

METHODIST MISSION TO ECOLOGICAL CHALLENGES IN AFRICA

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THE IMPACT OF DISPOSSESSION

The Reverend Tiyo Soga, ordained in 1856 as the first African minister of any of the foreign missionary churches in South Africa, observed in one of his early writings that, “The axe of the African people is poisonous.” The Reverend Soga went on to censure Africans for their stupidity in the manner in which they destroyed and depleted their forests. He asked:

When will this terror of the axe come to an end? Is there no steward of the environment who will call this destruction to a halt? Where is the government, the owner of the land? Why does the government leave the dangerous axe in the hands of infants [meaning African people]? Is it not the government that has the knowledge that trees bring rain and dew? Is it not the government that knows that the felling of our forests brings drought and famine?¹

From the perspective of his European experience of study in Edinburgh, he went on to assert, “This ruination of the environment is unknown in the world of the European people!” He added: “When Africans cut a tree, it dies together with its roots, never to grow again. Yet when Europeans cut a tree, it simply grows again.”²

1. Tiyo Soga, “Emlung Winphakathi,” in *Imibengo*, edited by W. G. Bennie (Eastern Cape: Lovedale Press, 1935), 43.

2. *Ibid.*

Soga's analysis is flawed. Most disappointing is his inability to relate the fact of environmental degradation to the full sociopolitical circumstances of the time. According to Professor Gideon Khabela of the University of Fort Hare, Rev. Soga had a serious misconception in his missiological approach that tended to revere the Europeans, their faith, and their lifestyle to the detriment of the indigenous people. The issue clearly was more than the problem of felling trees; it was the confiscation of land by force and the superior firepower of the colonialists. Rev. Soga held a view in this regard that strongly represented the missionary approach of the foreign churches at the time, including the Methodists. He assumed that "the struggle to recover the land of the [African/Ngqika] people lost to the colonialists was closely tied to the improvement of the [African people]. The [Africans/Xhosas] would have to accept civilization first before they could reclaim their land and the only way to reclaim it was to buy it back from the government," since "waging war against Europeans was suicide!"³

The European confiscation of the land had affected the people at the very core of their culture and lifestyle, which was nomadic in practice and thus allowed for a fair spread of people over large territories with no chance of overpopulating the land. Suddenly they found themselves confined and forced to depend on reduced natural resources. Khabela illustrated the pain and frustration of such dispossession, coupled with a sense of cultural alienation, with a protest poem by Jonas Ntsiko, an Anglican catechist who is suspected of having finally renounced the Christian faith. Ntsiko wrote:

It seems we march to our very grave
Encircled by a smiling Gospel.⁴

It can thus be plausibly claimed that the causes of the famine and droughts that Soga found so worrisome, lay firmly at the doorstep of the sociopolitical shenanigans of the time. They were a direct consequence of political expansionist ambitions that brought untold harm to the communities hosting the colonialists. This is the reality for which the church did not seem able to find a satisfactory answer.

THE RIGHT TO SELF-CORRECT

In substance, these earlier ambitions are no different from the aim of globalization today, which at heart cherishes domination of the financial

3. M. Gideon Khabela, *Tiyo Soga: The Struggle of the Gods* (Eastern Cape: Lovedale Press 1996), 51, 59.

4. *Ibid.*, 52.

markets by the world's big economies and leaves the currencies of the developing countries floundering pitifully. After the ushering in of the new dispensation in South Africa, for example, we experienced a frightening devaluation of the South African currency, the Rand. I recall a meeting a few years ago between a group of church leaders in South Africa and the then Deputy President Mr. Thabo Mbeki to express concern about the state of the Rand. His response was, "Everybody is commending us for the proper manner in which we are managing the economy, including the West. Yet our currency continues to devalue. The cause is certainly beyond our control."

I think that this is the nub of the problem regarding the challenge of globalization and the developing world. A scenario is created where the capacity of people to correct their own situation is systematically removed from their hands and is placed in the hands of a few who are thus given the responsibility to determine the fate of many. It is this right of the people to correct their own situation that the church must seek to protect and enhance. Sadly, it is precisely at this point that the failure of the church is most glaring. This is easily illustrated.

On the whole, missionaries tended to assume that they were adopting practical solutions to the "problems" of Africa, giving very little opportunity for their hosts to define their problems as they saw them in order to search for solutions themselves. And the solution, as far as the missionaries were concerned, was very simple. It was to substitute a European way of life for everything African. Their primary concern was to impose the European version of Christian faith. There was very little room, if any, for dialogue. The result was that Christianity failed to learn much from these African host communities, to the detriment of both Christianity and the African continent.

Later in his life, when he had developed many uncertainties about the approach of the missionaries to the African questions and moved more to a position of negritude, Rev. Soga himself called for a more deliberate program to understand the thinking of the African people. He said:

Our veterans of the Xhosa and Embo (African) people must disgorge all they know. Everything must be imparted to the nation as a whole. Fables must be retold; what was history or legend must be recounted. What has been retained, as tradition must be revisited. Whatever was seen, heard or done under the requirements of custom should be brought to light and placed on the national table to be sifted for preservation.⁵

It is clear that the proponents of missionary Christianity failed to listen to the African communities' story of ecology and the environment. In return

5. *Ibid.*, 114.

it lost its own voice about these matters. The questions we face today are: (1) What did we not learn? and (2) Can we still do anything about it?

WHAT CHRISTIAN MISSIONOLOGY FAILED TO LEARN FROM AFRICA

According to Ivy Goduka, a teacher in indigenous epistemologies in the department of Environmental Studies at Central Michigan University, missionaries to Africa and subsequent generations of Christian teachers failed—and continue to fail—to make a connection between indigenous spirituality and traditional ways of knowing.⁶ Otherwise they would have found that African teaching about life is all-inclusive, with the environment and ecology central to all the teaching. Maybe with this discovery they would have changed their methodology of mission, so that it embraced all creation. Goduka goes on to say:

Ecological education historically occurred in cultural, social, and spiritual contexts that enhanced the holistic growth and development of the individual learner. It unfolded through mutual respect, reciprocal relationships between educator and learner, and among one's social group. The proximal and distal, as well as natural and human constructed environments.⁷

The evangelical message of salvation not only failed to make a link with the issues that were foremost in the thinking of the African communities—the issues of holistic life, but it determinedly remained locked in the European context of the evangelist, and thus fell foul to the suspicion that it was part of a greater plan of subjugation. Instead of engaging the worldview that the evangelists found, they sought to undo it and replace it with their worldview. The result was that conversion of the indigenous people amounted to alienation from their culture and its teachings and from their community.

These teachings were communicated in a number of ways. They were not aimed at giving rational explanations as such about particular issues. Rather they were aimed at fashioning a lifestyle and behavioral patterns that would have appealed most to the missionaries. Levison Tatira cites *zviraabwe* (riddles) and *ngano* (folktales) as key instruments in the facilitation of growth and development among the Shona of Zimbabwe. A. C. Jordan says the same with regards to folk tales (*iintsomi*) among the Ama

6. In *Indigenous Knowledge and Technology in African and Diasporan Communities*, edited by Emmanuel Chiwome, Zifikile Mguni, and Mumashe Furusa (Harare: Mond Books, 2000), 135.

7. *Ibid.*, 141.

Xhosa.⁸ Bolaji Idowu points to these as the means for the indigenous people to define their interpretation of the universe and the supersensible world and what they thought and believed about the relationship between the two.⁹ Teaching through this artistic medium about the supernatural and the environment was easily intertwined for the purpose of effecting formation that was wholesome.

The idea of preaching as a communication method for effecting primary character formation was, on the whole, an unfamiliar phenomenon. The same is true of the method of Sunday school and formal mission schooling. While much of the success of mission school programs must be affirmed, the methodology was not only unfamiliar, it was inadequate as far as ecological education was concerned. With the advantage of hindsight we can say conclusively that it was inferior to the indigenous ecological education. As a matter of fact, mission education was functional to the degree it would advance the mission strategy of the foreign churches. Its message of salvation did not have ecology as a major feature. Assisting the new converts to be economically viable within the strictures of the colonial governance, especially agriculturally, was key to mission strategy.

William Shaw was among the first Wesleyan missionaries in southern Africa in the 1820s to acquire a piece of land for the purpose of settling new converts in Salem and Farmer Field. A few years later in a report to the Missionary Society in London he states that the converts settled at Farmer Field were far more economically advanced than their nonconverted compatriots neighboring the mission station. This turned out to be the situation with all the mission stations. Those who aligned themselves with the missions stood to reap immediate economic benefits within the new political dispensation of colonialism. On the other hand, the people educated by the mission schools gradually lost grasp of what was most important in the ecological knowledge of their environment. This failing is often captured in conversations between an African believer and a nonbeliever. Often the nonbeliever attributes the robbing of the community of its relationship with creation to the faith of the believers. Beyond the folktales, young Africans acquired this knowledge from instruction that culminated with initiation rites that were on the whole condemned mercilessly by the missionaries. Rev. Soga himself fell victim to this conviction, as the missionaries forbade him to participate in these rituals.

On the other hand, others like S. E. K. Mqhayi, who was also a committed Christian, resolutely rejected this alienation from African values, and thus retained the memory of the factors that gave African life a

8. See *ibid.*, 147.

9. *Ibid.*, 137-39.

wholesome sense of balance with the ecological environment.¹⁰ Mission education offered little that could so enhance the innate wisdom of Africans and their knowledge of ecology that they could match King Solomon, who in his wisdom could “describe plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls; and teach about animals and birds, reptiles and fish” (1 Kgs 2:33). A non-Christian African boy could say with pride and confidence to a Christian boy, “*awuzazi iintaka kwedini*,” “you do not know the bird species, boy!”

The second major failing was the inability to appreciate the inclusiveness of African society and therefore the collective communal response to matters ecological. The evangelical method of fishing for individuals for salvation and removing them from the influence of their communities essentially fished the new converts out of the lifestyle, heritage, and culture of their communities. This method introduced them to a new lifestyle that was hostile to African lifestyle teachings. This can be simply illustrated with a reference to *isiduko, seboko, isithakazelo*, the clan name. Methodists in many African societies are taught that the clan name must lose prominence in the life of believers, as they are now a new clan in Christ. This in my view was central in the process of alienating African believers from their heritage, and in turn robbed the church of a golden opportunity to present the gospel in a holistic manner. What is the relevance of a clan name?

ISIDUKO-SEBOKO—THE CLAN NAME

The African social structure on the whole is built around the concept of the extended family, which is bound by a common clan name. A group of clans then makes up a tribe. Among the Bantu people most clan names are associated with animals, plants, or water, such as, *Bakubung* (hippopotamus), *Majola* (a type of snake), *Ndlovu* (elephant), *Oo MthimkHulu* (huge tree), *Hlathi* (forest), *Nokwindla* (season of the firstfruits), *Oo Mvulana* (shower), *Mlambo* (river), *Mbethe* (dew), and so on. Those with a specific relation to a particular animal or plant, serve as custodians of knowledge related to these. The *Bakubung* (hippopotamus) people will be expected to be experts not only of the hippopotamus species, but also all water animal species. The *Hlathis* (forest) people will also be expected to be prime leaders in understanding matters related to forests. They would be knowledgeable about medicinal plants. They are the custodians of the forest who ensure that the forest continues to provide for society. If the community destroys the forest, the *Hlathis* would be held accountable.

10. See S. E. K. Mqhayi's autobiography *U Mqhayi wasw Ntabozuko*, and his poetry, especially in reference to the mountains, *Intaba ka Ndoda*, *Thaba Bosiu*, and so on.

According to Rev. Tiyo Soga, the *Hlathis* were responsible for ensuring that the axes of the community are poison free. The *Nokwindlas* would be prime educators on food related matters, as they usually produce the first fruit tasters (*abangcamli*). The *Mvulanas* would be expected to understand the weather dynamics, even to a point where rainmaking diviners would be expected to come from their stock.

Christian converts immediately dissociated themselves from these lifestyles, for their God seemed to be a direct opposite of everything for which their cultural heritage stood. To become a Christian one had to extricate oneself from this community and become part of a community where the collective values did not necessarily include ecology for the collective benefit of all. Instead a culture built around the individualistic motive of profit became a guiding factor for the new converts. The culture of shared life with the rest of creation began to recede. Rabid commercialization that allowed the mining conglomerates to rip open the bowels of Africa and mercilessly exploit its minerals was given the blessing of the church. Converted and mission-educated Africans became the servants of the system and handmaidens of the death of their own mother, the continent and its land.

The debt that the first-world church owes the continent of Africa for the role it played in changing the souls and societies of the African people toward their demise is immeasurable. The results stare us in the face. The extent of the damage has been aptly captured in a recent report by the United Nations entitled "Hard Facts and Tough Choices."¹¹ This report points out that a sharp increase in air and water pollution, land degradation, droughts, and wildlife losses is facing Africa unless urgent action is taken. The report goes on to state that over the next thirty years new and emerging threats, including climate change, uncontrolled expansion of cities, pollution from cars and industry, and the unchecked spread of alien species are likely to aggravate levels of poverty, environmental decline, and ill health. Climate records, according to the report, show that Africa's annual rainfall has been decreasing since 1968, possibly as a result of global warming.

According to the article summarizing this report, there is also evidence that natural disasters, particularly droughts, have become more common and more severe, and that droughts and floods are increasing pressure on fragile lands, leading to the displacement of people and wildlife. The article goes on to say that to some South Africans water is associated with water sports such as scuba diving, swimming, water skiing, boating, and fishing, but for huge numbers it is associated with drought, thirst, famine,

11. Summarized in "Hard Facts, Tough Choices," *Independent* (London), Sunday, 7 July 2002.

floods, cholera, and dysentery. The question that stares us in the face today is whether anything can be done to correct this situation.

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

There is a growing awareness in the global community that environmental degradation and poverty in the developing world go hand in hand. The International Conference on Financing for Development held in Monterrey, Mexico, in March 2002 called on world leaders to address hunger and poverty in order to ensure sustainable development. This conference noted that attitudes toward effective development strategies are changing and increasingly link rural livelihoods and agricultural strategies in ways that incorporate protection of the environment. Agriculture is now recognized as an essential element in promoting economic and environmental sustainability. Yet there is still significant resistance from the developed world to committing resources for this purpose. If the church is indeed guilty of having promoted an evangelistic approach that discounted the ecology of the continent of Africa and of other places that have been victims of global economic exploitation, then it is essential that the church find a prophetic voice to address this situation that will echo globally. Such a voice must enunciate clearly the values and practices that will guide the world to ways of reversing environmental degradation and restoring our ecology. Perhaps even more the church must agitate for binding decisions from the global community on this score.

On the other hand, the church must seek to lead by example in responding to this challenge. I consider a project by the Reverend Roger Hudson to be a model of an appropriate response by the church to this challenge. Reverend Hudson is endeavoring to develop an Eco Village in Gqunube, a small town in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. I will allow him to describe the project in some detail, and in his own words.

ECO VILLAGES AS ENACTED PARABLES OF EARTHKEEPING¹²

Many Christians have read wonderful treatises on the need for Christians to do a better job of caring for the earth. Stirred to faithfulness,

12. This major section is drawn, with permission, from an essay by Roger Hudson titled "Eco Villages as Enacted Parables of Earthkeeping," *Bulletin for Contextual Theology in Africa*, Vol. 8/2-3 (April and August, 2002).

some have earnestly tried to make a start at living eco-friendly lifestyles. Yet most have ended up exasperated and feeling defeated by the monolithic nature of the challenge. Clearly, examples of successful stewardship of creation by Christians would be helpful, particularly if such examples demonstrate how faith has played a role in shaping and sustaining the venture.

I contend that Eco Villages, as enacted parables of earthkeeping, promise to be such examples. In the context of an emerging Eco Village whose ethos is Christian, I will explore the shape of a possible eco-ecclesiology that includes in its commitment to God a commitment to the earth. Finally, I will examine a type of “holistic management,” whose bottom line does not begin and end with financial profit and loss; rather, it treats creation’s health as foundational to all life, as a practical means of bridging the gap between high-minded idealism and doing the job of caring for the earth.

The Nature of an Eco Village

Imagine an Eco Village measuring its wealth in terms of healthy soils, water, air, vegetation, and people. This means that food will be locally produced and consumed. Agricultural practices producing this food will build topsoil, not deplete it, and the use of dangerous chemicals will be minimized. Housing will be appropriately sized and priced, constructed of environmentally sustainable and safe materials; it will be thermally efficient to minimize the use of electricity and promote the recycling of water and waste.

Self-employment opportunities will be generated within the context of a village economy that produces, processes, and consumes much of its own healthy food and develops its own income generating opportunities such as educational tourism. Freehold title of individual lots with corporate ownership and administration of communal property will provide a place for healthy and safe community living, balancing community aspects of village life with individual needs for privacy.

To actively pursue this dream, the D. T. Hudson Christian Eco Village Trust has been established as a nonprofit, governmentally recognized company. Its stated purpose is to “establish, promote and support Eco Village development” in South Africa and beyond. The trust’s activities have been launched by the purchase of a site for its first Eco Village project, land totaling 97 hectares on the Gqunube River. An Eco Village design has been drawn up after extensive consultation and planning with local and international experts.

To be called Gqunube Green, the proposed Eco Village will be one of the first comprehensive Eco Villages in South Africa and certainly the first of its kind in the Buffalo City Municipality. Upon completion Gqunube Green will consist of:

- 68 Eco homes arranged in four separate clusters;
- 7.7 hectares of crop lands and orchards, totaling 7.9% of the land;
- 45 hectares of grazing lands, totaling 46% of the land;
- 32 hectares of indigenous forest land, totaling 33% of the land;
- 2.1. km of river frontage;
- 3 km of roads;
- a training center where courses in sustainability will be offered;
- a Village Centre serving community needs of the Eco Village;
- a Christian Retreat Centre helping Christians discover God in creation and explore their responsibility to care for God's earth.

Gqunube Green Eco Village will offer residents the opportunity to:

- live a lifestyle that respects God's creation;
- enjoy wildlife, beautiful views, fresh air, and the natural environment;
- enjoy fresh and wholesome food grown organically on site;
- share their sustainable lifestyle skills through educational "tourism";
- be a part of developing an eco-ecclesiology that links Christian spirituality with earth care;
- work from home in an Eco Village related profession or job;
- enjoy a healthy rural life while working in East London, only 20 minutes away by car.

In short, Eco Villages, by bringing all of life's activities and needs (people, housing, food production, energy use, land use, waste management, etc.) together under the banner of earth care, affords a unique opportunity to experiment with ecologically sustainable lifestyles. Such Eco Village experiments are happening on all continents and it is hoped that Gqunube Green, with its specifically Christian ethos, might help the Christian community find ways of more faithfully caring for God's earth.

Establishing such an Eco Village will not be easy, especially an Eco Village that claims to point to a more godly way of living on the earth. Undoubtedly there will be much to learn and unlearn during the process, and an enormous amount of openness and humility will be needed. But for this Eco Village to truly be an "enacted parable of earthkeeping" that

offers directions to and support for Christians wanting to care for God's earth, a new and meaningful earth-friendly ecclesiology will be critical.

Toward an Eco-ecclesiology

Already "converted" to the need to live humbly on God's earth, one challenge for Gqunube Green Eco Villagers will be that of linking their relationship with God to their relationship with the earth in a meaningful way. The focus should not so much be on doing theology, important as this is, but on the integrating practice of corporate worship which, linking mind, heart, and body, calls people to a Christian way of life quite literally on both God's *ground* and God's *grounds*. The question therefore is, "How can an ecologically friendly lifestyle be celebrated in the context of worship and so affirmed and encouraged?" And, "How might such worship reconnect individuals and communities with creation's life renewing processes, divorced from which we so easily find acceptable the plundering and destruction of the earth?"

Gqunube Green participants are quite literally feeling their way into answering these questions by using a healthy dose of intuition to do so. And the answers are being helped along by the design of a new church that is about to be built. This proposed structure will consist of three overlapping circles. One circle will be a building constructed of earth-friendly building materials. This will serve as the church/classroom. The second circle will be a permaculture vegetable garden, organic in operation and filled with all manner of plants that make up a healthy and productive food garden.

The third circle will be a cattle kraal to be used occasionally for (a) the collection of manure for the garden, (b) services of thanksgiving for the season's new calves, and (c) acknowledging the role that the herd of Nguni cattle plays in ensuring healthy grass and thornveld. Thinking back to the church service amongst a rural Xhosa congregation during which this idea first presented itself, the mind celebrates the undervalued intuitive faculty that birthed it and marvels at the depth of the symbolism still being revealed by the design. Believing that many visitors to the church, drawing on their own creative inspirations, will have their own insights sparked by the design, some initial thoughts are offered below.

An Equality of the Human and Natural Realms

First, the bold and outrageous linking of a cattle kraal and garden with a church in equal-sized circles affirms the equality of the natural realm with that of the human in God's eyes. For there in the church garden will

be the plants, there in the church kraal will be the animals, both claiming their rightful place in the worship of God. In so overturning the popular Christian notion of humanity being infinitely more important than the birds of the air, the beasts of the fields, and the plants of the earth, a creative gap for appreciating the sacredness of all of life is opened. Perhaps echoes of God's words, said as he looked over a freshly crafted world, that all of creation was "very, very good" will gain new appreciation within such a sanctuary. And perhaps such a question of how humanity can live in harmony with this good creation will find reason to be asked, and continue to be asked, in the context of worship, until such time as we get it right!

This unorthodox interpretation of the symbolism of the three circles can play a prophetic role by reminding people of the biblical call to care for God's earth because God loves it and sees creation as good. But this unorthodox truth, as presented by the architecture of this church, is anchored in the orthodox and the familiar. In particular, the three circles symbolize the Trinity too, and this serves to moderate, for conventional minds, any doctrinal threat the truth of the equality of nature and humanity might present. By affirming the uniqueness of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, it is acknowledged that nature by itself is not adequate to reveal the true nature of God. There is no dangerous pantheism here.

The Holistic Nature of Life

On a more practical level the design symbolizes the holistic nature of life. And it does this in two ways, in the material and spiritual dimensions.

In the material sense it demonstrates the mutual interdependence of all creation as seen in the inter-relationship of the different elements found in the vegetable garden, kraal, and church. Perhaps the first thing to note is that livestock is vital to the health of any food-producing garden system. Chickens are included as an element in the tri-circle design. Located between the kraal and the vegetable garden, the chickens will be confined to their house and surrounding straw yard. Food for them will come from the Lucerne (a type of alfalfa) field and from the garden itself, both conveniently located close to the straw yard. The Lucerne will be a source not only of greens for the chickens but also of mulch for the garden beds. Such mulch, however, will first be processed by the chickens as cut Lucerne is thrown into their straw yard. While there, weed seeds will be eaten by the chickens, it will be shredded by their scratching action, and it will be manured. After lying there for a few months it will be laid directly onto the garden beds as mulch.

Mulch is critical for the vegetable bed health. Two inches of mulch will hold an inch of water. As it decomposes there will be a slow release of

nutrients to the vegetable plants. It prevents evaporation of water from the soil and it neutralizes any pH imbalance in the soil. Into this mulch vegetable seeds and seedlings will be planted. Cherry tomatoes selected for their natural resistance to blight in the coastal area prevent the need to use chemical sprays. Next to these tomatoes will be planted basil plants for their natural pest repellent properties and their ability to enhance the flavor of tomatoes. Any rotten tomatoes will be thrown to the chickens as feed.

In turn the chickens will feed us as we harvest their eggs and meat. Chickens will be released into the cattle kraal when the cattle are present to eat the fly larvae in cattle manure and so control a potential irritant. And by receiving water for drinking purposes from the cistern collecting rain on the roof, all a chicken's needs will be met, so enabling it to play its role in helping meet the needs of other elements in the garden. Such a sustainable food production system, linked with a place of worship and instruction as it is, marvelously models in microcosm the holistic nature of life.

In the spiritual sense, the tri-circle church design affirms the unity of the spiritual and material, rejecting the dualistic worldview of the West that separates the two with catastrophic consequences for creation. And the exciting thing is that this will be an insight that worshipers in the church will be able to experience rather than simply accept intellectually. For under the floor where the three circles overlap will be a cistern collecting rainwater from the roof when it falls as a gift from the heavens. This rainwater will serve three functions. A hand pump will send this water to fill the drinking trough for the chickens and the cattle. The same water will irrigate the vegetables in the circle garden. But in addition this rainwater which waters garden, bird, and beast will also fill the baptismal font, symbolizing the truth that we "cannot live by bread alone" but need our Creator, the spiritual, for life to yield its fullness.

Eco Worship Opportunities

Such a church design will lend itself to creative worship services that quite literally prefigure the ultimate worship of God in which "all created things, in heaven, on earth, under the earth and in the sea" join (Rev 5:13 REB). By locating two huge glass doors that open up onto the vegetable garden and the kraal, both the cattle and the organic abundance of a healthy permaculture garden will be visibly present to worshipers and be part of worship itself.

Architecturally united with creation in the worship of God, services that connect faith to the seasonal agricultural tasks present themselves: Harvest Festivals in which fresh produce is quite literally pulled from the rich friable soil in sight of the worshipers and then carried in to the sanc-

tuary and placed upon the altar in thanksgiving; First Fruit ceremonies in preparation for harvesttime; Blessing of Seeds ceremonies in preparation for planting; and Blessing of Animal ceremonies in which new born calves of the Eco Village are present in the kraal.

Other services celebrating steadily improving eco-system processes of water cycle, mineral cycle, energy flow, and community dynamics can be creatively explored. This will have the effect of linking the people of the Eco Village directly to the land on which they live and depend. Already a liturgical year combining the cycles of the season and their related agricultural activities is presenting itself. Such a liturgical year could help Eco Village residents imbue the everyday with the holy and the holy with the everyday, so synchronizing them with the rhythm of a creation that magnificently reveals the hand and love of the Creator in visible organic abundance.

Holistic Management: An Eco-Biased Management System

Finally, a successful Eco Village that cares for creation will depend on appropriate decision-making processes. For this to happen, the decision-making process of the Eco Village will need to reflect the holistic nature of the world, just as the architecture of the tri-circle church is helping Christian spirituality to do, but now needing expression in a practical management system. It is this that Holistic Management offers, "a unique and practical means to account for and work with the complexity of nature, in balance with human needs and desires, and economic realities."¹³ In a word, Holistic Management is all about sustainability and understands something to be sustainable only if sustainable ecologically, economically, and socially.

Holistic Management begins with the establishment of a holistic goal. For the Eco Village, as we see, such a goal has been established, its value being that it provides direction for Eco Village planners and managers toward which the Eco Village can be managed in an integrated way. A holistic goal is formulated in three descriptions: (1) "Quality of Life," (2) "Forms of Production," and (3) a "Future Resource Base."

Such a three-part goal builds into the management of the Eco Village, a concern for a healthy environment (the future resource base), something one expects of an Eco Village. But the goal does not begin there. It starts with the quality of life the residents aspire to: simple, healthy lifestyles, meaningful work, feeling secure, caring for creation, and experiencing God in friendships and creation. The holistic goal then includes a descrip-

13. Holistic Management in Practice, Special Edition, 2000.

tion of what needs to be produced to create that quality of life: healthy homes, healthy food, clean water, employment opportunities, recreational opportunities, and eco-friendly worship opportunities. Only after this, does the holistic goal describe the resource base required, as it will need to be far into the future, to sustain what must be produced to create the quality of life envisioned.

Gqunube Green's holistic goal describes its resource base as consisting of a healthy indigenous forest system, a healthy grassland system, sustainable crop-land farming, a healthy wildlife population, preservation of the river edges, and eco-housing which has minimal impact on the environment. All proposed actions to be undertaken on the Eco Village can be evaluated now for their contributions toward meeting the established holistic goal. For this task a series of test questions are provided by Holistic Management to help ensure that the ecological, social, and economic implications of each proposed action are evaluated. With a constant re-evaluation of these decisions built into the process, Holistic Management provides a dynamic decision-making framework to guide all proposed actions toward a holistic sustainability.

The Eco Village as an Enacted Parable: Some Practical Illustrations

Let us look first at the example of eco-building. The recent renovation of an existing garage into a three bedroom Eco Block illustrated the type of eco-friendly home construction Gqunube Green is aspiring after. It also provided the design team with an opportunity to use the Holistic Management test questions to ensure that the construction of the building moved the Eco Village toward its holistic goal. The conversion considered a number of technologies.

Showers were installed rather than baths because they use less water. "Eco-valves" from Bauer Industries were installed on the showerheads to reduce water usage by up to 53 percent. Dual flush toilets, sourced locally, further reduce the amount of water used by the block. All rainwater is harvested in a rainwater tank for use on the food gardens. Electrically, a solar hot water heater was installed to reduce electricity consumption and plans for solar electric panels for lighting are in place.

Because of a concern not to be a part of global rainforest destruction, it was decided not to use imported hardwood for door and window frames. Rather, it was decided to custom make these from treated pine sourced locally from sustainable plantations accredited by the Forestry Stewardship Council. The doors, windows, and their frames were made by a local carpenter, George Kockett, who worked the wood with its qualities in mind.

One of the big challenges of sustainability, financial as well as ecological, is the management of waste. Given that sewage systems are costly to build and service and that rubbish collection is similarly expensive, the biolytic filtration system was chosen to enable the Eco Village residents to manage biodegradable waste responsibly on site. All black and gray water from the toilets and showers will be processed through the biolytic filtration system with the nutrient rich filtrate used to irrigate a plantation of banana and other fruit trees. By closing the nutrient cycle, a waste is turned into a resource and the sustainability of natural systems emulated.

Finally, the paint used on the interior and exterior walls, and even on the roof, is eco-friendly. A paint company, Eco-Touch in Cape Town, manufactures this paint from biodegradable ingredients.

Another parabolic focus is ecological land management. A holistic grazing program has already been developed for Gqunube Green. A herd of indigenous Nguni cattle were bought because of their natural resistance to tick-borne diseases, reducing the need for chemical sprays to control ticks. Twenty-nine Nguni cattle now roam the farm, and the incidence of spraying is significantly lower than what is standard practice in the area.

Recognizing that grasslands are one of South Africa's most valuable resources, the cattle are being used as a tool to move the Gqunube Green property toward its holistic goal of developing and maintaining its grassland at a high level of sustainability with a good mix of annuals and perennial grasses, good nutrient and water cycles, and a superior energy flow.

Managing the cattle with portable electric fencing as a means of achieving the landscape goal will ensure both a steadily improving pasture and financial return. It has been gratifying to note the difference the Nguni cattle have already made as a land management tool. They have trampled the excessive amount of moribund grass on Gqunube Green, thus reducing the fire hazard and encouraging new growth. Their steady fertilizing of the field with manure has led to a significant increase in dung beetles that in turn contribute to the improvement of the nutrient and water cycles. In addition, they are playing a role in preventing bush encroachment and in alien vegetation control as they graze the prolific Port Jackson. In short the holistic grazing plan promises an improved grass and thornveld as well as increased beef production and financial return.

CONCLUSION

Gqunube Green Eco Village is surely a dream worth pursuing. As it is successfully implemented, it will help mainstream an ecologically sound and culturally appropriate alternative to conventional suburban and rural

development. It will serve as a springboard to promote the development of other Eco Villages in the primarily rural Eastern Cape, and so help alleviate poverty. It will offer a retreat and training setting to help sensitize and educate a growing number of people, rich and poor alike, on the need to live sustainable lifestyles. Finally, it will contribute to the development of an eco-ecclesiology that can sustain the many Christians who are earnestly longing to live in harmony with God's good earth.

I share the conviction of the Reverend Hudson that it is possible to make a living in an eco-friendly manner, which is strongly undergirded with Christian faith. This means that it is feasible to transform basic life in the developing world. But the crucial question is whether the developed world can be persuaded to harness its appetite for the resources of the developing world in order to allow processes to emerge that enable all to benefit from these resources without eroding our ecology and environment. The signs are not promising. This may be our evangelical challenge!

May it be so. God willing, may it be so.