Towards an African Oikotheology

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Abstract

In the past years Africa has encountered great changes in all aspects whether social, political, economic cultural or religious due to globalization. This radical revolution which has invaded Africa has not come without challenges as the continent is today replete with poverty, hunger, conflicts, unemployment, corruption, tribal animosity, nepotism, diseases and so on. It is in response to these challenges that African theologians and Church leaders have continually developed various theologies so to address the poignant African situation. Some of these theologies include African theology, Liberation theology, African inculturation theology, South African Black theology and theology of Reconstruction. While not refuting the previous theologies in Africa, the author of this paper suggests African Oikotheology as an ideal theology for Africa in this century. The term Oikotheology is not new as it was applied in the post-apartheid South Africa, but African Oikotheology is first used in this paper. The word Oikotheology which is coined from the Greek Oikos (home or household) and theology means the ‘theology of the home or household’. In this case, Africa is our home graciously given to us by God. All inhabitants of this home are equal and so resources must be shared equally (economy), unity among all members must be maintained (ecumenics), and all must care for our environment (ecology). While Oikotheology in general concerns itself with only the double crisis of poverty and environmental degradation, African Oikotheology goes beyond this by emphasizing the need for the promotion of justice, peace and reconciliation among the inhabitants of the Oikos. Since human beings occupy a special place in God’s creation, Africans must see it as their duty to make the African continent an inhabitable home for all. Once they are able to effectively fight the problem of poverty, conserve the environment and maintain justice, peace and reconciliation, Africa will become a good home devoid of hunger, corruption, violence, nepotism, animosity and so on.

Keywords: Africa, Theology, Oikotheology, African Oikotheology.

Introduction

Africa is a continent which like the rest of the world has encountered immense changes in all aspects. Although traditionally life in Africa was relatively stable and almost static with religion permeating all spheres of life such that there was no clear distinction between the sacred and profane (Mbiti, 1969), today Africa is caught up in a world revolution which is so dynamic that it has almost gone out of human control (Mbiti, 1969:211). Globalization in itself is a positive development as it creates a possibility of working together to address the global challenges currently affecting humanity, but nevertheless, it has caused serious challenges in some continents like Africa which people must wrestle with for their survival. For example, Hamdi (2011) affirms that while globalization has made the world become a small village and has numerous advantages to the developing countries such as economic processes, technological developments, political influences, health systems, social and
natural environmental factors, it has brought up new challenges such as environmental deteriorations, instability in commercial and financial markets, and increase in inequity across and within nations. Mbiti (1969: 213) clarifies this argument by his assertion that,

Every radical revolution in human history costs human blood, human sorrows and human suffering. This was no exception in Africa, and Africa has paid heavily for the change which originated outside and was initially being forced upon her. So the revolution came by both power and peace, and Africa could not be same any more.

While supporting this argument, Nthamburi (2000:2) explains that the pressures of secularism and materialism and indeed the growing technological culture raise profound challenges in Africa. He asks a question worth reflection by all Africans: ‘How can the gospel become credible and relevant to Africans in the midst of the socio-political and economic changes that have ravaged our communities?’ It is possibly O’ Donovan (2000:1) who draws the point home by his contention that,

Africa is one of the most rapidly changing continents in the world today. The winds of change are affecting almost every sector of public and private life. . . . Education, technology, globalization, urbanization, religious change and social change are touching the lives of people from Cape Town to Cairo and from Dakar to Djibouti.

A notable thing is that along with the changes have come such great problems that no one seems to know what to do or where to start to solve them (O’Donovan, 2000). African nations are caught up in political power struggles, war and endemic nepotism, poverty, hunger, pollution, sicknesses, crime, unemployment, corruption, environmental degradation, breakdown of traditional family life and many others which threaten to destroy the core existence of the African people (Nkonge, 2012: 229). This poignant African situation is perhaps what makes the former South African Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu lament that,

The picture is bleak and the prospect one of seemingly unmitigated gloom. It is as if the entire continent was groaning under the curse of Ham and was indeed in all respects the Dark Continent of antiquity. Africans may well ask: “Are we God’s stepchildren? Why has disaster picked on us so conspicuously?” We appear to be tragically unique in this respect (Tutu, 2004).

In this regard, Donovan (2000:1) asks ‘What kind of future does Africa have?’ ‘Is the situation hopelessly out of control or is there anything that can be done?’

It is these kinds of questions that have led African theologians and Church leaders to continually develop different theologies to address the changing African situation and the challenges it poses. Such include Liberation theology, African Christian theology, South African Black theology, African inculturation theology and the Theology of Reconstruction. Any meaningful theology must be relevant to the people in which it is meant for. As Nthamburi (1991: 53) rightly puts it, doing theology is an exercise that involves our experiences, our social heritage which is orally handed down from one generation to another as well as religious practices and rituals. Jesse Mugambi informs that the Christian missionaries who came to evangelize Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries paid a high price for ignoring the African culture and religion in their evangelization and theological reflection. He says that, ‘One of the consequences of this error in the theology of mission which rationalized the modern missionary movement was that Christianity came to be viewed by most Africans as a European religion, superimposed upon the African cultural and religious experience’ (Mugambi, 1989a). This is usually what happens when those involved in theological reflection do not take the task seriously. As John Pobee warns ‘Theology will be anachronistic irrelevant unless it is pitched at the wavelength of the addressee as a person, in his ideologies, moods, and needs’ (Pobee, 1980:40).

In this regard, whilst not disregarding or discrediting the previous theologies in Africa, I want to suggest ‘African oikotheology’ as a useful theology for the African continent in the twenty-first century. The term oikotheology is not new as such having been proposed in South Africa in the early
years of this century as a useful theology for the post-apartheid South African context. The term ‘African oikotheology’ is however a new theological terminology being proposed in this paper with aim of developing a theology for the African continent in face of the numerous challenges high lightened above. This is justified by the fact that as Gitau (2000: 141) denotes, ‘It is important to articulate what one considers to be relevant theology in the circumstances of a people’s social, political, economic and cultural contexts’. It however follows from what some scholars such as Warmback (2007), Alokwu (2009) Conradie (2011) and others have done in their effort to construct an oikotheology. In Kenya, the term oikotheology is new with African theology and the theology of Reconstruction taking prominence in recent years.

**Definition and Justification of the African Oikotheology**

The term theology is derived from two Greek nouns *Theos* which in English is God and *Logos* which in English is ‘Word’. Literally translated in English, it means “the Word of God”. The “Word” as implied in John 1:1 has more to do with ‘knowledge’ and so theology may be taken to mean ‘the knowledge of God’ or even ‘wisdom of God’. But whilst wisdom can be attained through experience or is even inborn, knowledge is only attainable through an aspect of learning or training. Therefore, the term theology in its essence implies an aspect of learning or training which may either be formal or informal (Nkonge 2008:259).

According to Prof. J.N.K. Mugambi, theology is systematic discourse about God. The discourse may be theoretically expressed as it has been in the history of Christianity in the West or practically lived without verbalization as in the indigenous African religious heritage. He feels that theology is useful in explaining the mysteries and paradoxes people find themselves as part of the universe (Mugambi, 1989 a: 7). A similar view is shared by John Parratt who defines theology as speaking about God. He argues that theology is a ‘reasoned’ discourse about God. It is a systematic description of God as he really is in his true nature (Parratt, 1996:2). Richard Gehman sees theology as the study of God. He contends that any God-talk, any effort to speak our understanding of God is theology (Gehman, 1987: 26). Macquarrie (1966:1) while not departing from the observations of the other scholars view theology as a discourse which through participation and reflection upon a religious faith seeks to express the content of the faith in the clearest and most coherent language available. John Pobee elucidates that theology is concerned with existential situations that humanity finds itself in. It is a reflection on divinity or what divinity is conceived to be and what relationship to divinity means or should mean for one’s life situation and responsibilities to the society (Pobee, 1979:28). In view of this, I define theology as human contemplation about God and sharing the same with others.

The term Oikotheology is coined from two words, that is, ‘Oikos’ and theology. **Oikos** is a Greek word for a home or household. Thus the term Oikotheology literally means ‘The theology of the home or household’. The root metaphor for this theology is the notion of the ‘whole household of God’ (Conradie, 2011:115). From Oikos we derive the English words ecology, ecumenics and economy (Warmback, 2007: 100). From it we also get the word Ecumenism (in Greek ‘Oikoumene’) which means the ‘the whole inhabited earth’ in contrast to the uninhabited part of the world (Gatu, 1989:103). This is the term that has been applied to forge unity in the Church over the years (Mugambi, 1989 b). It is Rasmussen (1994:118) who brings forth a clear picture of the connection between economy, ecology and ecumenics using the notion of the Oikos by his elucidation that,

> *Creation is pictured as a vast public household. The English words economics, ecology, and ecumenics share the same root and reference. Economics means providing for the household’s material and service needs and managing the household well. But the word also has a theological meaning. One of the classic theological expressions for bringing creation to full health is the unfolding drama of the ‘divine economy’. . . One of the marks of that economy is shared abundance. Ecumenics means treating the inhabitants of the household as a single family, human and nonhuman together, and fostering the unity of that family. Ecology is the knowledge of that systematic interdependence upon which the life of the*
Thus when the word Oikotheology is used one has to see the interrelation between economy, ecology and ecumenics in the same Oikos (household). In this case, the earth is our Oikos. In this home or household (Oikos), there is good utilization and management of resources which are equally shared among the inhabitants (economy), the inhabitants form a singe unified family (ecumenics) and there is an unrelenting effort to care for the creation upon which the inhabitants depend for survival (ecology). In this regard, proper utilization of resources, unity among people and environmental conservation become crucial components of Oikotheology. A similar view is shared by Conradie (2011:115) who feels that the power of the Oikos metaphor lies in its ability to integrate especially three core ecumenical themes on the basis of the Greek word Oikos (household) which forms the etymological root of the quests for economic justice (amidst the inequalities and multiple injustices that characterize the current neo-liberal economic order), ecological sustainability (amidst the destruction of the ecosystems) and ecumenical fellowship (amidst the many denominational and theological divisions that characterize Christianity worldwide).

Therefore the root metaphor of Oikotheology is the notion of the ‘whole household of God’ (Conradie, 2011). This is not a difficult analogy for an African whose traditional home or household is the centre of existence. In Africa, members of the same household (who basically include the living, the departed and the unborn) are mystically bound to each other both because of blood or marriage and because of living together, and it is hard to break the knot between them (Mbiti 1975). From a very tender age children start to learn and master the art of hospitality and sharing (economy), respect and unity (ecumenics) and taking care of their surroundings (ecology) (Murianki 2016).

Sincerely speaking the notion of the ‘household of God’ may serve as a theological root metaphor for the current discourse on a wide variety of theological themes. For example, Conradie (2011) informs that it has been employed for as an ecological doctrine of creation based on the indwelling of God’s spirit in creation, and in the ecclesial community, anthropology of stewardship (oikonomos) or one of being at ‘home on earth’, a soteriology and an ecclesiology focusing on the way of members of the ‘household of God’. Saint Paul possibly explains to his better when he says that,

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit (Eph 2:19-22 NIV).

The household thus offers a sense of belonging and excludes nothing. It includes more than family members, friends, neighbours, visitors and foreigners. In Africa it also includes those in the Zamaní period (the living dead and ancestors) and the unborn who are regarded as the buds of hope (Mbiti, 1969). The household also incorporates domestic animals, livestock, food supplies, clothing, furniture, energy supplies, water supplies, trees, flowers, soil etc (Conradie, 2011). An important thing to note is that in this home or household all are equally valued. In it there is the structure as well as mutuality of care, assurance of belonging, sustenance and support. A home implies domestic relations of interconnectedness and interdependence, without rivalry and oppression. It is about community and reconciliation, wholeness, connectedness, love, sacrifice, generosity, and welcoming the stranger. All life shares in the same home and we all need each other (Warmback, 2007:102).

Therefore as it is clearly seen, the household/home metaphor is very relevant for the African continent which is currently bleeding from the pain of tribal animosity, ethnic tension, racism, hatred, conflicts, inter-tribal wars, violence, poverty, corruption, injustice, political instability, unequal distribution of
resources, hunger, diseases, illiteracy, terrorism, authoritarianism, environmental degradation, refugees and internally displaced persons (Nkonge, 2015; Mwiti & Dueck, 2007). African Oikotheology arises from the fact that the troubled Africa needs a theology which is awake to the challenges it is currently experiencing. Africans must begin to see this continent as our home or household which has graciously been given to us by God. We inhibit this home together with multiple of other forms of life. We are equal members in this household/home and so equal sharing of resources (economy), unity among ourselves and other inhabitants (ecumenics), and caring of our environment (ecology) are matters we cannot take lightly.

While other scholars including Warmback (2007), Alokwu (2009) and Conradie (2011) have proposed the construction of Oikotheology in the general sense to address the challenges of the double crisis of poverty and environmental degradation, the African Oikotheology proposed in this paper goes beyond this as it calls for justice, unity, love, respect, sharing, hospitality, reconciliation, peace and so on among the inhabitants of the home earth, particularly the marginalized African continent. Our success as Africans lies in the realization that we are living in the same household where none is more important than the other.

**Humanity as central in the Oikos**

Although the Oikos (earth) has many inhabitants including animals, birds, fish, insects, plants and numerous inanimate things all religions attest to the fact human beings occupy a special place in the Oikos. The sacred books of many world religions give a two-fold teaching that human being is part of nature and yet qualitatively distinct as the highest and central entity in nature. On one hand, since every creature has its value and purpose in the Oikos, scriptures teach an ethic of reference for all life and stewardship of the environment. On the other hand scriptures teach, in various ways, that the human being is the crown of creation (Wilson, 1991:203). Gurney (2013) regards mankind as the pinnacle of God’s creation, a claim acknowledged by the scriptures as we shall see. According to Wilson (1991), the human is the microcosm of the cosmos, encompassing all things. He/she is uniquely in God’s image and able to realize divinity. In this regard, humans are given the commission to take dominion over the things of creation. As noted by Pope Francis it is sad that human beings have quite often misunderstood this ‘dominion’ to mean ‘to rule over’, ‘lord over’ or ‘dominating’ the creation (Francis, 2015). The right of dominion rather means to contribute to and enhance the harmony and beauty of the earth, our Oikos (Wilson, 1991:203).

World religions acknowledge that although God has sovereign power over his creation, He has delegated the authority to mankind to have dominion over the earth. The authority to ‘subdue’ the earth/Oikos also comes with responsibility to govern or rule well. Man/woman is thus to be the steward of the Oikos. He/she is to bring God’s rule to the Oikos as His representative. This explains why he/she was given freedom to use everything that God had created for his/her well being. He/she must however realize that as Mugambi (1995:196) correctly puts it ‘Freedom without responsibility is anarchical and likewise freedom without limits is self-destructive’. The human being has however misused the freedom graciously given to him/her by God. As Hamilton (1990:92) denotes instead of extending his/her relationship from God to other creatures he/she has been raping and exploiting them.

Some examples from the texts and sayings of world religions which show the central place of humanity over other creatures/inhabitants of the Oikos and that they should care for them include:

**i) From Islam**

I will create a vicegerent on earth. (Koran 2.30)
Do you not see that God has subjected to your use all things in the heavens and on earth, and has made His bounties flow to you in exceeding measure, both seen and unseen? (Koran 31.20).

God is he who created the heavens and the earth, and sends down rains from the sky to feed you; it is he who made the ships subject to you… (Koran 14.32-34)

There is a type of man whose . . . aim everywhere is to spread mischief through the earth and destroy crops and cattle. But God loves no mischief. (Koran 2.205)

We did indeed offer the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains; but they refused to undertake it, being afraid of it. But man undertook it; he was indeed unjust and foolish. (Koran 33.72)

ii) From Judaism and Christianity

And God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon then earth.” (Genesis 1:28).

When I consider your heavens, the works of your fingers, the moons and the stars, which you have set in place, What is man . . . . You made him ruler, over the works of your hands, you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, all the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the sea. (Psalm 8:3-6).

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it (Genesis 2: 15).

When you lay siege to city for a long time, fighting against it to capture it, do not destroy its trees by putting an axe to them, because you can eat their fruit. Do not cut them down. Are the trees of the fields people that you should besiege them? (Deuteronomy 20:19).

iii) From Buddhism

As a mother with her own life guards the life of her own child, let all-embracing thoughts for that lives be thine (Khuddaka Patha, Metta Sutta).

The Exalted One was entering Savatthi when he saw some youths mistreating a snake with a stick. Then he uttered these verses of uplift:

Whoso wreaks injury with a rod
On creatures fain for happiness,
When for the self hereafter he seeks happiness,
Not his, it may be, happiness to win. (Udana 11-12)
If one is trying to practice meditation and is still eating meat, he would be like a man closing his ears and shouting loudly the asserting that he heard nothing. . . .

Pure and earnest Bhikshus when walking a narrow path will never so much as tread on the growing grass beside the paths. How can a Bikshu, who hopes to become a deliverer of others, himself be living on the flesh of other sentient beings? (Surangama Sutra)

The Illimitable Void of the universe is capable of holding myriads of things of various shape and form . . . . We say that the Essence of Mind is great because it embraces all things, since all things are within our nature. (Sutra of Hui Neng 2).

Creatures without feet have my love, and likewise those that have two feet,
And those that have four feet I love, and those too, that have many feet . . .
Let creatures all, all things that live, all beings of whatever kind,
See nothing that will bode them ill! May naught evil come to them! (Vinaya Pitaka, Cullavagga, v.6)

The destruction of vegetable growth is an offense requiring expiation. (Pacittiya 11)

iv) From Hinduism
Truly do I exist in all beings, but I am most manifest in man. The human heart is my favorite dwelling place. (Srimad Bhagavatam 11.2)

Earth is my mother; her son I am; and heaven my Father: may he fill us with plenty . . . . (Atharva Veda 12.1)

The mode of living which is founded upon a total harmless toward all creatures or [in case of actual necessity] upon a minimum of such harm, is the highest morality. (Shanti Parva 262.5-6).

Without doing injury to beings, meat cannot be had anywhere; and the killing of living beings is not conducive to heaven; hence eating of meat should be avoided. (Laws of Manu 5.48)

v) From Jainism
Have benevolence towards all living beings. (Tattvarthasutra 7.11).

This is the quintessence of wisdom: not to kill anything. . . . A true monk should not accept such food and drink as has especially been prepared for him involving the slaughter of living things. . . . A man who guards his soul and subdues his senses, should never assent to anybody killing living beings. (Sutrakritanga 1.11.10-16)

vi) From African Traditional Religion
One going to take a pointed a stick to pinch a baby bird should first try it on himself to feel how it hurts. (Yoruba proverb) (Wilson, 1991). All that we do on earth, we shall account for kneeling in heaven (Nigerian proverb) (Mbiti, 1991). He who finds the occasion to hurt others will be hurt by them tomorrow (Azanian proverb) (Mbiti, 1991)

The Earth while I am yet alive, It is upon you that I put my trust,
Earth who receives my body . . . . we are addressing you
And you will understand (Ashanti song) (Parrinder, 1974)

Muntu ni ndu (A human being is created strong) (Meru proverb)
From the above passages and aphorisms of world religions it is clear that a human being occupies a special place in the Oikos. He/she is the manager of the home earth, a task he/she performs on behalf of the Creator. Njino (2008:17) defines management as the process of planning, organizing and staffing; leading and controlling material and human resources available in a given organization. This is tantamount to what I earlier refereed to as ‘economy’. In this context, the organization is the earth which is our oikos or household. Planning, organizing and controlling (economy) are key elements of management and so if the organization, in our case, the Oikos is not going on well then there is a problem with the managers, that is, the human beings.

It is because of this that Africans have to start to realize they are God’s vicegerents entrusted with the responsibility of managing our continent (Africa) which is our home. I thus suggest African Oikotheology as an eye opener to all of us who are the inhabitants of this great continent graciously given to us so that we can start to realize that it is our collective responsibility to make our home habitable. Africa faces immense predicaments (Nkonge, 2012; Tutu, 2004; Mugambi, 1995, Chipenda, 1993), but it is vital for Africans to realize that they are the source of their own problems and the solutions lie only with them.

Although quite a number of African scholars such as Mugambi (1989 a), Nthamburi (1991), Dickson (1979), Ocheni & Nwankwo (2012), and Oliver & Atmore (1967) among others attribute the current problems facing the African continent to the Western expatriates of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries who came to Africa as explorers, traders, anthropologists, missionaries and colonialists, which is basically true, the African themselves also carry the blame. This is because with the attainment of political independence of many African nations in 1960s, it was widely expected that Africa would be a replicate of the biblical Eden with social, political, economic and religious freedom. But this was never the case. The African leaders who took over the leadership of the young African nations commenced to behave like the colonial masters. They started to oppress and exploit their fellow Africans. They were and have continued to be colonial masters in black skin. That is why I agree with Wa Ilunga (1978: 22) that even though colonialism was bad enough we should not see it as the culprit behind all our problems. We have also contributed.

It is the irresponsibility; greed and selfishness of the African leaders that makes the South African poet Ezekiel Mphahlele sing that,

Some day I’m going to plunder, rape, set things on fire; I am going to cut someone’s throat; I am going to subvert the government; I am going to organize a coup de’tat; yes I am going to oppose my own peoples; I am going to hunt down the rich fat black men who bully the small weak black men and destroy them ( Mphahlele, 1963:23, Nthamburi, 1991).

Therefore, the evil of poverty, incurable diseases, corruption, tribal animosity, nepotism, unemployment, environmental degradation, political power struggle and many others is our own creation. This does not however mean that all is lost. Here I echo Prof. Jesse Mugambi who in the construction of the theology of reconstruction argues that ‘The old image of Africa as the dark continent has to be replaced by a new one – of Africa as the bright continente...’ (Mugambi, 1995:49). The ‘brightness’ of Africa is assured if we realize that it is our duty to shed light to it. Borrowing from Jesus’ words in Matthew 5: 14, the clarion call for the Africans is ‘You are the light of Africa, wake up and illuminate to it’. Since Africa is our only home, the words of Fred Swaniker are so relevant in our theological reflection. He says ‘Africans today have a chance to build large-scale prosperity for Africa’ (Swaniker, 2014).

African Oikotheology: Areas of Concern
The term Oikotheology was first suggested in the early years of this century to assist the church better meet the challenges of the ‘double earth crisis’ of poverty and environmental degradation. For example, Warmback (2007) and Alokwu (2009) proposed Oikotheology as way of helping in both the
preservation of the environment and the eradication of poverty. Undoubtedly poverty and environmental degradation are the main setbacks to human development today and what is very clear is that they are intrinsically linked. That is why while seeing the earth as a global household, Oikotheology has been proposed as an effective way of helping us integrate environmental concerns with poverty eradication (Schalkwyk, 2007, Warmback, 2007).

In this paper, while retaining poverty alleviation and environmental degradation as the main concerns, I look at the situation in a broader sense and suggest African Oikotheology. While Oikotheology was proposed to address the problems poverty and environmental degradation in the global household (the earth in general), African Oikotheology is suggested as modern theological trend in Africa focusing on Africa as the home/household of the Africans south of Sahara. It aims at addressing the challenges facing Africa today in all perspectives whether religious, social, economic, political and so on. In doing this I do not refute that Africa is part of the global village (earth), but I am suggesting that Africans must start to see Africa as their home which they must collectively develop. It is true that poverty and environmental crisis are challenges that have really hampered the development of Africa, but there many other vices which we cannot ignore in our theological reflection as they risk disintegrating the entire continent which is our home. The analogy of the home is vital because as Douglas Meeks puts it,

Home is where everyone knows your name. Home is where you count on being confronted, forgiven, loved and cared for. Home is where there is a place for you at the table. And, finally home where you can count on sharing what is on the table (Meeks, 1989:36).

Therefore at home resources are shared equally, the welfare of all members is considered, all members are treated with respect, justice is applied fairly, peace and reconciliation are maintained at all costs and so on.

Some of the issues which affect our home thus calling for the attention of all of us include;

i) Poverty

Any theological reflection in Africa today (in our case African Oikotheology) cannot ignore the challenge of poverty which risks disintegrating our home. Although many African governments as they assume power always promise to fight this scourge, poverty remains the greatness enemy to humanity in Africa. When Mugambi (1989b: 41) lists the dehumanizing situations in Africa he puts poverty as number one. In Kenya for example, although at independence the first government committed itself to fighting poverty, ignorance and disease (Githiga, 2001), nearly half of the country’s 44 million live below poverty line or are unable to meet their daily nutritional requirements (Rural Poverty in Kenya, 2013). To be more precise, the World Bank Report of 2013 indicated that 46% of Kenyans live below poverty line. This means that they basically earn less than one dollar a day (Buzz Kenya, 2013). The practical implication of this is that these Kenyans do not afford three meals in a day. George Kinoti possibly puts this Kenyan as well as the general African situation in a more coherent way. In his book Hope for Africa, and what the Christian can do, he explicates that, “One out of three Africans does not get enough to eat” (Kinoti, 1994). The scourge of poverty together with other unsolved problems is possibly what made Oginga Odinga the first Vice president of Kenya conclude that ‘We have not yet attained independence’ (Odinga, 1968).

The Kenyan situation is a replicate of what is happening in the entire African continent. Adeyemo (1990:15) regards Africa as a whole as home of poverty. The common people are gripped by their poverty across the whole shape of their lives. Many African cities, towns, markets and even rural areas are filled with wretchedly poor people who lack the basic essentials of life. There are many homeless and displaced people, war refugees, handicapped people, beggars, abandoned street children and many others in Africa today (Kunhiyop, 2008).
What is however saddening is the fact that Africa’s poverty is ‘anthropological poverty’ (Soede, 2011:185). It is manmade thus causing one to wonder, ‘How can people destroy their own home?’ In Africa people are poor not because they don’t work hard but some unscrupulous leaders amass national wealth for themselves with little regard to their suffering brothers and sisters. As a result as Adeyemo (1990) elucidates, 80% of the national cake is enjoyed and controlled by only 5% of the population. Thus Samuel Kunhiyop’s saying is true, ‘The rich continue to be richer while the poor continue to have children and to get hungrier and poorer’ (Kunhiyop, 2008:139). Consequently two distinct classes have emerged in our Oikos: the rich and the powerful minority and the powerless majority (Adeyemo 1990:16). The result of this has been perpetual conflicts in Africa as individuals and communities compete for meager resources left by their insatiable leaders.

Poverty is therefore a vice which theology in Africa must address. This is because as we have already noted, there is a correlation between poverty, exploitation and oppression (Mugambi, 1989 a). Although this issue has been tackled by the previous theologies in Africa notably Liberation theology, African theology and the theology of reconstruction, African Oikotheology arises from the need of realizing that Africa is our home and we are all equal members. A good home is made up of people who take care of others and who are willing to share the resources they have equally. What benefit is there if you are very rich while your brother or sister is languishing in poverty? The assumption in Africa today that material prosperity is impossible to achieve without corruption and exploitation (Mugambi 1989b:98), must be the things of the past if we want to create a stable African home.

For a healthy Africa, as Soede (2011: 186) argues out we need to break with African practices that still maintain a theology of the ‘pie in the sky when we die’ and excuse Christians from a radical commitment to further just economic, political, social and cultural activities in the society. Africans must reject any teaching that does not enable them to consider action against every sort of poverty as a duty. God’s words to the Israelites can help us as we think of the kind of a home we require in Africa: “However, there should be no poor among you, for in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you” (Deut. 15:4). The challenge of Africa is not lack of resources but the management of those resources. According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (1999), the African continent is very richly endowed with vast natural and human resources albeit underdevelopment. This view is supported by Warmback (2007) who contends that the problems of hunger and poverty are not primarily related to lack of sufficient resources in Africa, but rather to the lack of adequate distribution and access to them. Kofi Annan, the former General Secretary of the United Nations blames the African leaders for the current problems facing Africa such as poverty and underdevelopment. He says ‘Responsibility for driving equitable growth . . . rests firmly with Africa’s political leaders. . . . Good governance and accountability will determine Africa’s future’ (Africa Progress Report, 2014). It is upon our leaders to realize that Africa is our only home and its stability lies on their ability to effectively and equitably manage its resources. We must hearken to Kenya’s President Uhuru Kenyatta’s call that ‘Africa has the ability to solve its own problems’ (The Standard, 2014).

ii) Environmental Degradation

I start this section by the exaltations of the Holy Father Pope Francis concerning the ‘our common home’

“Praise be to you, my Lord” . . . . Our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. “Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs”. This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself,
burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she “groans in travail” (Rom 8:22). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters. (Francis, 2015).

Pope Francis’ words above are a clear indication of how humanity has taken nature today. In section two we saw the central place of human beings in God’s creation, where they are God’s vice-gerents (Koran 2.30). They were created to have dominion over all other creatures (Genesis 1:28). Sadly human beings have abdicated their responsibility of caring for the earth, our Oikos and they have become its ‘ruler’, ‘master’, e.t.c where they have mercilessly and violently robbed and raped it. As a result, nature now groans in pain. Mwikamba (1993) possibly clarifies the situation well by his elucidation that ‘the mother earth has been mutilated, injured and hurt’. According to Hamilton (1990), God gave human beings the authority to exercise dominion over all other creatures and to subdue the earth, but this authority does not warrant or license acts of rape and exploitation. Clobus (1992:30) explains that dominion cannot be anything other than a stewardship in symbiosis with all creatures.

African Oikotheology arises from the fact human beings have a special place in the Oikos since they are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26), and they were made in charge of all the other inhabitants of the Oikos (Gen 1: 28; 2: 15; Tattvarhasutra 7.11). In the capacity of God’s image human beings were given the ability to think and discover things that can help the creation (Fihavango, 2001:92). There is therefore no theology of nature that can give room for human beings to mistreat nature as some Africans have done.

Mugambi and Vahakangas (2001), confirm that African populations have today been adversely affected by the environment degradation caused by both micro-economic and global corporate practices. Pollution, deforestation, desertification, soil erosion, droughts and floods have been a rough wake-up to the desperate condition of this continent, which is our home. As Mugambi and Vahakangas (2001:3) say, what is at stake in Africa is not a matter of convenience or aesthetics, but sheer survival. Why have we made the situation so desperate for ourselves yet we have been given a good home (Africa) full of resources? As Mabogunje (1995), explicates, Africa suffers from serious environmental problems, yet efforts to deal with these problems have been handicapped by a real failure to understand their nature and remedies. Although Akin Mabogunje is not trying to argue that Africans are not wise people, he feels that they are highly irresponsible toward the environment and look at the international community to save them from the current environmental crisis.

As noted by Alokwu (2009), the crisis of poverty (which we have discussed above) and the environmental crisis are intrinsically linked and so there will always be poverty in Africa in so far as Africans have little concern for environmental matters. It is difficult to comprehend why people cannot understand that they rely on the environment for survival. According to FAO Corporate Documentary Repository (2013), in Africa the most conspicuous symptoms of the environmental degradation are declining yields of food production and increasing levels of poverty. Thus a number of African nations are not able to feed themselves. For example according to this report by the year 2025 Africa will be able to feed only 40 percent of its population as compared to the year 2000 when it fed 55 percent. This implies that if this trend continues Africa will not be able to feed even 1% of its population by 2050. Mugambi and Vahakangas (2001) tell us what is likely to happen to our continent, our only home if we were not careful by their observation that ‘When the question is of survival, the attempts to solve the problems are desperate, and can cause the chances of survival to decrease even drastically in long run’. Therefore as Mabogunje (1995) advises, protecting the environment of sub-Saharan Africa is an issue that needs to be examined more carefully and incorporated into an overall strategy of sustainable economic development. The wealth of Africa depends on her ability to conserve and manage her environment well (FAO 2013).
Although we know that for sure this is a global challenge, and we cannot wholly blame Africans for the predicaments they are going through, it is important for Africans to realize that they carry the solutions to their problems. It is true as Mugambi and Vahakangas (2001:3) argue out that the poverty, the pattern of international trade and imbalance in political power between the affluent and poor countries contribute to the environmental problems in Africa, but it is critical for Africans to realize that whatever little they can do to rehabilitate their environment is essential for their own survival. It is lack of ‘home’ ethics when as John Paul II (1979) warns, human beings frequently seem to see no other meaning in their natural environment than what serves for immediate use and consumption. The destruction of human environment is extremely serious, not only because God has entrusted the world to us men and women, but because human life is itself a gift which must be defended from various forms debasement (Francis, 2015).

African Oikotheology is a challenge for us to protect our common home. It includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development. As we do this there is an assurance that we are not alone in this endeavour. The Holy Father, Pope Francis assures us that the creator does not abandon or forsake us (Francis 2015). African Oikotheology is based on the fact that humanity has the ability to work together (as members of the same family) in building our Oikos, our common home.

iii) Justice, Reconciliation and Peace
In his construction of an Oikotheology Warmback (2007:101) argues that the Oikos metaphor helps illuminate the connection between the concern for the environment and the eradication of poverty. This is true because as we have seen above environmental degradation leads to poverty. But the problem does not stop here. When people destroy the environment or when there is little concern of the resources we have, there is hunger and poverty, and this in turn leads to conflict and so there is no peace. There is therefore a connection between environmental degradation, poverty and peace. Unfortunately this standpoint has not been given much attention by African theologians thus the necessity of an African Oikotheology. Although Philip Ndegwa is not suggesting any theology to address this problem as I do here, he laments that the ways in which environmental crisis in Africa represents a threat to peace have not been given sufficient attention, but they are related to the environmental aspects of poverty and underdevelopment (Ndegwa 1985:115). The late Prof. Wangari Maathai, the Nobel peace winner also saw the link between environment, poverty and peace. She advised that to reduce conflicts and poverty, and thereby increase quality of life in Africa, we have to protect the environment (Maathai, 2014).

This is important because Africa is a home of conflicts where some Africans have not known peace over centuries. According to Camara (1971), the continent of Africa is filled with ethnic and religious conflicts, wars over resources and failed states which have really destabilized the continent. This is supported by Thompson (2003:136) who denotes that “From south to north, west to east, fighting burns or simmers in Africa”. In Africa in recent years, there have been conflicts in Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Angola, Nigeria, South Sudan, Liberia, Sudan, Egypt, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast and many others (Kunhiyop, 2008:107). It is very sad that across Africa brother is killing brother (1993: 23). For example, in 2014 alone deaths from ethnic and political violence constituted 75.5% of continent-wide deaths (Transconflict, 2015). One wonders why people of the same household are unnecessarily killing one another. Causes of these conflicts in Africa include a reaction against over-centralized, corrupt and exploitative governments, forces of change in the economic and political spheres, increased human migration, real or perceived injustices, competition over resources and many others (Kunhiyop, 2008), but can violence offer solution to any of these?
There is a lot we can learn from the traditional African concept of a home. An African home is inhabited by what anthropologists regard to as ‘an extended family’, whose members include children, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters, cousins, departed relatives (Ancestors and living dead) and the unborn (Mbiti: 1990:105). These members are mutually joined to each other to the extent that an individual can only say that ‘I am related therefore I exist’ (Nkonge, 2004). Of particular importance is how these members relate to each other. Each member has obligatory duties and responsibilities towards other members of the family (Mbiti 1975: 175), and this is essential in that as Aguedze (1990:175) denotes, where every member is conscious of his or her responsibility, there is not much ado about difficulties and problems. Thus courtesy to one another is enforced even among children. At home it is expected that they will learn to tell the truth, to help other people, to be honest, generous, hospitable, considerate, friendly and so on (Mbiti 1975:176). Peace, harmony and love therefore mark family members’ deportment towards one another (Aguedge 1990:175).

This is an important idea to consider in African Oikotheology. Since an African home is a place where justice, peace and reconciliation prevail at all costs, the African continent, our home (Oikos), should borrow the same so that Africa becomes a peaceful, harmonious and lovely home for all of us. If this is the case, the current conflicts in some African nations, particularly South Sudan, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo and others will be the thing of the past. Ademoyo (2015) observes that prior to the advent of the expatriates in Africa, the African people had well established mechanisms for conflict management, peace making, peace education, peace building, and conflict prevention. For example, among the Meru of Kenya, the role of Njurí Nceke (Council of Elders) was not only to resolve conflicts but also to anticipate and arrest conflicts (Bernadi 1959). Africans were very much aware that conflicts can occur, but whenever they occurred families and neighbours came together to resolve them (Ademoyo 2015). This was in realization that they needed a happy home (Aguedge 1990).

All world religions emphasize on the need for justice, reconciliation and peace. In Christianity, Jesus of Nazareth, the founder of Christianity is regarded as the Prince of peace (Isaiah 9:6; Ephesians 2:14) who came to reconcile humanity with God (2 Corinthians 5:18). Through him human beings are restored to a relationship of peace with God (Romans 5:1). God is portrayed as the God of mercy and justice (Is. 30:8; Ps. 89: 14; 140:12).

Islam by its very nature is regarded as a religion of peace. The root word Silm refers to ‘making peace’. It means living a peaceful environment that emerges as a result of submission to Allah (God). The Koran asks that all humanity should embrace Silm, that is peace and avoid Satan who is an enemy of peace (Koran 2:208) (Algul 2014). In Judaism it is believed that the world is preserved by three main things, namely truth, justice and peace (My Jewish Learning, 2015). Peace is however Judaism’s highest aspiration (Steinmetz, 1997). It is one of the most esteemed values which humanity must preserve (My Jewish Learning, 2015). The Hebrew word for peace, Shalom denotes a sense of completion, perfection or wholeness. It is only when there is true ‘completeness’ or ‘wholeness’ does true peace reign (Everything Jewish, 2014).

In African Traditional Religion, God is believed to be the creator of life and peace (Shenk, 1983: 3). Among the Kikuyu, for example, God is the life giver and is also God of justice and peace (Kibicho, 1972). Africans have an amazing confidence in God as the just one. He also establishes peace (Shenk 1983:6). The Meru people call him Murungu which suggests mercy and goodness (Nkonge 2004). Since God in Africa is known to be the God of peace, justice and reconciliation, the African people have always endeavored to ensure that these principles prevail in every family and community (Nkonge, 2015).

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2 Today Njuri Nceke has abdicated this important role and is entangled in endless squabbles.
Hinduism emphasizes universal values such as social justice, peace and spiritual transformation of the society (Flood, 1997). The Hindu belief of *ahimsa* calls for non-violence in all aspects of the society.

**Conclusion**

As I conclude this paper I would like to echo Aristotle who once argued that human’s greatest need in life is happiness. Although Aristotle was arguing from a moral perspective, his view is relevant to our case in that all strives made by human beings are geared towards attaining satisfaction or happiness. No matter the struggle, humanity will not be happy in so far as there is poverty, hunger and conflicts. Although I am not refuting the previous theologies in Africa as irrelevant since they have taken us this far, I am suggesting African Oikotheology as a useful theology for a continent beset with all kinds of ills such as poverty, unemployment, animosity, tribalism, injustice, corruption, hunger, diseases and so on. A home or a house without the basic human needs and peace cannot stand. Africa is our only home (Oikos) and it is upon its inhabitants (Africans) to see to it that it is plenty with all what they need for survival and it is also peaceful. Therefore the current trend where a few advantaged elite Africans are amassing wealth for themselves; the careless destruction of the environment through poaching, cutting down of trees and pollution; unnecessary conflicts leading to the death and displacement of many people and other vices have to cease if we want to have a stable African home. This is what can be termed to as true happiness.

**References**


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