

Widening horizons

There is growing awareness of the global environmental crisis in world Christianity today. An expanding body of eco-theological literature, examples of which have been quoted in this study, confronts us with the urgent need for environmental stewardship. Significant church or church-related developments, such as the World Council of Churches' JPIC (Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation) programmes, the Reformed initiative at the Au Sable Institute, church participation in the Rio Earth Summit and Orbis Books' introduction of a new series of publications entitled 'Ecology and justice' (Burrows 1995:173) all point to a growing will within the Christian church to face up to environmental issues consistently and realistically. Yet despite these positive signs one cannot deny that on the whole the Christian church as a community has been slow to respond to the environmental crisis by means of prophetic witness and telling action.

McDonagh (1994:103f) highlights the failure of twentieth-century church leaders to grasp the full implications of the destruction of nature and the urgent need for all human institutions to contribute towards its remedy. For all its significance to the Catholic Church, the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, for instance, had no underlying ecological vision of reality. It subscribed to a 'dominion theology' and the standard view of the subjection of nature to human rule, human beings featuring as the crown of creation (McDonagh 1994:104-105). Recent papal encyclicals mention the ecological crisis only in passing and even the Holy See's submission to the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 appears to endorse human domination of nature when it states that 'the ultimate purpose of environmental and developmental programs is to enhance the quality of human life to place creation in the fullest possible way at the service of the human family' (McDonagh 1994:107; italics in original). Similar anthropocentric trends prevail in the churches of the Reformation. Here the message of salvation tends to focus on the individual human being, thus reinforcing the dualism between spirit and

body, spiritual and worldly kingdom. McDonagh (1994:110) quotes the Methodist theologian Johnston McMaster's verdict that 'the location of God's Kingdom in the soul eliminated God from the ecological as well as the political arena'. In such a spiritualised kingdom, only to be realised fully in a future parousia, there is little scope for the protection and/or redemption of all the earth here and now.

To remedy its poor environmental track record so far, McDonagh (1994:114–115) calls on the church to adopt a prophetic stance. According to him this entails, first, criticism of unjust economic, political and social systems which impoverish people and destroy the environment; and second, an attempt to empower people to formulate a new vision of a more equitable and sustainable world order. In the struggle for justice and ecological reform the common culture of contentment needs to be confronted and a 'prophetic liberation of the imagination' (McDonagh 1994:119, with reference to Walter Brueggeman's book with that title) should be propagated, resulting in new and creative action.

It is against this background that ZIRRCO's prophetic ministry of earth-keeping should be evaluated. The new vision and environmental missionary activity in the ranks of the AAEC – largely in spontaneous and spiritually informed response to local conditions, without much exposure to modern eco-theological literature – present a challenge to the world church. This is not because the AICs involved at any point intended their earthkeeping ministry to counteract or correct the limitations of Christian churches elsewhere, but because their earthkeeping unfolds as an authentic act of faith. It is a conscious response to the movement of the life-giving Spirit, and manifests itself in a culturally relevant form. The appeal and inspiration of the AAEC lie in its humble environmental creativity and in a 'prophetic liberation of the imagination' which sets it on an exciting, unprecedented course of Christian mission in earth stewardship. As in all new Christian missionary ventures, activity entails widening horizons, both visionary and geographical. This will be the focus of our concluding chapter. But there are other reasons that the AAEC's earthkeeping experience should be taken seriously elsewhere. As Burrows (1995:172–173) – in keeping with emerging missiological consensus – observes: 'Although Third World Christianity – in its concreteness, as opposed to an idealised image of it – is not taken seriously in the North, *it is today the living center of the*

Christian tradition' (my italics). The AAEC's attempt to develop an environmental mission which addresses the local manifestation of a global phenomenon – one which threatens all of life on planet earth – underscores Burrow's assertion that 'First' and 'Third' World Christianity face essentially similar missionary situations, as a result of which Northern and Southern Christianity 'stand at a crossroad *where collaboration as equals in a world mission* is possible, and, quite probably, essential' (Burrows 1995:172f) (my italics).

If churches on all continents are moving towards 'collaboration as equals' in a world mission which incorporates earthkeeping as part of God's specific plan for all creation – as indeed they should – it is important to identify the deepening spirituality and broadening vision which are part of, and have evolved from, specific experiences of earth-care. We shall consider both the internal dimension of growth in spirituality and ecological commitment within the Zimbabwean movement, and the external one of geographical outreach in networking and project implementation.

7.1 Internal growth

7.1.1 Eco-spirituality

In my description of the AAEC's environmental ministry I have used terms such as 'commitment', 'dedication', 'determination', 'bondedness', and 'care'. All these terms refer to participant earthkeepers' changing attitudes towards each other, God and the earth. At the core of this phenomenon lies conversion – a change of heart, more in the sense of a gradually developing relationship with nature through ritual communion and deepening respect for God's creation born of nurturing it, than the radical, abrupt change that sometimes characterises the initial act of turning to Christ and the Christian church. Difficult as it is to gauge the extent of attitudinal change in a broad movement, I think it is fair to say that conversion to earth stewardship, as observed in ZIR-RCO, is basically a move from exploitive, *eros*-type love to biblically informed and Spirit-inspired *agape* love for nature.

To clarify this statement we need to look at Susan Bratton's paper entitled 'Loving nature: eros or agape?' (1992). Citing Old Testament texts such as Hosea 1:18 (which illustrates that a divine covenant between

Plate 46 Conversion: a deepening respect for God's creation. African earth-keepers' hands: black hands, white hands, men's hands, women's hands, sensitive and caring hands that nurture human families and earth-community



Plate 47 Under the cross of Christ in Zion a new lifestyle of tree-nurturing takes shape



God and Israel includes creation as a participating and benefiting party) and New Testament texts like John 3:16 ('For God so loved the world (*kosmos*) ...'), John 1:10 ('He (Christ) was in the world (*kosmos*) ...') and Romans 8:19–21 (which distinguishes between the material world and humankind without, however, restricting Christ's redemption to the latter), Bratton argues that God's love for nature is not 'second-hand' but has the same form and characteristics as God's love for human beings. Because agape love is self-giving, it is preferable to eros when it comes to relationships with the environment. Eros, being the physical form of human love, has severe limitations because it 'has been modified by separation from God, competition, and shortage – its tendency to desire and possess denies the flow of God's providence and blessing'. Consequently 'eros has always been a limited form of love, inviting finite beings who must of necessity draw some of their sustenance ... from each other' (Bratton 1992:12). Agape, being love given from beyond humanity, is capable of transforming human need eros and aesthetic eros, delivering these forms of 'love' from acquisitiveness and self-orientation (Bratton 1992:13).

In her discussion of agape as a 'value-creating principle', Bratton (1992:15) says 'this characteristic implies that it is God's love directed toward nature in blessing, covenant, and other forms that gives nature worth. Because agape love for nature must come from God, humans who purposefully ignore or avoid divine influence cannot perceive nature as truly valuable.'

As the 'initiator of fellowship with God', agape defines meaningful relations between humans, God and nature. Bratton (1992:15) writes:

Without agape human love for nature will always be dominated by unrestrained eros, and will always be distorted by extreme self-interest and material valuation (which results in acquisitiveness). Not only can agape transform eros, but it can also provide an eschatological vision of nature, quite independent of our day-to-day needs. If agape is characterised by divine fellowship, it brings humans and creation together (and considers the needs of both simultaneously).

Some outstanding features of Christian agape love for nature, as described by Bratton, are: a shift from dominion as 'taking control over' towards 'taking loving responsibility for' nature; the pursuit of Christian virtues such as simplicity, compassion and humility which – as in the

case of Francis of Assisi – can lead to a comprehensive ministry in nature, one which includes even the most elementary forms of life; the replacement of human will with divine insight, which includes attention to the values expressed in Christ's teaching and the concerns of God's kingdom; the will to be self-giving to the point of sacrifice and suffering; and interaction with nature in the knowledge that God's love and grace can be received through nature in common expectation of God's kingdom of peace.

The distinction between eros and agape love for nature, based on the interpretation of biblical texts, Platonic philosophy and/or Western theology, does not feature explicitly in AZTREC and AAEC speeches or sermons. The Shona word for love (*rudo*) is seldom used to describe the relationship between humans and nature. Nevertheless, the common qualification of earthkeeping endeavour as '*kuchengetedza zvisikwa zva Mwari*' (to care for or protect God's creation) reveals an altruistic self-sacrificing attitude towards nature, implying a spiritually inspired love or care similar to that described by Bratton. The radical distinction between *varoyi venyika* (wizards of the earth), who exploit the earth without concern for the future, and earthkeepers, who attempt to clothe and heal the earth, suggests awareness of the eros-agape conflict in the human psyche, and implies that individual and ritual development will be from an exploitive eros orientation to a caring agape attitude which benefits both nature and fellow human beings. Admittedly the green struggle itself is imperfect, with occasional cross-currents of self-serving individualism as opposed to sacrificial service. Yet the dominant trend discernible in a deepening eco-spirituality is one of growth, as signposts of hope and love for all creation are joyfully erected along the consciously chosen path of earthkeeping. This observation needs to be substantiated with some telling illustrations from our AAEC experience.

Before doing so, however, it should be noted that a similar development towards an agape relation with nature is also apparent in the traditionalist eco-spirituality of AZTREC. Although one cannot discount Christian influence in this association, intense interaction with the guardian ancestors at *mafukidzanyika* earth-clothing ceremonies and the direct involvement of the oracular deity at Matonjeni undoubtedly foster greater care for the environment and a more personal identification with the plight of nature in traditionalist circles. This is evident in

the full-time involvement of AZTREC spirit-mediums with land issues and their willingness to risk hardship and suffering incurred by prophetic criticism of land ownership and land distribution as administered by the ruling African elite. There are also the chiefs' intensified efforts to revive the customary conservation laws on holy groves, to curb river-bank cultivation in their chiefdoms and their 'love affair' with trees. All this is revealed in changed lifestyles as new patterns of eco-spirituality take shape. Hence the traditional holistic worldview, which tends to become obscured in the struggle for survival in an agro-economic situation of depleted land resources, resurfaces and is rejuvenated by intensified communication between the living and the living dead on behalf of abused members of the earth community who reach out silently for care and justice. In a Christian perspective I am inclined to attribute this development in traditional religion to the flowering of the inclusive grace and general revelation of the universal God, which have been operative in African traditional religions through the ages. It parallels the development from eros exploitation to an agape relationship with nature observed in AIC circles.

As for the AAEC, the following aspects of eco-spirituality illustrate the shift to agape concern for nature.

- The conceptualisation of God in the AAEC's emerging environmental theology reveals the realisation that authentic *earthkeeping is a divine initiative*. The new agape relationship with nature stems from the pervasive presence and the summons of Mwari the creator that his people should engage in responsible earth stewardship. It is rooted in Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection for the entire cosmos which, among other things, answers the call of the guardian ancestors to heal the barren land. Agape attitudes are also inspired by the Holy Spirit, who reveals the sinfulness of people's overexploitation of nature as a condition for genuine ecological conversion. All this surfaces in the sermons, discussions and actions of the fighters in the war of the trees. Such awareness evokes humility, which expresses itself in opposition to the triumphalist certitude of human dominion over nature. Instead, it proclaims the interwovenness of humans and nature in the presence of God, causing earthkeepers spontaneously to declare their union with the trees on whom they rely for the breath of life itself. Trees as the 'property' of a jealous God also acquire intrinsic value. They are to be respected as beings and

equals who are given a voice in the AAEC's tree-planting liturgy. Thus trees – trees spoken to, trees protected, trees nurtured and treasured – symbolise our freedom fighters' changing attitudes to creation.

- The *individual lives* of fighting cadres in our green resistance movement, key figures and villagers alike, attest an all-absorbing spirituality which informs and directs their new-found, diverse vocations. Mention was made of iconic leaders, most of whom have taken up earth healing as a life task. Self-interest is bound to play some role in the case of salaried workers. Yet several of our best paid staff are in a position to choose other, and in some cases more lucrative, careers. Apparently the call to mission, based on growing concern for God's creation, imposes a decisive mystical constraint on their lives, somehow overriding other considerations. Then there are the unsalaried church leaders and many of their followers who spend much of their time tending seedlings, nurturing trees, travelling on earthkeeping errands, attending meetings for days on end with little or no prospect of remuneration. Add to this long and exhausting weekends of tree-planting ceremonies which tax the energies of all concerned, and the stamina and enthusiasm of key figures at the centre of events, who are seldom absent, and one must conclude that only passion and sacrificial love from beyond can trigger and sustain such activity, such lives.
- The *incorporation of nature into church rituals* affirms the common will of believers to draw all the members of the earth community – animate and inanimate – into the circle of worship of Mwari and caring for each other. The tree-planting eucharist is an obvious case in point. It not only constitutes a new dimension of missionary outreach but declares publicly that the representatives of nature, the trees, have the value and status that God attributes to them, that they are worthy of love and care. Unlike the ZCC missionary strategy where the eucharist is the springboard of missionary mobilisation within the church (*supra*:153–157), the AAEC tree-planting eucharist is a witness event in its own right, a vehicle of mission proclaiming the good news to all creation. Not that the classic missionary command in Matthew 28:19 is eclipsed by ecological endeavour, allowing it to supersede the call for repentance, conversion, human salvation and church formation – these remain the essential missionary dynamics of all prophetic AICs. But the missionary mandate here is

derived from the healing ministry of Christ, related to the believer's stewardship of all creation as required by Mwari in the creation story of Genesis, and highlighted repeatedly with reference to Christ's involvement in creation (Col 1:17). What Christ literally holds together in this eucharist is the healing and wholeness of both nature and people. His blood was spilt to atone for all creation. The celebrating earthkeepers recognise this by allowing the empowering blessing of the sacrament to translate into an act of earth healing. They then kneel down in recognition of the human need for healing. The sacrament thus conveys a powerful message of Mwari/Christ's love for the entire cosmos and of human attempts to give expression to the implications for themselves and their environment.

- *Patriarchy* often characterises AIC leadership. This is attributable to the influence of male authoritarianism in patrilineal kinship, the 'inheritance' of church leadership by the eldest son of a deceased bishop and the fascination of AIC bishops with some of the Old Testament patriarchs as role models. Even in the course of an individual AIC leader's lifetime one can discern a gradual change from direct and regular interaction with followers as prophetic healers to greater remoteness as bishops, burdened with administrative and organisational duties. Women, moreover, despite their numeric preponderance in the AICs and despite outlets for their leadership in the healing vocation or in the Mothers' Unions (*Ruwadzano*), are seldom found at the apex of AIC leadership hierarchies. *AAEC eco-spirituality has an impact on AIC patriarchy!* It opens up new opportunities for women and prompts a compassionate ministry of earth-care in which celebratory forms of interaction between the genders, particularly at tree-planting ceremonies, bridge the divide which sometimes characterises leader-follower relations. Here, too, there are signs of the emergence of agape love between earthkeepers as they relate to each other and to nature.
- This breakdown of patriarchal relations and isolating authority patterns is aptly described by the imagery adopted by Matthew Fox in his *A spirituality named compassion* (1992). Fox complains about the exile of compassion in Western Christianity, dominated as it is by the quest for perfection and success. He maintains that the lack of compassion 'has left us with a sexually one-sided spirituality in which the prevailing patriarchal presumptions exclude nurturing, caring

and earthiness' (Fox 1992:37). For an analysis of spiritual experience in such a context he distinguishes between two contrasting symbols: climbing Jacob's ladder and dancing Sarah's circle.

Christian mystics, says Fox, tended to use the ladder in Jacob's dream as a symbol of fleeing the earth in order to experience a transcendent, an 'up-like' God. According to Gregory of Nyssa we climb the ladder away from earthly concerns to the heavenly majesty of God. Augustine insisted that up-ness is divine and down-ness demonic. In such a scheme contemplation is won at the expense of compassion. 'Thus,' says Fox (1992:40), 'compassion is descent; it is also an afterthought, a luxury that one can afford after a very long life-time of contemplative ascending.'

By contrast, the dancing of Sarah's circle implies a spirituality of laughter and celebration, as Sarah is filled with wonder and surprise at giving birth to Isaac (the name means 'God has smiled') in her old age. Sarah is a symbol of birth-giving, creating and fruitfulness. She laughed because human wisdom said pregnancy was impossible. But divine wisdom said nothing was impossible. In contrasting the two symbols it appears that the ladder dynamics is restrictive and elitist, whilst the circle motif is welcoming and compassionate. When the hierarchy becomes normative for spiritual progress the ladder's rungs are divinised and advanced individuals turn into remote 'deities'. In the circle dance, on the other hand, you relate eye to eye: you can see the tears in your neighbour's eyes; you share a built-in equaliser which is lacking when exalted persons operate from on high. Instead of the distance and abstractness of ladder-climbing, the circle dance creates physical nearness, empathy and earthiness. Insisting that the two symbols are irreconcilable, Fox argues for participation in Sarah's circle if a compassionate spirituality is to be developed in our global village – the only kind of spirituality which will turn around the forces of global destruction.

The lives of some outstanding AIC leaders in Zimbabwe did undoubtedly contain an element of Jacob's ladder dynamics. During the period of his call to Christian ministry the late Johane Maranke (AACJM) was considered to have dwelt with Christ in the heavens above, an experience which required isolation, religious contemplation and fasting up in the mountains. Similar experiences in dreams and

visions during periods of seclusion characterise the histories of many AIC male leaders and senior clergy. During his lifetime the late bishop Samuel Mutendi of the ZCC was considered by his followers to be closer to Mwari than they were. He was the one who 'lifted their prayers' to God in heaven. Thus one can speak of a certain elevation of the leader, a mystique of occasional remoteness integral to the kind of iconic leadership which, sometimes, includes black messianic trends.

Both Maranke and Mutendi, however, like the majority of bishops involved in the AAEC, were not meditating mystics in the Western and Eastern sense of the word at all. Their presence in the midst of their followers was real and not an afterthought, as Fox claims for medieval Christian mystics. As indicated above, compassionate interaction between prophetic healer and followers tends to be the norm before the 'dignified distance' of an ageing leader – similar to that of a traditional chief, who delegates considerable responsibility to councillors and elders – sets in.

For men like Maranke and Mutendi, the 'distance' of Jacob's ladder was overcome in their sharing of Christ's great commission with their followers during the paschal celebration. At the point of handing the sacrament to their followers, they drew them into the celebration of dancing Sarah's circle, challenging them as it were to carry the gospel to the wider family of humankind. Distance was overcome and mutuality in compassion became manifest when Christ incarnate, the black icon, handed his black disciples the earth-bound symbols of inner union and boundary-transcending outreach. Compassion became manifest as each ZCC and Apostolic communicant received the bread and wine from the hands and looked into the eyes of either the 'man of God' in Zion City or the African Apostle.

Something similar, but possibly an even more radical departure from AIC patriarchy in its alienating form, is noticeable in the AAEC tree-planting eucharist. First of all, the ecumenical setting is marked by the presence of several bishops. Dignified and revered as they are in their splendid robes, they themselves set an example of servanthood in the earthkeeping ministry. Their sermons reflect compassion for nature and for people as they blend into, rather than stand apart from, the proceedings. It is as if their concern about the plight of

nature overrides leadership considerations, at least for the occasion, as action in the struggle unleashes the motivation for unity, equality and humility.

Second, the bishops and all senior clergy make the same public confession of ecological sins as everybody else. *Earth stewardship offers no privileges!* Apparently the Spirit is equally relentless in revealing the shortcomings of respected church dignitaries and those of their followers. Mystical sanctification and empowerment erase human pretence and hierarchical privilege in anticipation of earth-care in sacramental union.

Third, the bishops file past the communion table, tree in hand, and later plant their own trees like everybody else. Then they celebrate the good news of new life in the form of trees placed in the earth by dancing the Zionist circle dance – Sarah’s circle – together with all the other earthkeepers, and they lay on hands or kneel to receive hands in the closing healing ceremony. *Ndaza* Zionist bishops in fact participate regularly in the circle dances of their churches, but there is a marked difference in the ecumenical *maporesanyika* context. Here they are less in charge of proceedings, deliberately closer to the soil and therefore also more spontaneously included in Sarah’s circle, where unity with the earth’s family derives from giving comfort to the stricken land.

Apart from the ritual manifestation of patriarchal remoteness being transcended by agape love for nature, female ascendancy and emancipation from male authority are also apparent in the organisation and project implementation of ZIRRCON-AAEC. To the extent that women in their ZIRRCON clubs are contributing to earthkeeping and progress by improving the income and nurture of their families, they are respected and assisted by many of their male partners in the movement. In her public speeches, Raviro Mutonga, coordinator of the Women’s Desk, always acknowledges the assistance received from men in preparing their woodlots for tree planting and the willingness of males in leadership positions not to interfere in the income-generating and other projects launched by women (supra:47). This is a far cry from the resistance, even suspicion, encountered from the side of AIC bishops some twenty years ago when the first attempts were made to launch a Women’s Desk in *Fambidzano*

(Daneel 1989:476f, 491f). The process of achieving gender equality and overcoming ingrained trends of male domination in church leadership hierarchies is, of course, far from complete. Change, however, is in the air and significantly so when male earthkeeping bishops start discovering and admitting that the lead dancers in Sarah's circle can and should be women, that without the compassion, creativity and leadership of women the entire environmental struggle will flounder.

- Other signs of changing attitudes towards nature prompted by eco-spirituality are the following: the determination of our earthkeepers to devise and implement *an environmental ethic* which clearly distinguishes between earth exploitation and nurturing earth stewardship; the move *from religious exclusiveness to religious inclusiveness* and tolerance as meaningful dialogue in joint ecological action takes shape; and the *breakdown of isolationist church-ism* as the AAEC increasingly takes note and feels part of the Christian fellowship worldwide, involved in the same struggle in the global village and its environs.

Difficult as it is to assess human motives and attitudes, I consider the trends outlined above sufficient evidence of a wide-reaching and profound spiritual phenomenon of inner growth. We observe eco-spirituality spiralling out, stimulating increased and varied responsibility for the environment, and stimulated in its turn by the very action it has generated to gain spiritual depth and enrichment by overcoming the inner enemy of self-seeking eros love and embracing the earth community in agape love.

7.1.2 Environmental commitment and vision

Inner eco-spiritual growth, as a condition for and byproduct of environmental endeavour, inevitably includes growing environmental understanding and commitment, resulting in broader horizons. The descriptions in this book of ZIRRCO's involvement in its primary objectives (afforestation, wildlife conservation and the protection of water resources, and the mobilisation not only of religious groups but also of the youth and women) reflect an expansion of programmes and responsibility for nature. This in turn feeds a shared vision among our earthkeepers for outreach, interaction and joint enterprise beyond the bor-

ders of our country. My participation in international eco-theological conferences, the regular visits of sponsors, environmentalists and other interested parties from abroad, the study of environmental themes by ZIRRCO staff members and the teaching of elementary earth-care in peasant society contribute to this development. To feel part of a global resistance movement, to learn about the green struggle in other countries and to plan ecological action with due regard to both the local religio-cultural context and the more universal perspective – all this helps to mature vision, however slowly, and inspires the day's task in local mission, despite setbacks. It also instils growing realism when soaring idealism comes up against sobering achievements.

Growing, too, is an understanding of the interconnectedness of all that exists in the cosmos. This awareness naturally highlights the limitations of ZIRRCO's threefold ecological goals. The question arises, for instance, how one should evaluate ZIRRCO's apparent afforestation successes in relation to escalating land degradation, caused in part by unjust *land distribution* and insufficiently controlled *population growth*. Can one successfully curb deforestation through afforestation projects without dealing with the basic causes more vigorously? It would be easy to argue on behalf of ZIRRCO that available funds and salaried staff set the limits of our endeavour and that too wide a scope of activity could jeopardise the quality of our current ecological work. However, this is the kind of question ZIRRCO will have to face in the future. As its auxiliary forces grow it should be possible for ZIRRCO to extend the scope of its work to match the broader vision and convictions that have emerged.

A few examples of extended responsibility will suffice.

7.1.2.1 *Population growth*

This subject is so important for the future of our planet that no earth-keeper worthy of the name can ignore it. In his informative and challenging book, *Earth in the balance*, Al Gore (1992:305f) lists the 'stabilizing of world population' as the first of five strategic goals in his proposed Global Marshall Plan, which should direct and inform all attempts to save the global environment. He discusses the population explosion of the past 45 years (an increase from 2 billion to 5,5 billion) and the expectation that this alarming trend will repeat itself during the next 45

years. An estimated 94 per cent of the expected increase 'will occur in the developing world, where poverty and environmental degradation are already the most severe' (Gore 1992:308).

On the basis of projections made by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, Gore (1992:309) outlines the future plight of a few African countries:

Kenya, which now has 27 million people, will have within thirty years an estimated 50 million people. Egypt's population, 55 million today, is increasing by an amount equal to the entire population of Israel every four years; within thirty years it will be at least 100 million people; Nigeria, which already has 100 million people, will have within thirty years at least 300 million people. All three countries are already putting great strains on their natural resources and threatening the integrity of their ecological systems, so it is truly frightening to imagine the impact of doubling or tripling their members – not to mention the pitiful quality of life these extra scores of millions can expect ... The social and political tensions associated with growth rates like these threaten to cause the breakdown of social order in many of the fastest-growing countries, which in turn raises the prospects of wars being fought over scarce natural resources (eg water) where expanding populations must share the same supplies.

The factors that help to stabilise population growth are well known. They include rising per capita incomes; high literacy rates for both men and women which improve the prospects of effective family planning; low infant mortality rates which help build the confidence of parents that the basic family unit will survive; and access to affordable birth control techniques (Gore 1992:311).

Zimbabwe has one of the fastest growing populations in Africa. It will therefore be faced increasingly with the same kind of environmental scenario as that sketched for the countries mentioned above. The fact that some of the constraints which will slow down population growth in the long run are already at work in Zimbabwe does not relieve ZIRRCON of the obligation to consider and start making some kind of contribution in this field. This subject has already been raised at executive meetings, but the sheer weight of other ecological priorities relative to human resources has so far prevented the development and implementation of effective programmes. My own view is that ZIRRCON com-

mands such a wide sphere of influence at the grassroots that additional funding and expertise are warranted to take on population issues as a new but integral part of our earthkeeping concern. At some future stage I hope to be making proposals such as the following:

- Our conscientisation workshops in rural society should provide informative courses on population growth and its impact on the environment, in African and global perspective, to give participants an overview so that they can face up to their own responsibilities in this matter.
- An upbeat programme of research, publications and media exposure on the interaction of population and environmental issues, especially natural resources, should be launched.
- ZIRRCO's women's clubs could be instrumental in establishing rural clinics for family planning and antenatal and postnatal care, similar to those started some years ago in *Fambidzano's* community development projects. These clubs are ideally placed to combine tree planting with education on birth control for the women, as Wangari Matthai's Greenbelt Movement in Kenya tended to do (Gore 1992:324).
- For a number of years I have been sounding out politicians and ZIRRCO key figures about their views on curbing population growth by means of legislation and law enforcement. Politicians tend to shy away from this contentious subject, referring to the negative implications of such measures in China and the religio-cultural resistance they would provoke in Zimbabwe. Some prefer to believe that modern technology will provide the solution to global overpopulation. Others hope that family planning will eventually turn the tide. Some of ZIRRCO's leading women show interest in the idea of testing the notion of population legislation in local study and discussion groups so as to gauge the prospects of forming advocacy groups from the bottom up – groups that will make representations to government about the kind of legislation required.

My suggestions have all along been based on the argument that the rate of environmental destruction far exceeds the current prospects of controlled population growth and that education, birth control and related factors should be augmented by legislation if the tide is to be reversed

in time. To stimulate discussion I have made tentative suggestions about the number of children a nuclear family in either a rural or an urban context can be expected to raise. Communities engaged in environmental care could well reach consensus about the maximum number of children an adult woman can reasonably be allowed to have in terms of socioeconomic and environmental constraints. In addition, restrictive legislative measures (eg additional tax or forfeiture of educational subsidies for those who exceed the maximum number of children) could be proposed. Promoting population control advocacy groups at the grassroots has the advantage that they will create a favourable climate for politicians to tackle this highly controversial and therefore politically risky issue.

This may be a highly unpopular, complex and culturally incorrect line of action. I am not an expert in this field and cannot foresee all the repercussions. Yet as ZIRRCON matures into a comprehensive resistance movement it may well feel compelled to do the groundwork of testing these ideas in society, lest the voiceless members of our earth community be further abused and betrayed.

7.1.2.2 Land distribution

By the very nature of their work, earthkeepers in Zimbabwe's communal lands are confronted with land distribution problems and the non-availability of land as part of the colonial legacy – no less formidable a dilemma than population pressure on the land. ZIRRCON has essentially adopted the policy of empowering the poor and restricted subsistence farmers in the communal lands (most of whom can barely eke out a living on the land available to them) to tackle with immediate effect the environmental problems they are facing every day. This has always been a realistic ecological option. It does not imply ignoring or acquiescing in pre-Independence land tenure legislation, which historically is largely to blame for the deprivation of African peasant society. But it recognises that nature itself in the communal lands requires urgent remedial attention, irrespective of future land reform measures which will inevitably be preceded by lengthy political and legislative processes. If anything, the difficulty of finding suitable patches of land for woodlots when there is a desperate shortage of arable land has sharpened our earthkeepers' awareness that major land legislation will

be required to redress the inequitable situation in our country. Even though ZIRRCO has no official strategy or political agenda in this regard, critical and prophetic voices are regularly heard from both traditionalist and Christian quarters at meetings and in private conversations.

This is to be expected in a situation where, as Bakare (1993:74) observes, 'the landless peasants who had hoped for more land after Independence, as promised during the liberation struggle, saw the very land disappear into the pockets of the chiefs (the ruling elite). The land reform programme which is intended to correct the past inequitable land distribution, remains mere political rhetoric twelve years after Independence. Access to land is no longer a birthright, but a right for those who have the influence, money and power.'

In his attempt to develop a theology of the land which will prophetically remedy the ills of Zimbabwean land apportionment, Bakare (1993:72) uses the apposite metaphor of the 'land as mother' to describe the sacred relationship between African people and the soil. Like a human mother, the land has a very personal relationship with her children and therefore cannot be seen as a saleable commodity. Personal bonds with the land are further strengthened by the traditional practice of burying the umbilical cord which links mother and child in the soil after birth. This ritual symbolises mother-child and earth-human interwovenness. Moreover, as a mother belongs not only to one child but to the entire family, the land belongs to an entire community and not to individuals who secure entitlement to portions of it through their buying power. In view of this deeply ingrained African perception of land, the violation of it by Western notions of individual land ownership and the trauma inflicted on people through colonial land alienation are glaring.

Bakare criticises the mission churches in particular for not opposing the injustice perpetrated on Africans by the land tenure act, and for accepting land 'stolen from Africans' to establish their mission stations. Thus he considers the critical comments in recent years of the Roman Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace on the Land Acquisition Bill, which empowers the government to acquire land, to be inadequate. 'If the director of the Commission of Justice and Peace was serious about this piece of legislation,' he says, 'the starting point for him

should be to ask all the churches who own so much land given to them by Rhodes to give it back to the poor and follow Jesus (Mt 19:21)' (Bakare 1993:75). In conclusion Bakare (1993:80, 81) calls on the church to raise its prophetic voice and help redress the land distribution ills of the past from a position of unwavering identification and involvement with the landless poor and those peripheralised by a system that fosters injustice.

I fully agree with Bakare's call for the church's ongoing prophetic involvement in land distribution. The AAEC bishops to a large extent represent the landless poor, as do the chiefs and mediums of AZTREC. Hence ZIRRCO is well placed to encourage debate on land issues so as to channel the prophetic voice which is already heard in the ranks of the movement, and then to communicate its message to government and the nation via the media and direct dialogue between delegates of our movement and senior government officials.

Land issues remain complex. There is simply not enough land in the country to accommodate the needs of all people in the traditional sense. Moreover, economic viability cannot be disregarded when it comes to redistributing commercial land. To slice up the commercial lands into agriculturally uneconomic units could have dire economic consequences for the entire nation. There is also the question of the future of the wilderness areas, including the Zambezi valley and the large game parks, Hwange and Gona-re-Zhou. To produce informed policy and prophecy ZIRRCO will have to study and keep abreast of developments in this field.

7.1.2.3 Education

ZIRRCO has already done much to instil environmental awareness and commitment among the youth. Seed collection, the development of school nurseries and woodlots, ecological competitions and participation in ZIRRCO's tree-planting rituals have all contributed to this end. This spadework is currently being systematised, consolidated and expanded by a Youth Desk. In a global perspective, the work of the Youth Desk will become part of what Gore (1992:355f) calls 'Mission to Planet Earth': the gathering of information about what precisely is happening to the global environment and making such information available for public education so that the green revolution worldwide can forge ahead.

Gore's suggestions for the involvement of the youth require urgent attention:

The Mission to Planet Earth should be a Mission by the people of Planet Earth. Specifically, I propose a programme involving as many countries as possible that will use school teachers and their students to monitor the entire earth daily ... Even relatively simple measurements – surface temperature, wind speed and direction, relative humidity, barometric pressures, and rainfall – could, if routinely available on a more nearly global basis, produce dramatic improvements in our understanding of climate patterns ... The virtue of involving children from all over the world in a truly global Mission to Planet Earth is, then, threefold: first, the information is greatly needed (and the quality of the data can be assured by regular sampling). Second, the goals of environmental education could hardly be better served than by actually involving students in the process of collecting the data. And, third, the programme might build a commitment to rescue the global environment among the young people involved (Gore 1992:356, 357).

ZIRRCO's inclusion of the youth in earthkeeping has already stimulated awareness and commitment to earth-care among both school teachers and their pupils. Follow-up requires curriculum development to introduce regular environmental education in all schools, drawing students into nature research and monitoring projects of the kind proposed by Al Gore, launching wilderness, game park and related activities for youth clubs (as suggested on p 257), and extending such work through networking at national, continental and international levels. All this is easier said than done. One hopes that the spirit of our resistance fighters engaged in the war of the trees will help fire the imagination and concern of today's youth so that the coming generation of earthkeepers will continue building and improvising on what as yet are mere foundations and visions for the future.

The brief discussion of these three subjects – population growth, land distribution and education – illustrates an uneven process of intensifying awareness, commitment, aspirations and plans based on growing eco-spirituality and insight born of increasing earthkeeping experience. Despite limited funding, staff and action, a holistic approach is apparent throughout. The interrelatedness of all beings, ecosystems, coun-

tries and continents and the immense need for local and global change if planet earth is to survive, are a tremendous challenge. Widened horizons also present a chilling scenario of seemingly uncontrollable forces destroying natural resources worldwide in the name of so-called progress – a scenario which could fill any earthkeeper who weighs the significance of local action relative to global ecological needs with a sense of futility and despair. One might well ask whether the environmental point of no return for our planet has not already been reached. Fortunately light overcomes darkness and God-given love for this cosmos can overcome greed. Despite our anguish at the little we achieve, the struggle continues.

7.2 Geographic outreach: towards a united front in Africa

The dynamics of mission to the earth – understood in religious and, more specifically, Christian, terms – implies outreach, crossing frontiers; in this instance, overcoming internal obstacles to personal commitment and crossing the geographical boundaries of countries and continents so as to proclaim, enact and share the good news of liberation or salvation for all creation. As pockets of resistance to earth destruction form all over the world, some of them extend their activities to engage in geographically wide-ranging operations to help liberate the environment. Here the Greenpeace movement comes to mind. Others draw encouragement for their local struggle by sharing information in a growing network of communication and interaction worldwide. Green political parties, environmental departments of governments and a host of institutions concerned with forestry, natural resources, agriculture, wildlife and the like seek to awaken the collective conscience of nations, governments, financial and business concerns. In a sense, therefore, a global green revolution has already started.

Much of what is being done for the environment, however, is of purely symbolic significance or for the sake of 'political correctness' in the public eye. Generally earth-care falls woefully short of what is really required for a revolutionary reversal of those trends which seem to be propelling our planet to the precipice of total destruction. The 'first' world still exploits the 'two-thirds' world at the expense of its natural resources. Entire economies still feed military expansion and armaments rather than environmental reform. Rain forests are still being

decimated by multinational companies at the expense of healthy conditions for all in the global village, besides extinguishing species of animal and plant life as yet hardly known. Norwegians still continue whaling operations despite international treaties aimed at protecting threatened species of whales, and Japanese fishing fleets continue harvesting certain species of fish illegally despite the irreparable damage already done. In Africa the few remaining black rhino are still being threatened by ruthless profiteers, wilderness areas dwindle as ever growing numbers of people crowd out wildlife, and the processes of deforestation and desertification continue unabated.

In the face of a global environmental malaise which eludes the control of even the most powerful international organisations, how does a small ecological institution with its limited sphere of influence envisage its mission to planet earth? A few simple guidelines were adopted. First, ZIRRCON's resistance fighters refused to be daunted by a global situation which in many respects seemed to be beyond redemption or repair. A growing passion for the earth derived from a spiritual mandate impels it to reach out in mission regardless of the disheartening realities of the global situation.

Second, ZIRRCON decided that the gist of its message elsewhere should initially be restricted to the field in which it had gained local recognition and insight based on experience, namely religiously inspired afforestation. It was confident that the nature of its struggle and the tree-planting model it had developed were relevant not only to Zimbabwe but to other African countries as well. Third, ZIRRCON felt that in the continued development of its religio-ecological ministry, exposed to an extended network of communication and interaction in Africa, it could achieve goals like the following:

- help escalate the green revolution in Africa's grassroots communities
- contribute to the organisational structure required for continent-wide coordination of the green struggle
- challenge African religions generally and African Christianity in particular to develop eco-theologies and eco-ministries relevant to their local situations

Fourth, it envisioned that deepening local earthkeeping commitment, coupled with continental outreach, will eventually send out a noticeable

message to the global village – one which will contribute, however modestly, to the kind of change that will draw entire nations into the green revolution.

7.2.1 The South African connection

Because of my dual position for many years as ZIRRCO director in Masvingo and professor of missiology at the University of South Africa in Pretoria, a natural link was forged between the two institutions. Through regular visits to Masvingo, publications in Unisa's journals on ZIRRCO's activities, lectures to the university's theological faculty at annual seminars (once, rather unconventionally, accompanied by visiting spirit-medium vaZarira Marambatemwa, then president of AZTREC), I managed to keep my colleagues in the south informed about earth-keeping endeavours in Zimbabwe and opened up prospects of establishing a similar project in South Africa. Aware of the importance of Unisa as one of the largest distance-education universities in the world, I proposed the establishment of an endowed chair and a religio-environmental institute with similar objectives to those of ZIRRCO. These proposals were made in a lecture to faculty in 1993 and later published in the journal *Religion and Theology* (1995) under the title 'Contextualising environmental theology at Unisa'. The proper locus for such an institute, I suggested, would be the theological faculty and its objectives would include research, conscientisation and mobilisation for earthkeeping projects, all based on the ZIRRCO experience yet with sufficient scope for improvisation and adaptation to the Unisa context. Unisa welcomed the proposals, provided the necessary funds could be raised.

Over the next few years I negotiated with representatives of the Gold Fields Foundation and the South African Nature Foundation (now WWF-South Africa). Delegations were sent to Zimbabwe to observe ZIRRCO's earthkeeping programmes, particularly the ecologically inculturated dimension which formed the cornerstone of my grant application. This eventually culminated in the finetuning of proposals, in which the proposed chair was shelved for the time being because of the cost involved. In the course of 1994 it became obvious to me that a research project on African initiatives in Christian mission would keep me out of South Africa for extended periods, rendering my ecological

workload unmanageable. As a result I suggested that David Olivier, an eco-theologian and ethicist at Unisa, be appointed to take charge of the envisaged environmental venture. Dr Olivier drafted the final proposal to the Gold Fields Foundation, participated with me in the final rounds of negotiation and, once we had been awarded R2,3 million for the new project at Unisa, was appointed executive director.

Flying under the banner 'Faith and Earthkeeping' (F&E) and operating from within Unisa's Research Institute for Theology and Religion, the project was launched early in 1995. Its original staff was Dr Olivier (director), whose primary assignment was conscientisation and mobilisation for ecological projects; Michel Clasquin (senior researcher), an authority on oriental religion, who was responsible for creating a resources database, the preparation of new courses and the publication of a newsletter; and Victor Mohlobi (junior researcher), who was involved in establishing environmentally aware religious organisations, especially among the AICs in Gauteng province. A full-time field operations manager for project implementation still had to be appointed. At the request of our sponsor, Gold Fields, and with a view to continuous interaction between ZIRRCO and F&E, I was appointed F&E consultant for the first few years, as well as chairperson of both its executive and advisory boards.

A brief survey of the F&E project's performance during the first year of its existence reveals some remarkable achievements.

7.2.1.1 Research

A resource database (3 468 entries) and mailing list (2 085 entries) were established. Three specialised bibliographies (on AICs, the Gaia hypothesis and eco-feminism) were compiled for research purposes. Several articles and conference papers on religio-ecological subjects by Olivier, Clasquin and myself were published in journals and progress was made with long-term publication projects. Substantial research went into the preparation of three new courses on the Christian, Buddhist and Hindu faiths as they relate to earthkeeping. Courses on Islam, the Bahàì faith and Judaism were also drafted. A new team was formed, comprising Unisa and external academics interested in researching the field of religion and conservation. All research undertaken by F&E focuses primarily on the ecological value and impact of various African belief systems and their ritual activities.

7.2.1.2 *Conscientisation*

F&E's environmental education aims at building awareness of environmental problems, their causes and remedies. Information is presented in a manner which highlights the urgency of environmental reform and fosters a sense of responsibility for remedial action. The distinctive ethical codes and ecological values of different religions are taught with a view to inspiring creative reflection and active stewardship. A series of degree, certificate and personal development courses are being prepared, with anticipated annual enrolment reaching up to one thousand by the year 1999. Some of the materials are being adapted to African worldviews and religion for teaching by underqualified members of grassroots society, including AIC members. Dr Olivier has introduced a new degree course in environmental ethics in the department of systematic theology. This means that F&E will offer the widest possible range of environmental studies – from simplified contextual courses to doctorates – to accommodate the diverse needs of African society.

Part of the educational exercise consisted in establishing contact and determining prospects of meaningful interaction with other institutions working in this field, notably the Environmental Education Association of South Africa (EEASA), Unisa's interdisciplinary body for environmental education and the Human Sciences Research Council's (HSRC) Community Outreach Programme. The results have been most encouraging. In addition, Dr Olivier has laid the groundwork for extensive cooperation between F&E and the Universities of Zululand, Medunsa, Transkei, North West University and the University of the North. This includes the presentation of F&E courses and annual lectures by Dr Olivier on eco-theology in the theological faculties of some of these universities as an integral component of their curricula. This is an impressive achievement during the initial phase of the F&E project's existence and has launched a geographically wide-reaching 'missionary' outreach and challenge through ecological awareness-building.

The F&E quarterly newsletter is also proving to be an effective conscientising tool. In addition, workshops are used for conscientisation and project implementation. In 1995 an F&E workshop was held in collaboration with the Pretoria Branch of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) to investigate interfaith cooperation in environmental projects. Another was arranged with some 60 members of the

Uniting Reformed Church near Ellisras, where Dr Olivier and representatives of the Department of Agriculture (Pietersburg) spoke on identification of the causes of environmental problems in rural communities in relation to agricultural production, food gardens and water systems. The outcome of this workshop was the appointment of a committee to identify local needs and to promote socioeconomic and environmental upliftment. After establishing links between the newly formed committee and the Food Garden Foundation, food gardening projects were launched. Follow-up F&E workshops will focus on empowering the church community concerned to assess and proceed with its projects.

7.2.1.3 Mobilisation

Specific areas throughout South Africa targeted for earthkeeping service include the former homelands, ethno-communal lands, informal settlements, townships and new housing areas. Where community needs within the ambit of F&E's interests are identified, the aim is to mobilise people via existing religious institutions and their networks in society so as to meet the particular needs in an environmentally responsible manner. In the ensuing interaction F&E seeks to establish a balance between earth-care and exploitation of nature's resources.

Dr Olivier has established numerous contacts with interested institutions and communities throughout South Africa, many of them already engaged in basic forms of community development. In some instances F&E was asked to endorse and help promote existing ventures, in others new joint projects were planned. I mention two examples, the one involving a Christian and the other a Bahàì community:

The Didache Institute of the Reformed Church (*Hervormde Kerk*) at Hammanskraal offers a training programme for AIC leaders at its theological seminary. It also runs the Iphedise Centre on its farm, where it provides training in such skills as dressmaking, building and carpentry. Following regular visits and negotiations between Didache and F&E, the latter was asked 'to help with the establishment of a nursery for indigenous trees and shrubs as well as vegetable plants and that the F&E project would contribute towards the training of AIC church leaders through a module on environmental theology and ethics' (Olivier 1995:35). Subsequently, Olivier involved experts from both the Irene Agricultural Research Institute and the Ecological Research Unit at

Roodeplaat Dam to advise on Didache's proposed nursery. F&E thus fulfils a valuable function in relating ecological expertise to lay earth-keeping endeavour.

The second example is F&E's involvement in the activities of the Onverwacht farming community, at the request of Gilbert Thombisa, a member of the Bahàì religious community in Pretoria. Here, too, F&E was instrumental in introducing the requested expertise for the projects envisaged. The HSRC's Community Outreach Programme will provide a capacity-building programme to teach basic skills in project planning, implementation and administration to the village committee of Onverwacht. The Animal Improvement Institute at Irene will assist with breeding cattle herds. Trees for Africa will supervise a project to plant indigenous and fruit trees. The Food Garden Foundation will provide training in gardening techniques. The Agricultural Research Council (Roodeplaat Dam) will assist with the establishment of tree nurseries, and the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry has made a substantial grant for the community to develop its water resources.

Thus the Onverwacht community is receiving input from a wide range of professionals in a holistic agro-economic enterprise. Tree planting and the protection of water resources will be integral to improved farming and community-controlled administrative methods. It is not clear at this point what impact the Bahàì faith and its ritual expression will have on the earthkeeping dimension of community development activities. F&E certainly operates in a religiously more pluriform setting than ZIR-RCON. It does not, as yet, have movements like AZTREC and the AAEC, which from the start were religiously motivated in their environmental work and were prepared, therefore, to consider ritual innovation to activate and strengthen ecological commitment. Placed in a university context with limited financial resources for project implementation, F&E had little option in the initial period but to act as a link between African communities and supportive environmental organisations who could provide the required expertise. Consequently it may take some time for the religious input of activated communities to crystallise, but when it does, it may well in the long run yield greater religio-ecological diversity and surprises than ZIR-RCON has done. Somehow a balance will have to be struck between religious spontaneity in the activated community, the supervisory authority of ecological experts from outside and F&E's facilitating role, lest the impetus that could be derived from African eco-

spirituality be crowded out, even unwittingly, by the pragmatism and performance orientation of Western culture.

7.2.1.4 Networking and project propagation

During their first year in office F&E staff made contact with a large number of institutions to advertise the project's existence and potential, to determine opportunities for collaboration and fundraising and to establish a network for future reference and planning.

At government level discussions were held with the ministers or deputy ministers of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Education and Culture Services and Water Affairs and Forestry. Newsletters were sent regularly to the president, relevant ministries and all the provincial premiers. Overt support was also given to the activities of South Africa's Reconstruction and Development Programme.

As regards the inducement of churches to commit themselves to, and expand, their earthkeeping ministries, F&E policy differs from that of ZIRRCO, in that both 'mainline' churches and AICs were targeted from the outset. This includes discussions with the National Council of Churches of the WCC, the Catholic Theological Society, ministers' fraternals and environmental committees of the Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Dutch Reformed and other Protestant denominations. One hopes that the positive initial response from these quarters will eventually translate into a telling ecumenical ministry of earth-care.

Mr Mohlobi, who was involved in a religious survey conducted by Unisa's Department of Religious Studies in the environs of Pretoria, was in a position to stimulate the interest of quite a number of AIC leaders in Mamelodi and Atteridgeville. As a result F&E managed to conduct several meetings with these leaders. This gave me an opportunity to inform them about the AAEC's earthkeeping mission in Zimbabwe and to make suggestions about the formation of a similar earthkeeping organisation in South Africa. The response was heartening and it appears that regular follow-up will produce concrete results. In view of the different circumstances it may take the AICs in Gauteng longer to develop an ecological 'strike force' similar to the AAEC. On the other hand, the South African AICs collectively represent approximately 40 per cent of the black population – a tremendous potential for eco-mission that cannot be overlooked.

7.2.1.5 ZIRRCON-F&E relations

There are fairly close links between ZIRRCON and F&E. The latter's origination as a result of the activities of the former is generally recognised at Unisa and among donor agencies, even if publicly the connection is somewhat obscure. As founder and co-founder of both institutions I continue to be a meaningful link between them. Members of both organisations realise that they can learn from each other and that mutual participation in activities is conducive to greater knowledge, vision and commitment in the earthkeeping struggle.

At the same time, the two institutions are fully autonomous in relation to each other. There is no attempt to duplicate ZIRRCON's inculturated model of earth-care in the South African context. F&E does in fact follow some guidelines which have grown out of the ZIRRCON experience, such as the emphasis on traditional religion and AICs as motivating forces in environmental reform. But it is entirely free to empower communities to develop their own earth-care techniques in accordance with local insight and religious creativity.

In February 1995 two F&E staff members, Dr Olivier and Mr Mohlobi, accompanied a delegation of the new project's supporters to Masvingo for a week to study and participate in ZIRRCON activities.¹ The party included Revd Elias Ngodela, Baptist minister and head of the government's Religious Desk in Mpumalanga, Mr Gilbert Tombisa of the Bahàì faith, Pretoria, Mr Lucky Ngale, chairperson of the Atteridgeville Community Development Programme, Revd Paf Mengwae of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Mr Tony Abbott, prominent environmentalist in KwaZulu-Natal and member of the African Traditional Medicine and Herbalist Association, Ms Lesley Richardson of the WWF-SA; and Mr Paul Sochacqewski, head of Creative Development at WWF in Switzerland

The visitors travelled to several ZIRRCON nurseries and woodlots in Masvingo Province, interviewed members of participant communities and joined in day-long tree-planting ceremonies of both AZTREC and the AAEC, at Great Zimbabwe and in the Chikwanda areas in southern Masvingo. On the whole, the South African delegates were much impressed by the afforestation programmes they witnessed. They took part enthusiastically in tree-planting celebrations, dancing with abandon and planting their own trees. In their speeches they encouraged the

Zimbabwean earthkeepers to remain steadfast in their labours. Some publicly stated their intention of initiating similar activities back in South Africa. Mr Ngale actually started a new nursery in Atteridgeville after the tour and Mr Abbott has involved members of the traditional Medicine and Herbalist Association in Natal in a tree-planting project.

In meetings between the F&E delegation and the ZIRRCO executive (which included AZTREC and AAEC representation) the need for continuing interaction was discussed. It was agreed that the exposure of larger contingents of South African AIC leaders to ZIRRCO's tree-planting programmes could help trigger AIC involvement in the green struggle in the south. In return ZIRRCO was eager to send delegates to participate in F&E activities in South Africa. I was given an opportunity to float ideas for the formation of an African Earthkeepers' Union, some details of which are presented below. Both groups accepted the basic concept and approved the appointment of a working committee to assist me with the groundwork for a movement for which I have been canvassing support for several years. Thus a tentative start was made towards charting the course of a common earthkeeping agenda, even if it was not clear at the time how the proposed collaboration would be financed. Nevertheless a sense of *partnership in mission* characterised our joint field activities, evaluative discussions and future planning – a spirit which I hope will pervade the green revolution as it gains strength and momentum throughout Southern Africa.

7.2.2 African Earthkeepers' Union (AEU): a continental perspective

In Gore's discussion of the need for a world body to coordinate individual nation states' attempts to save the environment he dismisses the notion of a 'world government' as politically impossible and impracticable (Gore 1992:301). Although sceptical about the ability of the United Nations, the world's most important supranational organisation, to do very much, he suggests the formation of a UN Stewardship Council to deal with global environmental issues, as the Security Council deals with matters of war and peace (Gore 1992:302). In addition, he advocates the establishment of a tradition of environmental summit meetings, similar to economic summits, where heads of state can meet annually to consider international agreements, criteria and action plans for global environmental reform.

Considering the urgent need to tackle environmental issues on a massive scale, these proposals make sense. However, the extent to which a world body will be able to operate effectively will hinge partly on the ability of *regional bodies* – representing clusters of nation states, such as Southern, Eastern and West Africa – or continent-wide movements committed to the green revolution to provide the information required, to help mould a vision and strategy for the various regions and to assist with the mobilisation of grassroots endeavour in local religio-cultural contexts. Regional councils will also have to establish a tradition of regular summits to keep abreast of and help direct earthkeeping activities in their own regions or continents. They certainly should facilitate two-way communication between governments and professional environmental organisations on the one hand and grassroots society in their regions on the other, as well as between a world organisation and the societies (earth community) they represent. With a view to this kind of organisational configuration as an essential framework for a global green revolution, I started to canvass for the formation of an AEU with representation from as many African countries as possible.

Given the ZIRRCOON experience, I am inclined to envisage the AEU as a *people's movement* which, while seeking government support in the countries of operation and enlisting the services of environmental experts and organisations, derives legitimacy and motivation from grassroots society and basic communities in both rural and urban settings. In other words, the fighters in the trenches – the peasants who suffer most from soil degradation and deforestation, the workers in the cities responsible for cleaning up operations and recycling, the key figures among the masses who command religious and political power (church leaders, traditional custodians of the land, chiefs and mediums, etc) and the communities already engaged in earth-care – should play a leading role in the envisaged union. The voice of the peasants, who 'live with' the barren earth, the plains without firewood, the sparse forests without game, the silted up rivers without fish – in other words the voice of the poor who struggle to survive and who have no option but to engage in earthkeeping – should be heard. These are the people who are not seen or heard at environmental conferences where the professional researchers, field experts, sponsors and government agencies gather. Not that these professionals are unimportant – their expertise is vitally necessary. But in a people's movement, as is the case with ZIRRCOON, it

is the key representatives of the masses, the basic communities in the green struggle, who should be empowered to arrange *their* conferences, set the agenda in terms of *their* needs and experience of environmental care, and invite professionals and government officials whom *they* consider relevant for the issues *they* face. In this way the green struggle would be expanded and strengthened. While the experts can assist with monitoring, evaluating and upgrading ecological methods, it is the green fighters at the grassroots – those to whom the struggle is fast becoming a matter of life or death – who can capture the imagination of the masses and thus extend the battle front, expand the numbers of the green forces and instil commitment in the face of inevitable setbacks.

Affiliation to the AEU should be on a regional and institutional basis. A predetermined number of representatives from member states – be they chiefs, headmen, commoners, religious leaders, government officials, environmentalists, etc, or a combination of these – should have voting power in the AEU plenum. Institutions like the following should be granted full membership with voting powers:

- environmental agencies/movements: ZIRRCO, F&E, the Greenbelt movement (Kenya), WWF-SA, environmental NGOs and similar organisations known for an emphasis on people's empowerment
- traditional authorities: chiefs' councils, traditional healers' associations, spirit-medium guilds, traditionalist environmental organisations, etc
- churches and other religious movements: AICs, 'mainline' churches, ecumenical bodies such as national Christian councils, the All Africa Church Conference (AACC) and environmentally active non-Christian religions

Representatives of environmental ministries, or government commissions (eg Forestry, Wildlife, Water and Natural Resources) could be invited as observers and advisors at conferences. Heads of state, distinguished citizens and environmental VIPs could be patrons and honorary or ordinary members of the movement. Whatever the eventual patterns of AEU affiliation, the principle of a people's union, run by the people for the people and for the environment of Africa, should not be compromised and should be reflected in the plenum's voting powers and in the composition of its executive.

Ideally regional offices, representing clusters of countries, should pro-

mote the union's ecological aims and provide administrative continuity. Steering committees could liaise with movements in the field and arrange interim regional meetings to augment regionally rotating conventions or summits held every third or fourth year. It seems reasonable to expect ZIRRCO, in whose context the AEU was first conceived, to act as host institution and provide the platform for organisation and fundraising during the initial phase of launching and developing the union. On behalf of the first AEU working committee (consisting of two AZTREC, two AAEC and two ZIRRCO office representatives) I have already drafted a provisional constitution for the union, and have circulated it among members of both ZIRRCO and F&E as a starting point for the next round of discussions between these two institutions.

Obvious and important objectives of the envisaged Union could be the following:

- to found a people's movement of earthkeepers with the *widest possible representation* in African society throughout the continent
- to act as a *people's forum*, and from such a platform to *launch and give cohesion to the people's green revolution* on behalf of the abused land and natural resources of Africa
- to form a *research unit* to do environmental surveys in member countries, follow-up on research already done for the Earthscan series (Timberlake and others) by the World Resources Institute, by universities, governments and individual environmentalists, as well as feasibility studies for new ecological projects and monitoring research for existing ones. This will create a *comprehensive database* for purposes of policy making, mass conscientisation and assessment and direction of the unfolding green struggle in all its diversified manifestations
- to publicise and promote *community-based earthkeeping projects* such as those of ZIRRCO and F&E (afforestation, grass cultivation, gully reclamation, wildlife conservation, protection of water resources, recycling and antipollution measures) by exposing interested parties to projects in progress
- to attempt to *launch a few large-scale environmental operations* such as the preservation of large sections of the Zambezi valley as wilderness areas as a joint venture of the Zimbabwean, Zambian and Mozambican governments; and the rehabilitation of denuded and

eroded land bordering on the Kruger National Park in South Africa, with a view to African communities in those areas benefiting from the game population along lines similar to those of CAMPFIRE projects in Zimbabwe

- to promote *networking and meaningful interaction* between government agencies, environmental experts, development agencies, NGOs, donor agencies and African communities with an emphasis on the environmental contribution of the latter
- to communicate and negotiate with *heads of state*, key figures in governments and relevant ministries about the protection and sustainable use of natural resources
- to seek where possible to have *earthkeeping activities based on African people's religious beliefs and worldviews* and to encourage the religio-cultural reflection and reinterpretation which accompany such endeavour

These are only a few tentative guidelines which will have to be debated and defined more accurately once the union is officially and constitutionally launched and starts charting its own course. Apart from discussions with members of ZIRRCO and F&E, I have also put out feelers among chiefs in Ghana at a conference entitled 'Strategies for Africa: the contribution of traditional authorities to development, democracy, human rights and environmental protection' (Accra University, 1994) and among representatives of the All Africa Church Conference during deliberations at the International Association of Mission Studies Conference (Buenos Aires, 1996). Generally the response has been enthusiastic. However, much more groundwork – orientation visits to various African countries, establishing contacts with environmental institutions and movements, initiating and activating a think-tank, and fundraising – will be required before the envisaged union can be officially launched. The task is a daunting one, but the urgency of the challenge to appeal to and help mobilise African people in the most compelling of all struggles does not allow evasion or procrastination.

7.2.3 African Christian theology and environmental liberation

Inasmuch as the churches in Africa are bound to play an increasingly significant role in socioeconomic and environmental development and

liberationist work, it is important that theologising from within these churches should keep track of developments and provide the necessary guidance. This applies not only to the enacted theology of the AICs, although their innovative liturgical and pastoral response to an abused creation – as indicated in this study – certainly warrants attention, but also to written theology based on academic and spiritual reflection.

In the latter field three basic trends can be distinguished (Ukpong 1984:501):

- *African inculturation theology*, popularly known as African theology, refers to the dialogue between European Christian and African religious thought, aimed at conveying the Christian message in a contextually relevant form and integrating Christianity with African life and culture.
- *South African black theology*, following American black theology, spreads the good news as a message of political and socioeconomic liberation in a situation of oppression and segregation.
- *African liberation theology*, moulded on either the indigenous socioeconomic structure or Latin American liberation theology or both, preaches the gospel as a message of liberation in the African context of poverty, hunger and political powerlessness.

Ukpong treats African liberation theology as a development of the 1970s, to be found mainly in postcolonial East and West Africa and aimed predominantly at socioeconomic development and upliftment. This theology is significant for its focus on the very dimension which South African exponents of black theology have always found lacking in African theology (cf Tutu 1975). Ela (1986, chapter 6), one of the most eloquent African liberation theologians, for example, outlines the continuing dependence of African states on Western capital and their enslavement to the manipulation of multinational corporations (eg the cocoa dictatorship of Cameroon) despite political independence. He demonstrates very clearly that liberation in postcolonial Africa is an ongoing mandate in view of economically enslaving conditions, declining agrarian economies, misgovernment and juvenile unemployment. Active concern with socioeconomic development and the fair distribution of the proceeds of production and trade presents the church with

an ineluctable challenge to introduce structural reforms. Typical of Ela's realistic approach is the following comment:

The world is not given to us as a ready made reality, but as a *construction project*, and this construction project includes political and social tasks. We must therefore move from a religion of nature to *faith that lives in history and confrontation* (Ela 1986:100) (my italics).

Ukpong's classification is certainly helpful to distinguish major trends in African Christian theology. However, it tends to obscure the fact that there are liberationist dimensions, admittedly in different applications and varying degrees, in virtually all forms of African theology. Black African theologians' interpretation and translation of the Christian message in and for the African context (Ukpong's first category) are in themselves forms of religio-cultural liberation from the dominance of Western theology. The entire history of AIC growth, moreover, has liberationist features, be it liberation from white missionary tutelage, resistance to oppressive colonial rule, freedom fighting or liberation from poverty through community development programmes (Daneel 1989, chapter 3). African liberation theology is therefore a much older and richer tradition, as an existential reality of the African church, than the literature on the subject would have us believe.

One dimension which has been hidden or lacking in Africa's liberation theology is that of the environment. A preoccupation with *human* liberation, *human* dignity, *human* progress, *human* upliftment and so forth is understandable and justifiable, given the erstwhile colonial situation of *human* oppression, *human* impoverishment and *human* suffering. Hence a plea for an ecological focus in African theology should not be interpreted as denigrating its current anthropocentric and humanitarian emphases. These undoubtedly will remain! But the concern for human liberation should be consciously extended to encompass *all* members of the earth community. The former cannot be complete and meaningful if the latter are not included. Our human dignity derives in part from the respect and care we show for the earth. In other words, our claim to dignity and equality in a racial and interpersonal sense rings hollow if we keep living in an abused environment and contribute to its destruction, without any attempt to establish the justice there that we seek for ourselves.

A more comprehensive liberation theology, in the light of Ela's observations, would deal with *all* impediments to justice and sustainable wellbeing for the entire earth community. The struggle against 'First' World exploitation of the Two-thirds World will have to be intensified, not only because of its debilitating impact on these economies and therefore on people's living conditions, but also and particularly because of the unaffordable price these countries are paying in loss of natural resources. Ela's view of the world as a 'construction project' will only make real sense if environmental reconstruction is given the same priority as the political and social tasks he refers to. Instead of 'moving away from a religion of nature' we need confrontation, dialogue and reinterpretation in that very sphere, in our quest for a contextual *theology of nature* which will meet the current requirements for environmental liberation.

This task requires comprehensive and ongoing interaction between Christian earthkeepers – peasants, villagers, urban workers – and academic theologians. Those who design new eco-theologies because of their dedication to the struggle in the field and those who reach the outside world through their publications should join forces if the green revolution in Africa, in its Christian manifestation, is to escalate to a point where the earth is truly valued, healed and sustained. *Enacted and written eco-theologies have to meet and bond!* When this happens, new fellowships in mission, in earthkeeping ministries of compassion, will emerge. It will call for sacrifice. Mention has been made of the price paid by AIC earthkeepers, the grassroots theologians of peasant society. To professional theologians turned eco-prophets, and resistance fighters turned tree planters, the price may be even heavier. Some may well forfeit academic careers at universities or seminaries; others may have to interrupt their traditional teaching and research programmes periodically so as to become 'intermittent earthkeepers' themselves, more than participant observers in the earth community: mouthpieces and authors, who have experienced at first hand what the good news to a ravished earth really signifies and requires.

It should be possible for African eco-theologians to spend part of their time, if not all of it, rethinking, propagating, directing and assisting with the organisation of this liberation struggle. A passion for the earth will cause them to give prominence to earthkeeping, the neglected dimension in African liberation theologies, in the very forums where these

theologies thrive: the conferences of the WCC's African national Christian councils, the All Africa Church Conference, the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) and the like. African eco-theologians could, for instance, find EATWOT's aims and objectives sufficiently flexible to accommodate their concerns. These aims are formulated as follows: 'The continuing development of Third World Christian theologies which will serve the church's mission in the world and witness to the new humanity in Christ, expressed in the struggle for a just society' (Torres & Fabella 1978:273). Conceivably eco-theological influence will enrich the definition of 'the church's mission to the world' and the 'struggle for a just society' will be interpreted as seeking equal justice for all members of the earth community! EATWOT's fourth objective reads: 'keeping close contacts as well as being involved with action-oriented movements for social change' (Torres & Fabella 1978:273). As the green struggle escalates the intention of this phrase, if not the wording, could be extended to include involvement in movements for *socio-environmental* change.

A number of themes that have emerged in this study will require the attention of African eco-theologians. I mention only a few:

- *biblical foundations* for ecological stewardship, land use, environmental liberation and justice for all the earth in African terms
- *the nature of ecumenical interaction* between earthkeeping churches, as well as between Christian churches, African traditional religions and other religions. This is a broad theme which includes encounter and dialogue between African Christianity and African traditional religion in earthkeeping praxis, and the implications for an *African theology of religions*
- *ecclesiological perspectives*: What are the implications of an earthkeeping ministry for the *liturgies* and *pastoral programmes* of the African church? How does earthkeeping fit into the missionary nature of the church and its propagation of the good news of Christ?
- *conversion* and *sanctification* of individuals and Christian communities in relation to earth-care
- *healing* and *salvation* in holistic African and biblical eschatological perspectives
- *sin, evil wizardry and church discipline* in relation to the earth com-

munity and an *environmental ethic* designed both from the 'underside' of the green struggle and from contextual Bible reading

- *African eco-feminism*: the contribution of African women to community development, environmental reform and the like
- *state and church interaction* in earthkeeping; particularly land distribution, land husbandry and the protection of natural resources
- *African liberation theology*: the integration and balance between its religio-cultural, political, socioeconomic and environmental tenets
- *earthkeeping at the behest of a trinitarian deity*: a protective creator Father/Mother, a healing/saving Christ and a life-giving/guiding Holy Spirit

I am not suggesting that these themes have been entirely neglected by African theologians. I have cited, for instance, Bakare's study of land distribution in Zimbabwe. Nevertheless, full-blown eco-theological studies by African theologians are few and far between. As our experience and insight grow in Africa's escalating green revolution, themes of this nature will require probing scrutiny and committed theologising.

7.3 Africa and beyond

Zimbabwe's war of the trees is, as we have seen, not an isolated struggle. As a liberation movement which seeks the improvement and well-being of the entire earth community it has a ripple effect at the local grassroots, extending and blending with similar movements regionally, throughout Southern Africa, and in the future, it is hoped, across the African continent. In this sense our struggle resembles grassroots endeavour all over the world:

In Brazil many Christian based communities, with a total of three million members (in the 1980s), work with the poor and oppressed environment that makes them poorer. In Indonesia, six hundred independent development groups work on environmental protection alone. In India there are similarly some twelve thousand groups working for more appropriate development. Whether these scattered beginnings rise in a global groundswell depends on how many more individuals commit their creativity and energy to the chal-

lenge, to new vision and responsible action (Birch, Eakin & McDaniel 1990:5; with reference to Alan Durning).

Whether a 'global groundswell' or a global green revolution ensues – one which can help stem the tide of earth destruction and facilitate the historical transition from an industrial epoch to the 'ecozoic age' (Mary Evelyn Tucker, in Grim 1994:13) – also hinges on meaningful communication and enriching interaction between existing green movements, action groups and institutions worldwide. To reach consensus in the global village on the common good of all members of the earth community the local and global dimensions of earthkeeping will have to be kept in balance. Earthkeepers will have to 'think globally' but 'act locally'. Noel Brown (1994:15), director of the United Nations Environment Programme, endorses this view: 'At a time when the future viability of the planet hangs in the balance, local/global must be seen as a premise for a new kind of responsibility for the earth.' Callicott (1994:38), in his suggestions for the development of a global environmental ethic, adds the following rider: 'Let us by all means think globally and act locally. But let us also think locally as well as globally and try to time our global and local thinking as the several notes of a single, yet common chord.'

The proposed task is too great for individuals operating in isolation. Teamwork – the mobilisation of entire societies, nations – is of the essence. As Gore (1992:277) observes: 'By themselves, well motivated individuals cannot hope to win this struggle (of saving the world's environment), but as soon as enough people agree to make it our central organising principle, success will come within our grasp and we can begin to make rapid progress.' This is not to denigrate the contributions of individuals. Alongside the green fighters in all walks of life, those who have little option but to concentrate primarily on their local earthkeeping responsibilities, we indeed need the individual specialists: academics, visionaries, prophets, bridge-builders between communities, 'intercultural nomads' – in other words, the mobile units of the global battlefield.

These are women and men who identify fully with their local struggle, yet act as link figures between communities, cultures, nations and continents; those whose task it is to think both locally and globally, to interpret the local struggle and render its contribution fruitful in the family

of nations, at the same time feeding information and inspiration from similar struggles in other parts of the world back to the local situation. These are the storytellers who contribute to the myths people need to motivate them for their struggle. These too are the ideologues, philosophers, scientists and representatives of an amazing variety of faiths, who periodically team up to assess the green struggle in global/local perspective, to consider ideologies, worldviews, political and scientific developments pertinent to the revision of earthkeeping strategies, and to attempt to articulate what is yet to become a global environmental ethic.

In the final analysis the green revolution will have to have an impact on all life on planet earth if creation in its rich pluriformity, or what is left of it, is to survive with a reasonable measure of wellbeing – a future. Even if we are to strike only a shaky balance between homo sapiens and other forms of life and life-support systems, a new world order is necessary. Militarism in its current form will become unaffordable. Only sustainable development should be acceptable. Systems of government, economics and industry will require drastic adjustment and restructuring. Religions and cultures will alter course and change as they embrace and join the earth-keeping mission. Affluent lifestyles will perforce become more frugal, and so forth.

These remarks are obviously flimsy generalisations, which some will interpret as idealistic and utopian in the midst of the harsh, pragmatic realities of capitalist society. They are at this point mere reminders of where we should be heading if the green revolution is to succeed. I do not presume at this juncture to attempt a more specific or comprehensive scenario in a field so vast and complex.

However, operating as a lay earthkeeper within the Shona culture of Zimbabwe, and in consideration of the local/global premise underlying attempts to define our current responsibilities for the earth, I wish finally to comment more specifically on two types of environmental tasks that need to be undertaken.

7.3.1 The religio-philosophical and scientific task

Religions, philosophies and science captivate the minds of people and motivate their activities. It is becoming critically significant to examine

their underlying assumptions, worldviews and cosmologies. This provides new insight into the motives, attitudes and values that have qualified relations between humans, nature and the supernatural in the past, and suggests possible solutions that could be proposed and implemented in the future. The present study joins up with others in its attempt to probe some of the cosmological roots and belief systems of two religions in Africa and to highlight the significance of religious motivation in the mobilisation of inculturated earthkeeping. The local/global premise is in evidence, albeit modestly, in this attempt to share local African insight and experience from the war of the trees, through the written word, with fellow fighters in the global village.

Anthologies comprising theological and interdisciplinary contributions from all parts of the world reveal acute awareness in academic circles of the task referred to above, as well as a common conviction that there is a need to radically rethink the anthropocentric ethic which has prevailed in many religions and in exploitive industrial societies. I mention a few examples that illustrate this trend. In a collection of eco-theological essays entitled *Liberating life: contemporary approaches to ecological theology*, Birch, Eakin and McDaniel (1990:1) observe a new, emerging consensus among Christian theologians:

The consensus is that an anthropocentric ethic, understood as an emphasis on human wellbeing at the expense of the earth and other living beings, must be replaced by an ethic of respect for life and environment. We think it quite significant that theologians from different perspectives and backgrounds are moved by this common concern ... It is as if life itself has cried out for freedom from human exploitation, and they, in different contexts have heard it.

In *Ecotheology: voices from South and North* David Hallman (1994) observes that the contributors tend to emphasise the interconnectedness of ecological destruction and economic injustice, and the need to address these issues concurrently. As for a new theological agenda, he states:

We are in the early stages of a profound conceptual shift in theology that will move us far beyond stewardship theology as a response to human exploitation of God's creation ... Even if we now talk more in terms of responsibility than domination, our approach is still a management model in which we humans think we know best. By

breaking open that conceptual prison, feminist theology and insights from the traditions of indigenous peoples are both critically important groundings for the emerging eco-theology, as the articles in those chapters demonstrate (Hallman 1994:6).

By contrast, the collection of essays compiled by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim entitled *Worldviews and ecology: religion, philosophy and the environment* (1994) presents a wider spectrum of religio-ecological worldviews (Christian, Native North American, Jewish, Muslim, Bahàì, Hindu, Buddhist, Jainist, Taoist and Confucian), as well as contemporary ecological views based on evolutionary cosmology. Characteristic of this book is the recognition of plurality, the premise that 'no one religious tradition or philosophical perspective has the ideal solution to the environmental crisis' (Tucker & Grim 1994:11), and the editors' thesis – endorsed by some of the contributors – that 'a new global environmental ethic will be needed to solve some of the critical issues that face us in the late twentieth century' (Tucker & Grim 1994:12).

A valuable aspect of this anthology is the plea for an inclusive, holistic approach which integrates religio-ecological concerns with modern scientific development in the interest of the entire earth-community. Callicott (1994:35–37), for instance, argues for solidarity of both the evolving postmodern scientific worldview and religiously based traditional environmental ethics in the development of an 'international eco-centric environmental ethic'. Traditional environmental ethics can be revived and validated on the strength of 'the affinity of their foundational ideas with the most exciting new ideas in contemporary science'. Likewise, 'the abstract and arcane concepts of nature, human nature and the relationship between people and nature implied in ecology and the new physics can be expressed and articulated in the rich vocabulary of metaphor, simile, and analogy developed in the traditional sacred and philosophical literature of the world's many and diverse cultures' (Callicott 1994:37).

Thomas Berry maintains that little progress can be made with global environmental ethics prior to the development of a new science which deals with the integral functioning of the earth itself, a field to which we are as yet newcomers. In anticipation of a creative period which he calls the 'ecozoic era', Berry (1994:230) outlines a new biological and planetary situation:

While we generally use the terms 'environmental' and 'ecological', it might be more appropriate to deal with the situation in terms of a planet which has become dysfunctional because we do not have an integral sense of the earth or how it functions. We need a new study that might be designated, in the terms of Robert Muller, as a 'Total Earth Science', a science which has so far never been properly identified as a special field of study.

One of the mechanisms to this end, Berry suggests, could be a new discipline which he calls 'ecological geography', which will focus less on detached, academic understanding as it relates more purposefully and directly to political decision making, economics and the dynamics of human culture: 'If economic geography serving the purposes of human exploitation of the planet were to be altered into ecological geography for the purpose of identifying the proper niche of the human within the larger purposes of the earth community, then a great advance may be made toward achieving a viable planetary system' (Berry 1994:235).

Regarding the role of religions in safeguarding the future of the earth, particular prominence is given to what are called 'primal' or indigenous religions. Tu Wei-ming calls for a rethinking of the Enlightenment heritage, its positive contribution to humanity and the negative consequences it has engendered for the world's life-support system. According to him, the Enlightenment emphasis on individualism, reason and progress has undermined the idea of community. In the joint spiritual venture of moving beyond the Enlightenment mentality and creating a new world order the priority is 'to articulate a universal intent for the formation of a global community' (Wei-ming 1994:25) (my italics). To this end three kinds of spiritual resources need to be mobilised:

- the ethico-religious traditions of the modern West (Greek philosophy, Judaism and Christianity) with a view to re-evaluating their relationship with the rise of the modern West
- the religions of the non-Western axial-age civilisations (Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism in South and South East Asia, Confucianism and Taoism in Asia, and Islam) in recognition of the fact that Confucian culture, for example, has given rise to a less adversarial, less individualistic and less exploitive modern civilisation
- the primal traditions (Native American, Hawaiian, Maori and others)

whose imbeddedness in specific localities has enhanced the development of life styles and worldviews which have important implications for the quest for a global community (Wei-ming 1994:25–28)

Tu Wei-ming singles out some features of primal societies. Their intimate knowledge of, and close identification with, the environment could help to cultivate new attitudes and worldviews. Their rituals of bonding in interpersonal relations and consequent sense of community make for participation in creation and respect for the transcendent, instead of dominion and exploitive manipulation. Hence, in contrast to anthropocentric manipulation and exploitation of nature, 'primal consciousness emerges as a source of inspiration' (Wei-ming 1994:28).

In conclusion, Tu Wei-ming (1994:28) quotes Ewert Cousin's remark about how we should face the ecological crisis – with 'the earth as our prophet and the indigenous peoples as our teachers'. The ongoing hermeneutic responsibility of interpreting both prophecy and message remains. Dialogue is essential if the modern West is to fully perceive the significance of such interpretation.

This positive evaluation of primal traditions is also apparent in John Grim's essay on 'North American worldviews and ecology' (1994). Towards the end of his probing and thought-provoking survey, he concludes that 'the religious values within the lifeways (ie the functional interaction between cosmology and culture) of Native American Peoples, which have extensive similarities with other global indigenous peoples, serve to enrich the ecological dialogue in assessing the importance of functional cosmologies, environmental ethics, and appropriate rituals for renewing human-earth relations' (Grim 1994:52).

The agenda for Christianity appears to be more complex, as it has to include self-critical confession of complicity in today's rampant exploitation of natural resources by human beings if the biblical impulses for responsible stewardship are to be convincingly extolled and practised. Jay McDaniel arrests attention when he sums up his inspiring 'Christian approach to ecology'. Life in Christ, the new life for ecology, says McDaniel (1994:80), involves '(1) an acceptance of lost innocence; (2) a recognition of the limitless love of God; and (3) an openness to the healing powers of this God as they well up from within the very depths of our existence'. To accept our lost innocence we have to recognise our alienation from fellow human beings and our inclination

to evaluate other creatures only or mainly in terms of their usefulness to us. From within our urban-industrial contexts, says McDaniel (1994:81), 'we must confess that we partake of "anthropocentric consciousness". This is part of our sinful existence.' To the extent that we become vessels of God's limitless love and experience the living Christ at the core of our beings 'our own "dominion" will be tempered by a deeper recognition of the sheer goodness, the sheer lovability, of each and every living being whom we influence. As Paul puts it, we will have put on the mind of Christ' (Phil 2:5).

These brief citations from only a few essays reveal some similarities of intent. For instance, the conviction is prevalent that to deal effectively with the ecological crisis worldwide there will have to be substantial change in attitudes, values, the religio-cultural dispositions of entire societies, scientific developments, philosophies, etc, in the global village. There is also an assumption that reinterpretations and rediscovery of ethical codes in the world's cultures, religions and philosophies are possible and could provide the motivation and impetus for the changes envisaged. The agendas for action, however, vary considerably. Depending on the subject matter of the essay, they vary from relatively clear-cut guidelines for specific traditions – such as the new eco-spirituality required in Christianity, proposed by McDaniel – to more generalised profiles of what is required, as in Tu Wei-ming's plea for a world order beyond the Enlightenment mentality and Callicott's suggestions for a global environmental ethic. Not that the second approach is less significant. On the contrary, the challenge to think globally is of the essence! It takes courage to expose oneself to the broad sweep of a global vision, a position which inevitably evokes critical enquiry about the practical implications for local contexts but also challenges earth-keepers far and wide to apply their own ingenuity and creativity to what they consider meaningful in the implicit or explicit proposals made.

Practical implementation of the proposed agendas remains problematic and we have to continue grappling with the difficulties. What, for instance, will be the design of Berry's total 'earth science'? Where is it to be developed and at what levels of education should it function to have the desired impact on political, economic and legislative decision making? How can the sense of community in primal societies be conveyed to consumerist, industrialised and overly individualistic societies in the modern West? Is it at all possible to orchestrate the kind of dia-

logue between faiths and power establishments or economic interest groups which will lead to more altruistic and environmentally friendly policies worldwide? At what levels will Callicott's envisaged global environmental ethic – based on science and articulated in a multiplicity of revived traditional cultural environmental ethics – be worked out, and which institution(s) will oversee the application of such a code?

Finding answers to these questions is bound to require teamwork at interdisciplinary academic, inter-institutional, interreligious and intercultural, political and grassroots levels. This will have to happen wherever new communities of concerned earthkeepers take shape, so as to confront the problems, formulate strategies and develop a new solidarity in action – in lieu of isolating individualism – aimed at the liberation of a beleaguered creation. Practical solutions will be found to the extent that love, compassion and commitment to the earth community enable these emerging fellowships to transcend the boundaries of ethnicity, culture, race, class, nationality and geographical distance, without violating the pluriform historical and cultural heritages of local societies. In terms of my own Southern African earthkeeping context, I attempt but a brief, provisional response to some of the questions raised.

First, ZIRRCO could propagate the introduction of 'earth science' courses in Zimbabwean schools. These would be much more rudimentary than what Berry has in mind but, along with the nature-related practical activities already suggested above, they will help to give the youth an environmental focus and a global view of the ecological crisis at an early stage of their education. The courses should be developed by interdisciplinary teams to combine ecological expertise with the kind of religio-cultural input which ZIRRCO has gained in the field. One could experiment with educational ways of exposing the youth to the elders of AZTREC and the AAEC bishops. Such instruction will put scholars in touch with the roots of their own environmental ethics, both in the traditional, ancestrally informed and in the indigenised Christian sense. F&E, in turn, is well placed not only to introduce the local/global dimension into its more advanced environmental courses in South Africa, but also to arrange interdisciplinary conferences where attention can be given to the scientific and religio-cultural issues mentioned above.

Second, the eco-theological task of developing an African creation or

environmental theology, both at the grassroots and at the more sophisticated academic level, should be pursued with vigour. AIC theologians operating in rural and urban societies and African theologians attached to academic institutions should be encouraged to collaborate regularly in such an enterprise. To the same extent that academics would benefit from exposure to the earthkeeping rituals of village or urban communities, AIC earthkeepers could benefit from recognition and participation in events arranged by EATWOT and the WCC's JPIC committees. Empowerment of AIC earthkeepers to relate to Western eco-theological literature and to make their own contribution at the highest level in Western academic institutions will extend North-South dialogue and enrich the local/global dimension in eco-theology. This process is already under way, as evidenced by the participation of Revd Zvanaka and Bishop Marinda, both *Ndaza* Zionist leaders, along with black and white academics in Southern Africa, in The Pew-sponsored Research Project on African Christianity (supra:313). Revd Zvanaka is increasingly often invited to address academic and/or environmentally concerned audiences throughout Southern Africa and abroad about the religio-cultural tenets undergirding the war of the trees. In this way local African impulses are finding their way into the modern West, where it is hoped they will add momentum to the green revolution. In 1996 the focus of Revd Zvanaka's address to the ASM (American Society of Missiology) in Chicago, and of my papers read at IAMS (International Association of Mission Studies) at the Harvard Centre for the Study of World Religions and the Rodney Seminar Series at the African Studies Centre at Boston University, was the theology of Africa's earthkeeping mission. These are modest beginnings, along with many other scattered attempts throughout the global village, but little building stones nonetheless which could help to build and inform the 'global environmental ethic'.

Third, the ecological contribution of African 'primal traditions' or world-views needs to be more closely defined and publicised. The earth-keeping activities of AZTREC described in volume 1 (Daneel 1998) provide valuable clues to customary conservationist laws and praxis as they relate to an indigenous yet modern earthkeeping movement. In the *mafukidzanyika* ceremonies the interconnectedness of the entire earth community – living, deceased and unborn humans, soil, water, trees, wildlife, etc – is ritually enacted over and over again, like the life

cycles and seasonal cycles of nature. Even here exploitive anthropocentrism is not entirely absent. But altruistic and caring attitudes towards nature are culturally and spiritually ingrained, and are significantly in evidence and readily available to motivate responsible ecological stewardship in a society where the 'trees of consent' (*mubvumira*) still affirm ancestral approval of human behaviour, the 'trees of exorcism' (*muzeze*) provide symbolic power for demon expulsion, the 'trees of protection' (*muchakata*) still symbolise the closeness of the apical ancestors and the creator, Mwari, who provide all creation with life-giving rain, and the 'trees of royalty' (*mudziavashe*) are still vested with tribal political authority and environmental responsibility.

These religio-ecological realities, which are integral to a holistic Shona cosmology, underscore Grim's (1994:52) findings on Native American worldviews:

The ecological dimensions of Native North American lifeways are not held back in some evolutionary backwardness or in a stereotyped ahistorical paradise. Nor can the spiritual insights of the First Peoples of the North American continent be described as lacking profundity. Moreover, the private and experiential nature of indigenous traditions do not lead to a muddled spiritual life but rather one in which individual values are embedded in a lifeway community which extends into the natural world. In an investigation of these issues, striking insights emerge which can complement, correct, and enrich the very traditions which often dominate these indigenous traditions.

The same applies to African primal traditions, even though the earth-keeping message from this quarter has been muted or underrated in the mechanistic and technologically oriented cultures of the West. The future challenge to institutions like ZIRRCO, the F&E project and the envisaged AEU will be to investigate African cosmologies and the indigenous roots of their environmental ethics, as well as empower basic African communities to become fully active in the green resistance struggle. Then the prophecy of the African earth and the message of the African people will be heard and heeded in the global village, just as modern science and the technology developed to serve creation will inform and assist the struggle in Africa.

Fourth, *thematic studies* of worldviews, spirituality, traditional knowl-

edge and environmental ethics in primal societies, the perception and functioning of ecologically related community life, the nature and impact of liberation struggles throughout the world, etc will promote the articulation of a global environmental ethic and the development of global strategies for earthkeeping action. ZIRRCOON's war of the trees, for instance, suggests two themes which could be fruitfully studied for their significance elsewhere: *the experience of community and of sinfulness* which characterises the body of earthkeepers and the communities they serve. The sense of belonging, destiny and purpose which the Shona earthkeepers share as they fight poverty and earth destruction has its roots in Zimbabwean history, in the ancestors, in customary kinship patterns, in a holistic philosophy of life which refuses to contradistinguish between human and environmental interests, and in Christian tradition. Hence the family of earthkeepers has both old indigenous and new contextualised roots. These can be studied together or in terms of religious studies and Christian theology. The fact that the earthkeepers themselves are forging a new kind of religious ecumenism in the interest of harmony in the earth community – one which transcends the neat categories of rationalism – is in itself a challenge to develop a form of 'earth science' in the humanities, a flexible interdisciplinary approach suited to studying the intricacies of human-nature relations. Mention was also made of an emerging sense of ecological sinfulness among earthkeepers, expressed in the traditional idiom of wizardry. Here, too, both traditional African and Christian traditions are at work. The confession of ecological sins apparently motivates earthcare, improves human-nature relations and opens up new perspectives on the salvation of all creation, rather than signifying a pessimistic and fatalistic appraisal of humanity. In a particular culture it reflects openness to the healing power of God and vanquishment of selfish dominion over nature as we 'put on the mind of Christ' (cf McDaniel, *supra*:336). A study of how this process actually takes place in a mass movement could powerfully inspire the green revolutionaries.

In the fifth place, the intellectual activity of research and publication underlying much of what is outlined above should be augmented by *actual exposure to and participation in African earthkeeping projects*. Institutions like ZIRRCOON and F&E could be instrumental in such networking. Just as message and prophecy have to be carried from the grassroots to the institutions of academic knowledge and political

power, the representatives of academia, capital and power need to be exposed to earthkeeping experience at the grassroots. Although the mass media help in carrying the earthkeeping story to the furthest corners of global society, it is only when the wealthy, the power brokers, the representatives of multinational interest groups and the intellectuals are wrested from their safe havens and reintegrated with the earth community – where they can feel the scorching sun on denuded plains, the urgent call for justice and healing in dancing feet and the forgiving benediction in the shade of carefully nurtured trees – that the global groundswell of earthkeeping will get underway.

This brings us to the second task: the praxis of the green struggle.

7.3.2 The task of mobilising the struggle

The intellectual task of studying cultures, religions, human values and behavioural patterns in relation to the environment, and of formulating views and information which could further the quest for a global environmental ethic, is never complete – or at least it shouldn't be. There can never be an abstract or a purely theoretical ecology! Ecology entails passion, action, the struggle for the life of the earth community. The struggle requires reflection, evaluation, publication and policy making, all activities which require periodic retirement from the battle front. But intellectual endeavour does not mean isolated or elitist academic privilege which entitles one to stay out of the fray. Whether we are actively mobilising political consensus, our own families in recycling ventures, or entire movements in earthkeeping projects; whether we raise or donate funds for earthkeeping, whether we proclaim the good news of earth healing by refraining from using polluting chemicals, fighting for responsible disposal of atomic waste, or risking possible ridicule by publicly identifying with the controversial activities of green movements – the fact remains that private reflection and public action are both integral to earth stewardship if we are genuinely concerned about the future of planet earth. For, as Gore (1992:269) insists, 'we must take bold and unequivocal action: we must make the rescue of the environment the central organising principle for civilisation'.

Gore (1992:273) spells out the implications of such challenge as follows. First of all, widespread consensus about the new environmental principle should be achieved while there is still time for remedial

action. Second, the central principle implies 'an all-out effort to use every policy and programme, every law and institution, every treaty and alliance, every tactic and strategy, every plan and course of action – to use, in short, every means to halt the destruction of the environment and to preserve and nurture our ecological system' (Gore 1992:274). Here, obviously global ecological action is envisaged as part of the international political spectrum. Third, the morally bankrupt approach of postponement and delay adopted by world leaders at the outbreak of World War II should be avoided at all costs. The real enemy is the one within, namely a dysfunctional way of thinking. We are up against *totalitarianism* which 'collapses individuals into the state', and the ideology of *consumption* which 'collapses individuals into desire for what they consume, even as it fosters the assumption that we are separate from the earth' (Gore 1992:275).

At this point Gore qualifies our battle for the environment as an extension of the struggles against Nazism and communism, as 'a crucial new phase of the long battle for true freedom and human dignity'. He continues by listing vital issues, threats to the new principle, which need to be faced and corrected: the balance between rights and responsibilities, which is impaired because of the alienation of individuals from community and from the earth; corruption in both the developing and developed worlds, which obstructs our ability to share environmental stewardship on a global scale; mistaken assumptions about development and a mismatch between projects funded by the industrial world and the real needs of the Third World, resulting in ecological destruction and social instability.

In the fourth place, Gore emphasises both the importance of numerical strength worldwide of those who accept the environmental principle, and the profound influence of courageous individuals who are opposing the destruction inflicted on nature by industrial civilisation: 'standing bravely against this new juggernaut, a new kind of *resistance fighter* has appeared: men and women who have recognized the brutal nature of the force now grinding away at the forests and oceans, the atmosphere and fresh water, the wind and the rain, and the rich diversity of life itself' (Gore 1992:282) (my italics). Gore mentions a few examples of people who faced grave risks or sacrificed much in their opposition to earth destruction. He points out that they were ordinary people, yet uncompromising campaigners in the cause of justice for the

earth community. One was Tos Barnett, who narrowly escaped assassination by writing a report exposing the rape of forests in Papua New Guinea by Japanese corporations; another was Chico Mendes, who was martyred for leading rubber trappers in the rain forests of Brazil in their resistance to the landowners and corporations responsible for massive deforestation; a third was Wangari Matthai, who mobilised the women of Kenya in the Greenbelt movement to plant millions of trees (Gore 1992:283–294). All these people in their different ways were and still are engaged in the global war of the trees. These green icons have captured the imagination both of eco-sensitive people in their own cultures and of the emerging earthkeeping community in the global village. Likewise, the Shona icons mentioned in this book – even if their activities seldom reach the news headlines in their own country – appeal to the conscience of large segments of African society. This promotes the steady recruitment of new fighters, the encouragement of the ‘pioneers’ of the struggle who are already becoming ‘veterans’, and the escalation, geographically, of afforestation and related projects.

In his final chapter Gore outlines five strategic goals which should inform and guide the environmental struggle; goals that are integral to his proposed Global Marshall Plan. This valuable overview of action plans is well worth reading, for its practical suggestions and inspired vision. Although the proposals merit detailed consideration, I can only make a few observations in passing.

One of the most pressing issues, that of financing a global recovery programme, remains an open question. Gore (1992:303) points out that the United States cannot possibly be the principal financier, and that sponsorship will also be the responsibility of Japan, Europe and wealthy oil-producing states. A fair distribution of financial responsibility amongst the industrialised nations will undoubtedly be required. But if one considers the USA’s annual rate of consumption of the world’s fossil fuels and other natural resources, and the contribution of its industries to global pollution, then the least that can be expected is that the USA’s financial responsibility for global ecology should be balanced proportionately with that of other contributing nations. Besides, it appears to be something of a contradiction when Gore, explicitly and implicitly, assigns the USA a leading role in the implementation of the proposed Global Marshall Plan (for example his insistence that the USA take the lead in the proposed stabilisation of the world population;

Gore 1992:314), without accepting a similar responsibility for financial sponsorship. Here, particularly, the enemy within, the one that causes evasion and delay, should be recognised and confronted.

Gore's observations about the need for accountable use of development funds in the developing world are fair enough. However, once accountability has been established – both in the intentions of the sponsoring countries and in the control of project expenditure in the Two-thirds World – it is essential that a *balanced partnership relationship* between donors and recipients be observed, lest a neocolonialist pattern of interaction takes over, with all the negative implications of funding manipulation, alien control over natural resources in the developing world, and subtle forms of continued 'First' World enslavement of poor people in the Two-thirds World.

Another trend that needs to be dealt with is the counterproductive establishment of bureaucracies by development agencies in the sponsoring and sponsored countries. Some of these are proliferating institutions of the development elite, little 'kingdoms' whose upkeep absorbs an unwarranted percentage of the funds voted by governments for use in the developing world. Although such institutions are needed as monitoring links between governments and projects on the ground, they, too, need to be monitored and trimmed if the scarce funds are to benefit the earth community as intended.

Aware of the risk that sustained technological development will exacerbate environmental degradation still further, Gore nevertheless proposes the development and sharing of new technologies favourable to environmental recovery. To this end he suggests the establishment of a Strategic Environment Initiative (SEI), which will include tax incentives and research and development funding for new technologies, as well as appropriate assessment procedures for the replacement of old technologies by better ones. He also proposes 'the establishment of a network of training centers around the world, thus creating a core of environmentally educated planners and technicians and ensuring that the developing nations will be ready to accept environmentally attractive technologies and practices' (Gore 1992:320).

The idea of a global network of technological training centres is sound, provided the training programmes in the various regions are holistic. Subjects such as local environmental traditions, local cosmologies and

local spirituality should be developed and taught alongside technological courses and skills. For technologists to operate effectively as earth-keepers among the people, they will have to be conversant with and sympathetic to their deeper motivations and beliefs. If not, they could well be alienated from the people's liberation movements, however great their environmental and technological expertise. Technology is often a product of a mechanistic worldview which strengthens rather than reduces the illusion of human dominion over and separation from the earth. To prevent this aberration from being perpetuated at the envisaged technological training centres, integration or regular interaction with institutions such as ZIRRCO, F&E and other local religious institutions known for their ecological commitment should be encouraged.

NOTE

- 1 The party included Revd Elias Ngodela, Baptist minister and head of the government's Religious Desk in Mpumalanga Province (formerly Eastern Transvaal), Mr Gilbert Tombisa of the Bahàì Faith, Pretoria, Mr Lucky Ngale, chairperson of the Atteridgeville Community Development Programme, Revd Paf Mengwae of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Mr Tony Abbott, prominent environmentalist in KwaZulu-Natal and member of the African Traditional Medicine and Herbalist Association, Ms Lesley Richardson of the WWF (SA) and Mr Paul Sochacqewski, head of Creative Development at WWF in Switzerland.