his/her own church and other participant churches.

While the communion table, covered with a neatly pressed tablecloth and bearing the bread, wine and a number of tree seedlings, is being prepared, groups of dancers dance around the bulk of the seedlings to be planted, which are stacked nearby. Dance and song bring praise to Mwari the great earthkeeper, encourage the green fighters to be vigilant in the struggle and even entreat the young trees to grow well. The service itself consists of several earthkeeping sermons by AAEC bishops and ZIRRCOM staff members. It invariably also includes speeches by visiting government officials and representatives of the departments of Forestry, Education, and Parks and Wildlife, as well as the Natural Resources Board.

The sacrament starts with the public confession of ecological sins referred to above. All communicants, church leaders included, line up behind a band of prophesying prophets to confess their guilt and receive prophetic admonition as they slowly file past the prophets before picking up a seedling and moving to the communion table to partake of the sacrament.

We shall now consider in some detail the contents of the eucharistic tree-planting liturgy as read (in Shona) by Bishop Marinda at a ceremony of Bishop Mupure's Zion Christian Church of St Aron on 1 February 1992.

By way of introduction all participants were welcomed to the Lord's acre, where the trees to be planted and the planters would share the same status as brothers and sisters in the Lord's presence (appendix I). Mwari is the one who declares to his church people the value of their friends the trees:

They will provide you with shade  
to protect you from the heat of the sun.  
They will give you fruit, for you to lead healthy lives.  
These trees will clothe the barren earth,  
protecting it against soil erosion,  
preventing it from turning into a desert,

keeping the moisture in the soil.  
Look at the stagnant water  
where all the trees were felled  
Without trees the water holes mourn;  
without trees the gullies form

for the tree roots which hold the soil ...  
are gone!

These friends of ours  
give us shade.  
They draw the rain clouds,  
breathe the moisture of rain.

I the tree ... I am your friend  
I know you want wood  
for fire  
to cook your food,  
to warm yourself against cold.  
Use my branches ...  
What I do not need  
you can have.

I, the human being,  
your closest friend  
have committed a serious offence  
as an *ngozi*, the vengeful spirit,  
I destroyed you, our friends.  
So the seedlings brought here today  
are the bodies (*mitumbu*) of reparation  
a sacrifice to appease  
the vengeful spirit.  
We plant these seedlings today  
as an admission of guilt  
laying the *ngozi* to rest,  
strengthening our bonds with you,  
our tree friends of the heart.

Let us make an oath today

that we will care for God's creation  
so that he will grant us rain.  
An oath, not in jest ...  
but with all our heart  
admitting our guilt,  
appeasing the aggrieved spirit,  
offering our trees in all earnest  
to clothe the barren land.

Indeed, there were forests,  
abundance of rain.  
But in our ignorance and greed  
we left the land naked.  
Like a person in shame  
our country is shy  
of its nakedness.

Our planting of trees today  
is a sign of harmony  
between us and creation  
We are reconciled with creation  
through the body and blood of Jesus  
which brings peace,  
he who came to save  
all creation (Col 1:19–20).

At this point Bishop Marinda digressed from the liturgical text by giving an exposition of Genesis 2:15–17. Corrupted by Satan, he argued, man became an enemy of God and nature by cutting down all the trees. 'As a result the weather patterns of the entire world changed. Man became the destroyer of the rain forests, the killer of the world's ecosystems.' God retaliated by sending severe droughts. 'Look, the rivers are dried up and all the fish have gone, because we cut away all the vegetation on the river banks, causing the river beds to fill up with sand.' Against this background of human sin against nature and God's judgment, an urgent appeal was made once again to confess environmental sins. Christ, the one who holds everything in creation together (Col 1:17), atones for such sins. As Lord of creation he works salvation for humanity. 'Humans, in their turn, have a duty to extend salvation to all of creation (as Christ's co-workers).'

Plate 16 Drumbeat and a dance of joy around the seedlings to be planted, while the communion table is being prepared





Plate 17 Bishops Zvanaka, Marinda, Masuka and Moses, praying over sacraments and seedlings in preparation of the eucharist (top). Communicants file past Bishop Mutikizizi – with crown – and Revd Zvanaka as they partake of the sacraments



In addition to the people's role of extending Christ's salvation to creation, Marinda also presented an intriguing interpretation of how Christ saves all of creation. Through the ultimate sacrifice on the cross, Christ brought all burnt offerings of Old Testament times – the destruction of sacrificial birds and animals, as well as the firewood used for this purpose – to an end. Hence 'through his death on the cross he also saved the animals, the birds and the trees' (appendix I). In the liturgy this theme is further elaborated with reference to Jesus' action against the merchants in the temple in Jerusalem. 'When Jesus heard the lowing and the bleating he knew the poor creatures were crying to be saved from the cruel merchants.' By lashing the merchants Jesus saved the birds and animals from the cruel fate of being sacrificed.

The liturgy then turns to the ecological strife caused on earth by Satan:

There was war in heaven, says the Bible.  
Michael and his angels ...  
He was hurled down,  
that ancient serpent called Satan  
he, who leads the whole world astray.

So the devil is deceiving the whole world  
causing man to fight creation.  
Possessed by the demon  
man is destroying nature's beauty.  
All living things suffer -  
the trees, the animals, water  
It shall continue  
until man extinguishes  
all life on earth.  
If we continue to kill the trees  
we hurt ourselves  
by hastening the end of the world.  
If the world is ultimately destroyed  
it will be the doing of man.

In a further elaboration of *ngozi* beliefs (appendix I) the liturgy explains the meaning of *mutumbu* payment and sacrifice. Replacing the sacrificial animals to appease the aggrieved and vengeful spirit with sacrificial trees to pacify the aggrieved land and its creator is 'the only way we can

seek forgiveness for having caused the nakedness of the land'.

Then follows the celebration of sacramental bread and wine. Holding seedlings in their hands while receiving the sacrament, the communicants then proceed to where the holes have been dug in the new acre of God (woodlot). Prior to the actual planting, the Bishop walks through the woodlot sprinkling holy water on the ground and on the seedlings, saying:

This is the water of purification and fertility.  
We sprinkle it on this new acre of trees.  
It is a prayer to God, a symbol of rain  
so that the trees will grow,  
so that the land will heal  
as the *ngozi* we have caused withdraws.

'Holy soil' which has been prayed over is then scattered in the woodlot to the words:

You soil ...  
I bless you in the name of Christ  
for you to make the trees grow  
and to protect them.  
Provide the trees with sufficient food  
for proper growth.  
Love the trees and keep their roots  
for they are our friends.

The Bishop then leads the green army into the Lord's acre to do battle against the earth's nakedness. The seedlings are addressed one after another as they are placed in the soil:

You, tree, my brother ... my sister  
today I plant you in this soil.  
I shall give water for your growth.  
Have good roots  
to keep the soil from eroding.  
Have many leaves and branches  
so that we can  
breathe fresh air  
sit in your shade  
and find firewood.

Plate 18 Bishop Chimhangwa, accompanied by Bishop Marinda, scatters 'holy soil' over the 'Lord's acre' before the seedlings are planted



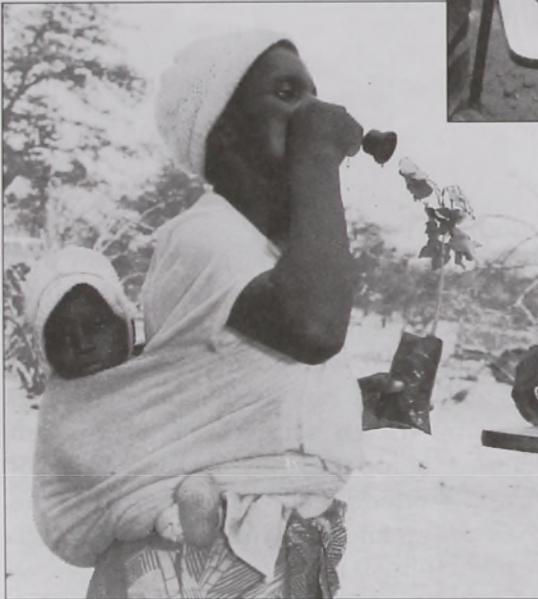


Plate 19 Bishop Chimhangwa assists women earthkeepers at the communion table (top); seedling in hand, a woman communicant partakes of the sacramental wine (below)

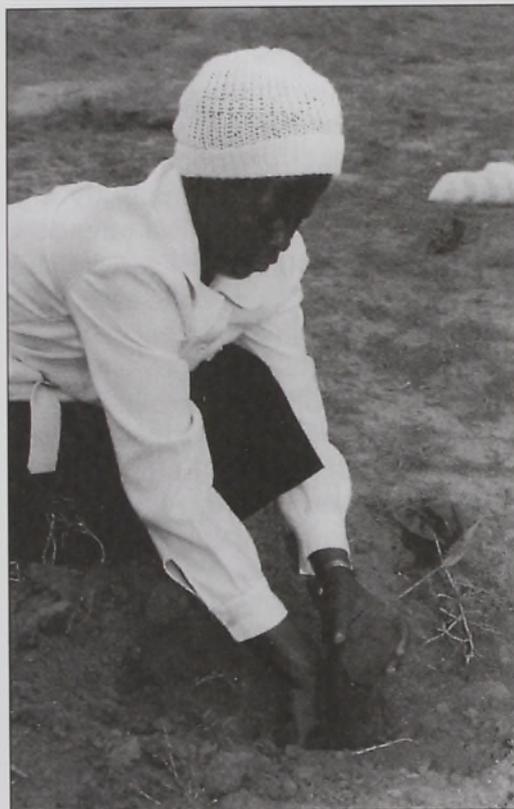
To the Western mind this liturgy may sound simple and fairly trivial considering the enormous, near impossible task of halting deforestation, desertification and soil degradation. In the African cultural and linguistic context, however, as part of spontaneous ecological ritual activity, it is a powerful statement of Christian commitment to the healing of all creation.

The close identification with water, soil and trees – elevating them ritually to the status of communication with human beings – reflects African religious holism. Here the intuition of the past is taken to a level where mutual dependence is eloquently and meaningfully verbalised. In this overtly declared friendship, subsequent to admissions of human guilt in the mindless destruction of nature, mutual responsibility is reaffirmed: the new trees to provide shade and unpolluted air to sustain healthy life for humans, and the earthkeepers to water and protect their budding friends in the Lord's acre. The liturgy assumes responsible aftercare by the community of believers commissioned to do so – in itself a strong incentive to the woodlot keepers not to let the green army and its monitoring agents down. This imaginative encouragement of proper aftercare – normally the Achilles' heel of most African tree-planting endeavours at the grassroots – is already proving effective at sustaining responsibility for the sometimes monotonous chores in the wake of the more exciting ritual experience of tree planting.

Impersonating the vengeful *ngozi* spirit in terms of earth destruction is as potent a way of accepting full responsibility for deforestation as the confession of ecological wizardry. The *ngozi* is an aggrieved spirit of a murdered person or someone who has been the victim of a grave injustice prior to death (Gelfand 1959:153; Daneel 1971:133–140). In customary law and traditional religion the *ngozi*, which wreaks havoc in the offender's family through illness and death, has a legitimate claim to full compensation in the form of up to ten sacrificial beasts called *mutumbu* (literally 'corpse' or 'body', since they pay for the corpse of the deceased). In some cases the offender's relatives also provide the *ngozi* with a young wife, who must sweep and tend the small hut specifically erected for her disgruntled 'spirit-husband'.

Presenting the trees to be planted as *mitumbu* compensation for the *ngozi* spirit provoked by wanton tree felling is an illustration of thoroughly contextualised appeasement between humans and environ-

Plate 20 Sacramental empowerment culminates in tree-planting. *Ruwadzano* women often plant the bulk of the seedlings in new woodlots



ment. The ritual, moreover, expresses compassion for the badly abused friends: trees, soil, water and, by implication, all of life in nature.

The *ngozi* concept has several subtle connotations in the liturgy. It reflects the ruthlessness of the supposed human stewards of the earth who attack nature with a vengeance, like that of the *ngozi*, hence the seedlings are legitimate sacrificial substitutes for the stricken tree trunks or 'corpses'. Then, in sprinkling the water over God's acre, the words 'It (the water) is a prayer to God, a symbol of rain' implicitly suggest that God him/herself turns *ngozi* against the ecological offenders by retaliating with severe drought. This interpretation tallies with the still persistent and widespread traditional belief that the creator-God punishes transgressions against nature and the guardian ancestors of the land, who are responsible for ecological equilibrium, by withholding rain. In the admission of guilt, the ritual plea for termination of divine discipline, the renewal of human resolve to heed the environment as ordained by deity and ancestors, absolution is found. God responds by sending life-giving rain. Transformed as they are in the Christian liturgy, some of these traditional notions are still in evidence.

Sprinkling holy water and soil over the barren earth earmarked for repair is a symbolic act of earth-healing. It accords entirely with prophetic faith-healing practice as described above. As such, it is further proof of the ecclesiological shift which extends healing beyond human suffering to the healing or liberation of all creation.

Both the liturgy itself and Bishop Marinda's commentary make a powerful statement about the evil forces at work in earth destruction. Having deceived humanity and having alienated men and women from God, Satan is the main perpetrator of evil against creation. A frustrated being chased from heaven, Satan is presented as destroyer and foremost ecological enemy from the very beginning (Gn 2). This focus, however, does not minimise human guilt as demon-possessed human beings cause all of creation to suffer. Such madness raises the prospect of extinguishing all life on earth. 'If the world is ultimately destroyed, it will be the doing of man,' says the liturgy. By implication the tree-planting eucharist in its entirety epitomises fighting Satan and the demonic blindness to the needs of nature which has been induced in humans. Thus, during the eucharist, all participants are given the opportunity to confess their particular ecological blindness under the sway of Satan.

And what more poignant way of doing so can there be in Africa than to own up to the particular kind of wizardry against creation in which one has indulged!

Christ emerges in the liturgy as the complete antithesis of Satan – the one who heals, protects and brings harmony. His blood effects reconciliation between humankind and the rest of nature. His salvation, through humankind, extends to all creation. The reference here is to Colossians 1:17–20. Although at this point the liturgy is not explicit about the twofold interpretation of the body of Christ (ie the body as church and the body as creation), the central concept underlying this Christological feature, much discussed in AAEC circles, is that ‘in Christ all things hold together’. The sacramental activity which unfolds around this concept apparently suggests that the view propagated by myself and fellow Independents during eucharistic ceremonies is gaining currency, namely that at the point where the believers give expression to their unity in the body of Christ as church, by partaking of the bread and wine, they accept responsibility for the repair of the cosmic body of Christ, to which they also belong and which they, too, have abused. Consequently, in partnership with Christ who, as head of the believers, is the real *muridzi venyika* (guardian of the land – in contrast to or in fulfilment of the traditional concept of ancestral guardianship), they proceed in unity as the church to heal the stricken body through tree-planting.

In the tree-planting eucharist this close identification of Christ’s body with the abused and barren soil makes sense. Traditionally the ancestral guardians of the land belonged to the soil. They are the soil! Their ecological directives issue from the soil, as expressed in the literal saying, ‘*Ivhu yataura*’ (literally ‘the soil has spoken’). In a sense Christ in this context is both guardian and the soil itself. New conceptions of Christ’s lordship and his salvation of all creation can develop from this essentially African expression of his pervading presence in the cosmos. In African peasant society at any rate Christ’s reign as *muridzi* (guardian) of the land is an essential part of the good news, for he is the one who is believed to consciously strike a balance between exploitive agricultural progress and altruistic, sacramental restoration of the land.

Here, in Christ’s lordship, the Independents give ecological expression

to what Moltmann (1985:227) calls the messianic calling of human beings:

In the messianic light of the gospel the appointment (of humans) to rule over animals and the earth also appears as the 'ruling with Christ' of believers. For it is to Christ, the true and visible image of the invisible God on earth, that all authority is given to human beings at creation ... It is to 'the Lamb' that rule over the world belongs. It would be wrong to seek for the *dominium terrae*, not in the lordship of Christ, but in other principalities and powers – in the power of the state or the power of science and technology.

The AICs will agree with Moltmann that their tree-planting eucharist gives expression to their 'ruling with Christ' in his liberating and healing rule as fulfilment of the *dominium terrae*. However, the twofold interpretation of Christ's body – implying both personhood and cosmic presence – is a somewhat controversial issue amongst AAEC earthkeepers. This is illustrated by some responses to recent interviews on the subject.

As mentioned before (supra:43), Bishop Farawo, senior AAEC nursery keeper and expert forester, is critical of the interpretation that tree-planting 'heals' Christ's cosmic body, and said outright: 'Tree planting during the eucharist is not really part of Christ's body. It is like an expression of Christ's body ... for our clothing the earth pleases Christ.' Farawo's two wives held opposing views on the matter. While Miria thought that earthkeeping is unrelated to Christ's body, Sophia described tree planting as 'part of Christ's body, because it is he who inspires people to restore the earth; he is present in all earthkeeping activities.'

In the previous chapter I also mentioned that in response to the question whether the earth is part of Christ's body – a question integral to an in-depth scrutiny of views on the tree-planting eucharist – the majority of respondents answered affirmatively. An interesting array of reasons were given. I quote a few examples:

Revd Tawoneichi of the Evangelical Ministry of Christ said: 'The earth is the body of Christ, as is the church. Only we do not sufficiently acknowledge this truth because we remain ignorant of the creation story. Christ's spirit hovered over the waters and was therefore part of

the elements.' Because of this identification of creation with creator, Tawoneichi saw the church's earthkeeping role as healing the wounded body of Christ, that is, the barren earth.

Bishop Chimhangwa of the African Zion Apostolic Church said: 'We would not exist if all of creation was not Christ's body. God, the Father, created the earth and Christ was part of it. So Christ is in creation. He is the fulfilment of all creation and the owner of it all.'

Mrs Chimhangwa, the Bishop's wife, concurred: 'Yes, the earth is part of Christ's body, because that is the place of his footprints, the place where he dwells. The trees are his, and if they are chopped down for no good reason, he is hurt.'

Bishop Machokoto, the AAEC president, claimed in no uncertain terms: 'Indeed, the earth is Christ's body. If the environment that we destroy was not Christ's body, Mwari would not have been angered and he would not have punished us with this drought. Mwari is angry. He says: 'The people destroying the earth are destroying my body.' We people have killed the earth, we have killed the trees and the animals ... In killing the earth we are destroying the body of Christ, the life of God.'

Some of these statements reveal radical sentiments, reflecting in AIC peasant perspective the severity of the life-threatening drought which prevailed at the time that these views were aired. Implicit in these views is an acute awareness of the incarnate Christ who, despite his lordship, shares the suffering of an endangered creation. Chimhangwa's assertion that Christ's body is creation and that he is the fulfilment of all creation underlines the AAEC's predominant interpretation of the cosmological implication of Colossians 1:15-20 ('in Christ all things hold together'). Whereas Carmody (1983:91) maintains that this *logos* doctrine remained unrelated to Western science and was neglected as a theological basis for referencing nature, the AAEC depends on it as the cornerstone of its tree-planting eucharist.

In doing so there is no pretence that we earthkeepers are the saviours of creation, for that we can never be. But as believers and disciples of the one who holds all things together, we are erecting not merely symbolic but physical signposts of life-giving hope in a creation suffering while it awaits redemption. For, as Duchrow and Liedke (1987:61) correctly state:

Spirit-endowed beings do not save creation, but creation looks to us. The way that we cope with its suffering shows how much hope there is for creation. When we increase the suffering of creation its hope sinks. When we sharpen the conflict between human beings and nature, and also the conflict between humans, then creation lapses into resignation. When, instead, in solidarity with nature and our fellow human beings, we reduce suffering, then the hope of creation awakes into new life.

Such a solidarity between humans and nature is precisely what the AAEC hopes to achieve. Through the movement of the earthkeeping Spirit new unity is being established between formerly opposing churches and between a pluriformity of religions in society, giving rise to an ecumenism of hope. In the participating holy cities and Jerusalems, hope takes concrete shape in the form of a healing ministry that attempts to cover and nurture the afflicted land. Serious attempts to expose and discipline those who continue raping the earth embolden the green combatants to intensify the struggle. Replacing the trees in sacramental recognition of the lordship of Christ – the ultimate guardian who reigns over, yet suffers within, the stricken earth – brings life and celebration to creation.

TOWARDS AN AFRICAN THEOLOGY OF THE ENVIRONMENT

PART 2

Towards an African  
theology of the  
environment