

Karl Barth's doctrine of creation: Convergence and divergence with African Christology

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This article explores the intersection between Karl Barth's doctrine of creation and African Christology seeking to elicit similarities as well as differences. It argues that this intersection is contested and open to different understanding and interpretation. The common goal amongst the two doctrines is that they derive from biblical teachings about creation and the creator. However, there is also divergence between the doctrines. Barth's point of departure in his doctrine of creation maintains the Covenant of God to humanity which is not extended to all creation. African Christology's point of departure, on the other hand, maintains that the relations between God, humanity and all life-forms are sacred because of its intrinsic value and sacramental nature. From an African perspective, creation is mutually related and interconnected to the web of life. All life forms hold intrinsic value. It is argued that African Christology implicates Barth's Christological focus as something that reveals Barth's doctrine of creation as anthropocentric.

Contribution: The article promotes a multi-disciplinary approach to eco-theology by exploring the intersection between Karl Barth's doctrine of creation and an African Christological perspective on ecology. It implicates Christian anthropocentrism as a contributory factor to ecological degradation and suggests that African Christology is an important resource for developing a remedial eco-theology.

Keywords: Christian anthropocentrism; African Christologies; African religion; African knowledge wisdom systems; eco-theology.

Introduction

Karl Barth made a grand entry into the theological scene during his Römerbrief of 1919 and 1922 (Barth 1922–1933). Gradually it manifested into volumes of literature and became a turning point in Protestant liberal theology. Much as it started as a critique, it later transformed the understanding of the church's primary mission and the formation of basic reformed Christian doctrines. Barth's works are as relevant today as they were amongst theological discourses of his time. There are no other works in the theological sphere that have been conceived on such a grand scale. His works are classified into five major divisions, or volumes (Brown 1967:105). Brown classifies them as follows: the Word of God; the Doctrine of God; Creation; Reconciliation and Redemption (by which Barth means eschatology). According to Brown's observation, each volume is sub-divided into part-volumes. The two English translators under the leadership of Bromiley and Torrance (1966) have made it possible for contemporary scholars in theology to analyse the strength and weaknesses of Barth's approach to creation.

The objective of this article is not to criticise Barth's views on creation but an attempt to critically excavate the Barthian landscape from an African Christological perspective. Barth's church dogmatism has been debated and criticised for decades, but his contribution remains crucial from a theological perspective. Throughout his teachings, Barth is of the view that as the earth community, we do not know God apart from our Christian imagination and the Word of God which we meditate upon. One can conclude that Barth's approach to creation is purely Christocentric. He is adamant that creation is a revealed doctrine, even though human reasoning remains in the dark as it is with other Christian doctrines due to several factors, including Christian anthropocentrism. From his reading of biblical passages, for example, Psalms 19:1–14; Acts 14:15–17 and Romans 1:18–20, Barth concludes that the texts expose humanity's failure to recognise the obvious through culpable ignorance of God the Creator (Barth 1962:76).

Doctrinal differences within the faith community (Christianity)

Within the faith community, there are major divisions as a result of doctrinal differences. These can be classified as Orthodox, Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Reformed, Methodist, Baptist, Adventist, Pentecostal, Charismatic and World Indigenous Churches. The African Indigenous/Independent Church remains the only group without doctrinal affiliation. Most African Indigenous/Independent Churches do not have such a detailed doctrine as the developed society founded Churches sense of an elaborate, systematic, creedal document, containing the crux of the dogmatic guidelines laid down by the church. From an African perspective, religion is not a matter of meticulous formulation of faith, but rather an expression of a belief system transmitted down to generations. This classification of doctrinal differences and categories presupposes that it is possible to try and define an integral pan-Orthodox doctrinal position. Presumably, Orthodox Catholics do not require separate treatment from contemporary Roman Catholics and Congregationalists, Scottish Presbyterians and Dutch Reformed traditions do not necessarily need separation. Mennonites and Baptists, Moravians with Lutherans, Nazareth and Wesleyan with the Methodists likewise share the same sentiments.

Barth's Christocentric approach exposes the paradigm shift of emphasis from the Word of God to Jesus Christ, as the dominant theme of Barth's theory. In his later works, there is a broad shift as Barth posits the revelatory aspect of the Word of God as significant in the *Church Dogmatics* which are relevant in elucidating the implications of the incarnation and history leading to Christ's embodiment. With regard to the union of divine and human nature in the person of Christ, Barth stresses that God posits mankind into partnership with Godself and introduces the term 'Covenant' (the term Barth uses when joining both the doctrine of election and doctrine of providence). The scope of the universe, according to Brown (1962:99–105), is universal because the human nature of Christ which is inclusive, given that it embraces humanity. This is demonstrated profoundly in the parable of the weeds/thorns (Mt 13:37–40). Therefore, when humanity rejects Christ and all that he stands for, it means humanity is rejecting the impossible. Consequently, there is no escape from the Covenant – love of God to all of creation. Brown (1967:12) concludes that Barth's views regarding creation have a natural theology on a biblical core that is disputable. In the Covenant of works and grace God interacts with humanity for example, in the historical event of Adam and Eve. In the Covenant of Grace, God is revealed through Jesus Christ of Nazareth. The background of these teachings derives from an exegesis of passages such as Genesis 3; Leviticus, 18:5; Nehemiah 9:29; Romans 5:12–21; Ezekiel 20:11 and Galatians 3:12. From these passages and the African Christological perspective, which differs from Barth's Christocentric one, it becomes understandable that Christ becomes the agent of creation.

African Christology

An African Christology defines Christ as the Ecological Ancestor; the ancestor of all creation (Kaoma 2015:42). Jesus is understood through ecologically-based African religiosity and belief systems. Therefore, the application of the ministry of Christ on earth and his redemption extends to the entire cosmology. From an African view, ancestors are the spiritual elders who are custodians of land, life and morality. It is this world-view that informs ancestral Christologies in African theologies. Various Christological notions are used in the continent by theologians and inter-faith based communities. Kabasele (2001:116–127) views Jesus as 'an elder brother-ancestor'. Benezet Bujo refers to Jesus as the 'Proto-ancestor, healer and master of initiation' (Bujo 1982:143–146). Kaoma describes Christ as the 'ecological ancestor', (Kaoma 2013:56–59), who cannot be limited to humanity alone, but is an ancestor of all the creation, and Nyamiti presents Jesus as the 'Ancestor of all ancestors' (Nyamiti 1990:129). Christ as the ancestor should not be limited to humanity alone. Christ is understood or perceived as 'the first-born of all creation' as illustrated in Colossian's 1:17. According to Kaoma, by virtue of tradition he becomes the elder brother to every creature. As the origin of all creation, Christ is the Lord and the ecological ancestor of all life-forms. The text in the book of John is an illustration of the ecological ancestry of Christ when it states that 'through him, all things were made and without him, nothing made was made' (Jn 1:3). African ancestor-ship is not concerned with life in heaven or the eschatological concept, but concerned with life lived on earth as the earth community. The belief system is that the Creator is present within creation and that the created world is sacred, and all life-forms hold intrinsic value and should not be exploited and abused.

From an African perspective, life is viewed, lived and characterised as an organic whole, whereas within developed societies, life is mutilated or divided into components and compartments. In African Christologies, the compartmental divisions of the universe are near impossible in African life-worlds and belief systems. The only person designated to divide and rule is the Creator of the universe because he is the life-giver and sustainer of the earth community. Nkemnkia (1999) captures the integrated nature of African life-worlds by saying:

The African's life is characterised by an organic whole within which it is very difficult to distinguish clearly as the western classical conception does, the boundaries of different realities forming the whole universe of the living. It is very difficult to differentiate clearly between man (sic) and the world, and man and God, and the world. (p. 152)

The diversity and complexity of Christologies on the African continent as Smith points out, is the amicable result or response to different cultural and historical contexts of African theologians, and their targeted audience or readership. Each author brings to the conversation certain values shared by her or his community (Smith 2006:337–348). Based on African life-worlds, it is evident that African

theologies are faced with a dialectical cultural opposition between African Christologies and established western theological premises. For example, Nyamiti referring to the Trinity from a western theological perspective argues that the Father is the parent-ancestor of the Son; the Son becomes the descendant of the Father, and the Holy Spirit automatically becomes the ancestral oblation and Eucharistic gift to humankind. The term 'ancestor' according to Nyamiti, from an African theological perspective, holds five elements: (1) a kingship between the living and the spiritual realm; (2) a sacred status of a model being/an exemplar of good conduct acquired after death; (3) an aspect of mediation between the Creator and the living; (4) the responsibility to guide the living towards respect and admirations through offerings and supplications and (5) the duty to venerate and honour ancestors (living dead) during the bumper harvest, and following ecological sensitive measures with regard to land usage. From this understanding, the fourth commandment in (Ex 20:12) to honour one's parents is not limited to the contemporary, but includes the living dead. This explains Christ's critics' blasphemous accusation when he claimed existence before Abraham (the patriarch of the Israelites, through his sons Isaac and Ishmael from his wedded wife Sarah and her Egyptian slave servant Hagar). According to Nyamiti (1984), we cannot begin to differentiate between African ancestors and non-African saints. He writes:

By African ancestors is meant to those saints in heaven or purgatory who have, with the living on earth, consanguineous or non-consanguineous ties which are necessary for one to qualify as an ancestor according to African traditional beliefs. Because of the modern social and religious changes that have affected the African traditional way of living, it is necessary to modify and enlarge the scope of ancestral ties so as to include African national or racial ancestors, or those belonging to the Third World. (pp. 29–30)

African Christologies by virtue of tradition do not turn a blind eye towards land degradation. Ecological sensitivity from an African perspective, due to ancestral notions and land tenure systems, is vital to Christian theology amidst the exploitation and abuse of land which has resulted in the contemporary ecological crisis. Christ as the 'original ancestor' is the custodian of the land and the entire earth community. The earth is sacred and ought to be replenished by humanity; a responsibility mandated by the Creator (Gn 2:15–17). The African people(s) and the ancient Near East perceived ancestral shrines as sacred places mainly located in mountains: large deep-rooted, old trees and valleys, where individuals and groups of people communed with the divine and ancestral powers. Sacred places promote biodiversity as trespassers face consequences including alienation from the community (Kaoma 2015:55). The story of the Samaritan woman's encounter with Christ (Jn 4:20) demonstrates the cultural controversy between the Jewish people and the Samaritans who were regarded as inferior. In a conversation she told Christ with confidence that, 'Our ancestors worshipped in this mountain, but you say that the place where people should worship is in Jerusalem'. Christ replied in affirmation and said, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is

coming when you will worship God neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem'.

From an ecological perspective African Christologies perceive Christ as the origin-ancestor within the earth community. Therefore, all of creation holds intrinsic value and how we relate to each other (taking into account the ontological connectedness) has eco-social implications towards the abode (Earth) of the Creator. The household of God is in peril due to human ill-practices which have resulted in land degradation across sub-Saharan Africa. According to Daneel, amongst various factors causing the ecological crisis in Africa, agro-economic progress is killing the earth (Daneel 2001:19). Deforestation for commercial gain is more than a criminal act; it is a sin against creation. Without the forest, the earth community is deprived of a number of ecological blessings to all life-forms, including human livelihood. For example, forests rank amongst the world's chief primary carbon sinks, storing about 289 giga tonnes of carbon in trees and vegetation (Gardner 2002:23). Trees are not only sacred from an African religiosity perspective, but they provide habitat to the massive collection of biodiversity of all ecosystems on earth. Based on the Zimbabwean artist Mtukudzi's perspective, humanity plays a role in the contemporary ecological crisis both as the victim and perpetrator. He sums it eloquently in his song 'Pindirai' (intervene). He beseeches all stakeholders, at all levels, to be ecologically sensitive. Mtukudzi (2005) writes, or rather sings:

Vakuruwe pindirai – Elders intervene

Madzimambowe pindirai – Chiefs intervene

Mhuri yenyu yapererwa neruzivo – Your family has run out of wisdom

Vana venyu kupererwa nenjere – Your children have run out of ideas

Tatadza kuchengeta masango – We failed to care for the forests

Kutadza kuchengeta nzizi – We failed to care for the rivers

Mhepo yekufema yangova utsi – The air we breathe is now smoke

Kusvipira mutsime – Spitting into the well

Vakurawe pindirai! – Elders/ancestors intervene.

At last, humanity is acknowledging the fact that the global ecological crisis can be addressed positively through an interdisciplinary approach and methods. It is the moral duty of humanity to replenish the earth (the abode of God). In the African world view, influenced by religiosity and the African indigenous knowledge wisdom system, duties include reciprocal obligations. For example, it is the duty of the elders to protect their young, and the young to protect and respect their elders in the community (Bujo 1998:23).

According to Young, Barth's Christological focus is identified as something that places Barth's doctrine of creation as anthropocentric. Young argues that Barth's theology discourages theological attention to the natural/wild world. Barth attests the fact that the knowledge of creation begins and ends with Christ. The focus of Christ

alone brings systematic constraints to Barth's theology as the focus is not inclusive but exclusive. In contrast, African theology upholds the intrinsic value and interconnectedness of all life-forms, regardless of origin or characteristics. These are contemporary contextual realities that African Christologies reflect with potency as an authentic expression of African Christianity. There are African theologies that are not classified as Christian doctrines or belief system. African theology is a reflection and discourse that attempts to successfully build relations between African religiosity, culture/heritage and Christianity. It is a theology from an African world view that embraces both African-Christian theology and the African cosmology/natural world (Nyende 2005:3–4). Barth's Christology aligns with the early missionaries'/colonial powers' version that presented Christianity from a predominantly developed society perspective. According to the developing world's theologies, Christ is the saviour of the world's problems and ideologies arising from sinful behaviour due to secular world views and interpretation. The African Christology approach places Christ in an ancestral position or lineage as the first-born of Creation. It is an approach that holistically identifies Christ with an ancestral lineage of humanity and the natural/wild world. From an African perspective, the foundation from the beginning of time is based on relations between God, humanity and the natural/wild world (Gitau 2000:19).

The African Christological approach of positioning Christ in the ancestral category has attracted many scholars into a dialogue (Bediako 1994:93–95). From an African theological perspective, the designation of the ancestral category with regard to Christ and the biblical teaching has positively added value in academic literature, because it addresses in depth the world view and perceptions of ancestral veneration. Ancestral veneration (not worshipping) plays an important role in African religiosity which binds spirituality and ecological responsibility. Critics and those outside theology are concerned that the reality of Christ as 'God incarnate' is diminished and syncretism is endorsed (Palmer 2006:71; Potgieter 2017:6–7). Wanamaker (1997) sheds light on this puzzle and writes:

Those who shared his human existence (Christ) and became witnesses to his resurrection, began the process of Christological elaboration by interpreting Christ in terms of the world-view and themes derived from their own cultural experience. (p. 282)

Barth's doctrine of creation

Creation, founded on the Christian doctrine adapted by Barth, is solely dependent upon the grace of God for its existence and sustenance. It is exemplified in the breath of God which is imparted to humanity. It is also symbolised in the tree of life within the Garden of Eden imparted to Adam, the first human species from a theological perspective. Although Barth's doctrine of creation capitalises on relations with God and humanity extended to all of creation, Barth understands the Covenant between the Creator and creation from a Trinitarian approach. The Covenant (which is fulfilled in the historical

Christ) according to Barth is the internal basis of creation and unifies creation. As much as Barth is not modalistic, his contributions distinguish his concern with safeguarding the unity of creation. He presents an eloquent Christian doctrine of creation by elaborating on the full meaning of creation and what creation stands for in Christ. The Covenant between God and man is the meaning of glory; the ground and goal of heaven and earth and the whole of creation. According to Barth, the order of creation ought to be understood in that it proceeds not from God's nature, but his will for creation legitimately perceived as distinct from God (Mueller 1972:152).

According to Herbert Hartwell, from a Trinitarian approach, Barth's doctrine of creation is intrinsically Trinitarian in its ontologies. Barth affirms the fact that the identity of the Creator is the Triune God. However, Aung (1998:34–35) disagrees with Barth's theory and points out that Barth neglects the divine activity of the Holy Spirit in creation by holding to the bestowal model of the Trinity. According to Aung, Barth in his doctrine of creation portrays the Holy Spirit as the unity of the Father and the Son, rather than as a person in his own right. Therefore, this model prevents Barth from attributing divine creative activity to the person of the Spirit. Fundamentally, a Christian doctrine of creation gains its knowledge only from the revelation of Jesus Christ in its noetic grounding in Christ. This is evident in the historical redemptive and reconciling work of Christ on earth. Barth notes that humanity cannot think of creation apart from redemption and reconciliation because to think of creation separately and abstractly is outside the Christian faith. The knowledge expressed in the doctrine of creation is the truest knowledge of the existence and identity of the Creator and the created world. It is through our faith base that we draw affirmation that God is the creator of the Universe, determined entirely by deeds and content found within the text(s). Therefore, the doctrine of creation is an attempt and appeal to faith, and can only be revealed through faith. The positioning of the doctrine of creation within *Church Dogmatics* also reveals Barth's systematic belief that the doctrine of creation is an affirmation of faith. He places the doctrine of creation after the two doctrines of revelation and God, which includes the doctrine of election. According to Godsey, Barth is attempting to convey to his followers that God is not incipiently known for His creation, but is perceived in the revelation of His Lordship, in Jesus Christ (Godsey 1963:7).

The orderliness in creation plays a significant role in Barth's theological view. In his work, 'Church Dogmatics, Volume 3/1', he does not directly link or assert the 'independent and distinct rationality' of creation, but he speaks of an ordered creation that is distinct from God. Barth adds that from the orderly creation, humanity must continually bear in mind the order of sustenance. He (Barth 1981) points out that the mode of sustenance is an act of God's free goodness. Meaning that in sustenance creation:

God willed to be faithful in the eternal election of the creature which He made prior to creation and in which He ascribed to it its being and content and existence. (p. 261).

Therefore, when the work of creation was finished, God remained faithful and will always be faithful to all. Barth expands in articulating substance as the divine order in terms of preservation of creation at all cost. The mosaic pattern in Barth's doctrine of creation, particularly the divine sustenance, reflects the aspect of justification in the doctrine of atonement where it reveals the Lord as the servant in the cross delivering humanity as part of creation.

Karl Barth's approach to the doctrine of providence in church dogmatics

Barth's theology resembles a mosaic in which everything coheres with everything else, and nothing remains isolated from the whole. He maintains throughout his teachings that God's gracious deeds in the atonement of Christ 'is the most important thing'; the atonement is a vantage point in Barth's dogmatism as one of the premises of his theological approach (CD IV, 1.83). He refers to God's gracious and merciful act amid the history and background of humanity as the 'gracious election' a narrative expressed in his doctrine of creation and providence. Barth uses the term 'covenant' particularly in the doctrine of atonement and reconciliation. He makes a distinction between Creation, Providence and the history of the Covenant, and gives a full description that the act of creation concerns the origin of creation in God's divine decision, and the relationship between the Creator and Creation. Providence in its totality is the Creator's concern with life experiences and participation of his created world and its inhabitants. The Covenant history between the Creator and humanity is the centre and basis of creaturely history under divine sovereignty. Therefore, the Covenant history according to Barth becomes the internal basis of creation and providence, whilst creation history and Covenant history are parallel entities. God fulfils his fatherly lordship over his creation by preserving and ruling the whole web of earthly existence. This is witnessed and revealed as his mercy is realised in the creaturely sphere portrayed in Christ's life and ministry on earth. The Creator of all things humbles himself in Christ on the cross (justification) and is exalted in Christ on the cross (sanctification) and through Christ; humanity is reconciled to him and receives divine sustenance. That is the Creator's fatherly lordship over creation, which implies that the Creator preserves and sustains the existence of all creation vouchsafing the particularity of Creation in its totality.

In *Church Dogmatics*, 111/1 Barth lays the foundation of subsequent teachings on Creation, drawing his theory from the creation narratives in Genesis, (Gn 1:1-2), which depict Creation as the external basis of the Covenant. In the book of Genesis, (Gn 2:4-25) the Covenant is perceived as the internal basis of creation. The view is that the reciprocal relationship between Creation and the Covenant manifests historically through all life-forms. Barth's teachings concerning the doctrine of creation does not display inclusiveness, but addresses creation with reference to humanity.

According to Heyns in the *Dogmatiek*, 1978, Providence and Creation display certain parallels and differences. Amongst the parallels, one cannot omit the fact that both share the same active subject, for example, the Triune God (the Father, Son and Holy Spirit) who created everything and continues to manifest in creation. All things come from the Father (1 Cor 8:6; Mt 6:25). The Son holds all things together (Col 1:17) and the Holy Spirit makes all things new and alive (Ps 104:30). In a nutshell, Heyns concludes that Creation and Providence concern the same world which the Creator perpetuates and guides to its destination. The difference though between Creation and Providence, according to Heyns, is that Providence is an act of faith which cannot be shared but experienced, or revealed historically in the life of Christ on earth (Heyns 1978:144). Creation is God's continuation dialogue with humanity and all life-forms. The Creator's commandments, the voice that is heard through the Word that is written or spoken and all his acts are interrelated. Therefore, God's numerous deeds such as creation, providence, incarnation and redemption are not identical but enacted by the same Word, which means the distinctive nature of all works reside in the spoken or written word, but with different caesuras or embodiments (Heyns 1978:22-28).

The doctrine of creation in its informative stage did not focus on the doctrine of salvation and its Trinitarian status. It was mostly influenced by the Greek philosophical world views of Plato and later his disciple Aristotle in understanding the orientation of the universe. Based on the Trinitarian influence, one amongst the pacesetters of theology, Irenaeus (the Greek Bishop 180 ca famous for developing Christian theology by combating heresy and defining orthodoxy) drew a close connection between Christ and Creation, and the implications that followed the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* (Latin interpretation *out of nothing*). The Creator brought forward the world into existence out of nothing but a purposeful act of his free will. According to Barth's observation the universe came into existence at some divine time long ago without the use of pre-existing materials or existing foundations.

During the period of identity crisis of the Church, created by Gnosticism, Marcionism and other movements, Irenaeus' concept of authority enabled the early faith community to overcome the dangers caused by heretics and Christian anthropocentrism. He encouraged biblical scholars, authors and critics to view the canon and creed as interpreted by bishops in Churches of apostolic foundation. St. Irenaeus' vantage point regarding the doctrine of creation emphasised that God began the world and has been overseeing it ever since. Therefore, contemporary and past experiences are part of his plan for creation, regardless of the earth's status consequent to human ill-practices (Kaoma 2015:128). The continuous land degradation according to Kaoma is the grand moral issue of the present generation. The colonial education that nature serves humanity should be addressed radically through theological conviction that the Creator has a covenantal relationship with the earth community, and a sacramental presence in the cosmos.

The background of Barth's doctrine of creation

Barth's doctrine of creation originates from the Trinitarian approach (truism). His focus is on creation itself as a symbol of all life-forms and not on how creation originated and the proctology of the world. He emphasises the Triune God, who is revealed in the works of Christ through the Christian faith and a binary stance from the philosophical ideas of pantheism and panentheism (Gunton 2000:143–158). Barth speaks of creation in action. God spoke the Word and there was immediate action. The act of God's command is complete and at the same time it continues (*creatio continua*). The history of creation is an ongoing process. Barth warns that history of creation is different from contemporary history recorded by humanity. Humanity was not present to observe creation as it unfolded and continues to unfold. Based on this fact Barth's point of departure speaks of history of creation as 'non-historical' or 'pre-historical history of creation' (Barth Church Dogmatics, Vol. 3/1). He describes creation as a product of God's act of creation. It is not only the physical universe, but it includes heaven and the earth community, the visible and the invisible. Barth's theology affirms the goodness of creation because it is 'created in Jesus of Nazareth, and exists only in terms of his saving grace'. Barth's theory is supported by Berkouwer, who argues that Barth's creation is centred around and in continuity to the unity of God's work revealed in Christ and positioned from its 'patri omnipotence' and sustainability. It is utterly impossible to separate creation and redemption in terms of the historical background phases of creation. The Creator's eternal counsel keeps humanity from separating the works of creation and reconciliation. He suggests a paradigm shift in Barth's emphasis on the historical aspects of God's works rather than upon the eternal aspect. In illustrating his point, Berkouwer (1956) states:

The real issue raised by Barth's Christological doctrine is not whether his conception may be opposed in terms of the centre of the redemptive process, namely Christ Christology, and therefore by historicizing of the works of God, but rather whether the unison of God's work may ever be presented in antithesis to what Barth has called the 'step-wise' character of God's works and against which he directs his sharp protest. (p. 251)

Barth's doctrine of creation out of nothing is an affirmation that all created beings are distinctive from God's self the omnipresent. Barth explains the 'notion of creation out of nothing'. First, that creation was not out of pre-ordained/pre-existent material because there was no reality other than the omnipresent Creator. Second, the doctrine of creation out of nothing 'Creator ex nihilo' depicts creation exclusively as a result of the will of God. As an illustration concerning creation out of nothing, Barth conforms to the historic formation of the Church and the doctrines. When Barth considers the biblical text, for example in the Genesis creation-narratives it displays inconsistency in several factors including text interpretations, misconceptions and biblical hermeneutics.

Is Barth's doctrine of creation aligned to Christian anthropocentrism?

In many instances, Barth comes across as somebody who is constantly against the discussion of natural theology, and hence he describes natural theology as anthropocentric. His doctrine of creation according to many scholarly works does not address contemporary ecological degradation. This critique can be found, for example in the works of Norman Young, Kapyra Kaoma, John Webster, Samson Gitau and Jesse Mugambi's contribution in addressing contemporary eco theology (Kaoma 2013:52). However, unlike these critics, Gunton (1998:85) sees Barth's point of departure more as a subordination of creation to redemption, rather than as being anthropocentric. Webster (2000:63) argues that Barth is anthropocentric because he focuses entirely on God's relations to history as in the Covenant, rather than within nature. By taking this stance, he subordinates creation to the Covenant and portrays Creation as the means to an end. Also, the anthropocentric nature of Barth's doctrine of creation and Covenant upholds his exposition of the Genesis creation narratives. Young argues that because of this anthropocentrism Barth's theology discourages non-human species and promotes humanity as the master of creation. He perceives that knowledge of the Creation begins and ends with Christ. Therefore, his theological interest is limited to the relationship between God and humanity. All of Creation is simplified in Barth's world-view as the means to an end. By this statement alone, Barth has elevated human beings, and the cosmic world as being dependent on humanity. This is Christian anthropocentrism at its highest order as White (1967:55) suggests in his publication *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*. White argued that an abusive attitude towards the natural world became visible during the medieval era, encouraged by the anthropocentrism of Christian theology. Christianity has propagated the notion of 'dominion over Creation' (Gn 1:28). According to White, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion, which has resulted in the contemporary ecological crisis. White's accusation is a challenge not only by Christian apologetics but by various intellectuals across disciplines.

Ever-since White's critique, many theologians have defended the faith community, pointing out the gaps and simplicity of White's ecological understanding from a historical background. It is argued that Christianity, understood adequately and without misconceptions, is not the main cause of ecological degradation (as suggested by White), but constitutes a part of the solution to the crisis. Passmore (1980:10) suggests, the abuse of nature from a developed world perspective originates from Greek dualism when compared to biblical texts, which are misinterpreted widely across readers. Dubos observes that it was not only the Greeks ideologies that contributed to environmental abuse but also the ancient Chinese and Muslim civilisations (Dubos 1973:43–54). To address the contemporary ecological crisis across disciplines, it is time to retrieve or re-visit the ecological heritage of Christianity. It will be of advantage in the

discourse to make provision for distinguishing between Christianity and Christendom, faith and practices.

Barth's position regarding evil or sin concerning creation

Based on Barth's doctrine of creation, evil/sin bring complete disorder and confusion to Creation, because evil is in opposition to God's creative order and activity. He argues that the fall was unavoidable because God did not keep a provision for the fall in Creation. Maynell's response to Barth's theory is that it is inviolable to think that the fall existed in creation before the actual reality, or its occurrence in the fall of Man (Meynell 1965:35). From an African Christology perspective, Christ as the first-born of Creation could not have come in a human form to redeem the earth community from sin/evil deeds. Barth is adamant and writes that, 'It will always be obscure, unfathomable and baffling that something opposed to the will of God can be realised' (Meynell 1965:81).

Barth is misunderstood by many scholars on his quest to demonstrate that God did not create evil and sin, but at the same time Barth is not in denial that evil/sin exists in humanity. He suggests the 'origin of sin' or 'natural evil' in Creation is debatable, and affirms that evil or sin is not a threat to the Creator. Conradie observes that original sin/evil does not ontologically, logically or chronologically occur before the emergence of sin/evil deeds (Conradie 2018:118). But it is understood or perceived by many authors, within and outside the discipline of theology, as something or some act that follows from the planetary dissemination or culmination of evil deeds (Conradie 2018:42). As the earth community, humanity in particular, understands sin in relational terms as a 'broken relationship'; sin does not hold ontological ties or status. It does not exist on its own. From an African indigenous ecological perspective, the notion of sin describes a sense of alienation from all creation. Such as when individuals or group of people(s) are deprived of their identity from their ancestral lineage, or banished from their ancestral land (Kaoma 2015:99). It is also evidenced when humanity exploits and abuses the natural/wild world through human ill-practices, resulting in ecological degradation. Rasmussen, from a South African context, likens this type of alienation and sinful act to the 'apartheid habit' of distinguishing between humanity and non-human nature, giving the impression that we are ecologically segregated as the earth community (Rasmussen 1996:75–89). Sachs (1991), a contemporary opponent of apartheid and a retired judge of the constitutional court of South Africa, during his exile era, wrote in defiance of the apartheid regime and said:

Apartheid not only degrades the inhabitants of our country. It degrades the earth, the air, rivers and streams. We are calling for the restoration of the land and the atmosphere. The greening of our country is basic to its healing. There is a lot of healing to be done in South Africa. (p. 74)

Berry (1988), on the same notion of human alienation to the natural world, uses 'autism' as a metaphor. He writes:

In relation to the earth, we have been autistic for centuries. Only now have we begun to listen attentively and with a willingness to respond to the earth's demand that we cease our industrial assaults, that we renew our human participation in the grand liturgy of the universe. (p. 22)

Berry's eco-theological sensitivity was influenced by the life-worlds of indigenous people, particularly in North America and Africa. Their relations towards the natural wild/world of respect and sacredness inspired his cosmological vision to greater heights. He is famously known as the principal theological mind of the New Cosmology, and founded the Riverdale Center for Religious Research in the Bronx (Berry 1972:48–49).

McFague (2001) shares the same view with Barry when she says:

We have lost the sense of belonging in our world and to the Creator, who creates nurtures and redeems the world and all life-forms. We have lost the sense that we are part of a living, maturing, dynamic cosmos that has its being in and through God. (p. 112)

Conclusion

The intersection between Barth's doctrine of creation and African Christology is contested within theology. The common goal amongst the doctrines is derived from biblical teachings about Creation and its creator. Barth's point of departure in his doctrine of creation is that the Covenant of God to humanity extends to all Creation. African Christology's point of departure lies in the fact that the relations between God, humanity and all life-forms are sacred. From an African perspective, Creation is mutually related and interconnected to the web of life from a systematic belief system and religiosity, without following Christian dogmas. The fundamental point is that theology is a reflection and discourse about the Creator in our daily experiences and endeavours. Although we face contemporary challenges from a number of factors including Christian anthropocentrism and religiosity, one should bear in mind the fact that the centrality of biblical teaching in the African Christian theological endeavour should not be compromised. African religiosity maintains ecological sensitivity within its life-worlds.

African Christology embraces creation in all spheres of life. Through the cult of ancestry, it holds humanity as designated custodians within the earth community. Ancestors are by default the guardians of communities' livelihood by honouring and acknowledging community obligations. Land degradation is one amongst other factors contributing to extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa. In African cosmology, the multiple Christological notions indicate different roles of ancestor in society at large beginning with Christ as the 'original ancestor'; the giver and sustainer of life. African Christologies are attempts to incarnate Christ into African cultures. Christ the 'brother-ancestor' relates to the church as the ancestor of all saints in the heavenly realm, purgatory and on earth. In a nut shell, the church becomes the extension

of Christ ancestor-ship to human communities (Nyamiti 1984:132).

Based on African Christologies the assumption that the natural/wild world is for human consumption and extensive profit is a fallacy. The sooner humanity acknowledges that we are interconnected to the cosmos and that the earth is sacred, and every species has its own ecological significance, the sooner we uphold the ontological-custodian position within the earth community. According to Barth's Christology, creation is the means to an end. God created a covenant partner in humanity and the rest of Creation their home (earth), which will provide for their needs. This is evidently an anthropocentric character at all costs. It is primarily focused on the God-human relationship, whereas African Christology is focused on the relationship between God, humanity and the natural/wild world (Gitau 2000:34).

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