

**AFRICAN COSMOVISION AND ECO-SPIRITUALITY: HEALING THE  
ECOLOGICAL CRISIS IN AFRICA**

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**Abstract**

*In our age of huge ecological crisis and colossal consequences for humanity and the earth system, occasioned by man's ill-exploitation of the earth's resources, this paper argues that the root of our ecological crisis is in the spiritual deficit of the modern man, which informs man's attendant exploitative approach to nature. Thus, in the light of the contemporary search for remedy through ecological spirituality, the paper calls for spiritual renaissance of Africans through the re-sacralization of their worldview in line the traditional African eco-spirituality, to save the African continent from ecological collapse. For this aim, the paper explores the concept of African eco-spirituality and appeals to its viable potential in addressing the present ecological crisis and ensuring a sustainable ecological management and protection in Africa. The hermeneutical, speculative and prescriptive methods of research are adopted in the paper.*

**Keywords:** Cosmovision, Ecosystem, Eco-spirituality, Biodiversity, Global Warming

**Introduction**

The need for ecological preservation and conservation is, more than ever, everywhere emphasized today. Of course, the pervasive effects of the global ecological crisis on all life on earth in our day, has made this essential concern a basic necessity. Ranging from environmental degradation, climate change, global warming, to the depletion of natural resources (food, water, and energy), the ecological crisis has not only created massive imbalance in the ecosystem, but ruefully threatens the survival of humans as well as the earth's biodiversity. Sequel to this is the global urgency for the conservation and preservation of the ecosystem, if life on earth must continue. Amidst this call, however, is the general recognition that the unchecked human activity and ill-considered exploitation of nature are responsible for the problem. Among the oft-proposed mitigating measures are investment in cost-effective and sustainable energy technologies, elimination of distorting subsidies favouring fossil fuels at the expense of renewable alternatives, the development of climate-friendly markets (e.g., carbon

trading), targets for concentrations of greenhouse gases, and rationalized consumption and production patterns (Melnick et al., 2005, p.28).

However, the failure of these proposals to effectively address the challenge of our ecological crisis has not only awakened the consciousness of many to the limitations of the scientific and technological approaches the problem, but also to the fundamentally moral, spiritual and religious nature of the problem as associated with man, who is exploiting the earth's resources irresponsibly. This awareness has, in recent time, encouraged the concern for environmentally based spirituality, as an approach in tackling the problem. Thus, at the forefront of ecological debates today, is the clarion call for a spiritual and moral response to our environmental crisis. Pope Francis, for instance, recognizes that, "The ecological crisis is essentially a spiritual problem," (2015, para. 9), and urges "the need for a spiritual and moral response to these environmental crisis" (2015, para. 206). This concern is, thus, the basis of today's advocacy for spiritual ecology or eco-spirituality, based on the assumption that spirituality is an important dimension in contributing to how we value and care for our environment.

However, as expressed in their traditional eco-spirituality, caring for the environment has been a part of the African traditional way of life. The African eco-spirituality, which takes its bearing from the African cosmovision or cosmology, embraces the awareness of the sacredness of the whole reality (or the whole "web of life"). This manifests itself in the deep sense of reverence and respect traditional Africans have for the natural world, and the way they regulated their relationship with nature to ensure that nature and the environment are protected, while at the same time serving their human needs. Unfortunate, however, this African eco-spirituality appears lost today in the continent, due to the impacts of the materialistic, mechanistic, capitalist and consumerist world economy, which simply ravages the resources of the earth. Consequently, Africans now relate with nature and their environment from the capitalistic, manipulative and exploitative point of view in their attempt to accumulate wealth in terms of money. The net outcome is the present ecological disaster engulfing the continent. In the face of this challenge, this paper emphasizes the need for Africans to re-sacralize their worldview and re-invent their spiritual orientations of love, care and reverence for nature as augured in the indigenous African eco-spirituality, in order to reliably address the challenge of ecological crisis and ensure sustainable environmental preservation and conservation in the continent.

**Conceptual Clarification:**

**Ecosystem**

The word, “ecosystem” deserves an attention here given its relation to our basic term here, “eco-spirituality” – a shortened derivative from “ecosystem” and “spirituality”. An ecosystem (or ecological system) consists of all the organisms and the physical environment with which they interact (Chapin, 2011, p. III). It consists of biotic and abiotic components that function together as a unit. The biotic components include all the living things, whereas the abiotic components are the non-living things. These biotic and abiotic components are linked together through nutrient cycles and energy flows (Odum, 1971, p.56). Thus, an ecosystem entails an ecological community consisting of different populations of organisms that live together in a particular habitat.

Ecosystems are controlled by external factors, such as climate, parent material which forms the soil and topography; and internal factors, such as, decomposition, root competition, shading, disturbance, succession, and the types of species present. Ecosystems provide a variety of goods and services upon which humans depend for their survival. These include water, food, fuel, construction material, and medicinal plants, the maintenance of hydrological cycles, cleaning air and water, the maintenance of oxygen in the atmosphere, crop pollination and even things like beauty, inspiration and opportunities for research.

Ecosystem processes are driven by the species in an ecosystem, and the net outcome of the actions of individual organisms as they interact with their environment is the balance this ensures in the ecosystem. Hence, biodiversity (the biological variety and variability of life on Earth) plays an important role in the proper functioning of the ecosystem (Schulze, et al., 2005, p.449). Although humans exist and operate within ecosystems, much of human exploitation of nature have negatively impacted the ecosystem, resulting in a medley of ecological problems facing the world today.

For the terrestrial ecosystems threats include such as environmental pollution, climate change, global warming, biodiversity loss, air pollution, water pollution, habitat fragmentation, soil degradation, and deforestation. For the aquatic ecosystems threats also include unsustainable exploitation of marine resources (for example overfishing), marine pollution, microplastics pollution, the effects of climate change on oceans (e.g. warming and acidification), and building on coastal areas (Alexander, 1999, p.14).

### **Spirituality**

The other aspect of the term “eco-spirituality”, is “spirituality, which denotes the "deepest spiritual values and meanings by which people live" (Sheldrake, 2001, p.1). It can also be conceived as Anne Carr defines it as “the whole of our deepest religious beliefs, convictions, and patterns of thought, emotion, and behaviour in respect to what is ultimate, to God” (1982, p.49). She adds that, “spirituality is holistic, encompassing our relationships to all of creation – to others, to society, and nature, to work and recreation – in a fundamentally religious orientation” (1982, p.49). Christina Puchalski broadens the reach of the concept as she sees spirituality as, “the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred” (2014, n.pg.). The essential elements captured about the concept of spirituality in these range of definitions is it is “a relationship with the supernatural or spiritual realm that provides meaning and a basis for personal and communal reflection, decisions and action” (Ver Beek, 2000, p. 32). Spirituality is commonly associated with religion because, “people explain their spirituality through a religious perspective” (Wijk, 2010, p.7).

### **Eco-Spirituality**

“Eco-spirituality” (or Spiritual Ecology), as obvious from the definitions above, connects the ecosystem (ecology) with spirituality. In his paper, "Celebrating Earth Day Through Eco-Spirituality", Olga Bonfiglio says, “eco-spirituality brings together religion and environmental activism” (2012, n.pg.). In the light of this, Valerie Lincoln (2000, p.227) writes that eco-spirituality is "a manifestation of the spiritual connection between human beings and the environment." As an eco-spirituality is field in religion, conservation, and academia Eco-spirituality rests on the conviction that “there are spiritual elements at the root of environmental issues” (Sponsel, 2014, p.1719); and that, to decisively address our distressing global environmental crisis, “there is a critical need to recognize and address the spiritual dynamics at their roots” (White, 1967, p.1203).

Thus, it recognises that there is a spiritual facet to all issues related to conservation, environmentalism, and earth stewardship (Sponsel, 2014, p.1718). Reflecting on this basic concern of eco-spirituality, Virginia Jones, cited in Bonfiglio says: "Eco-spirituality is about helping people experience 'the holy' in the natural world and to recognize their relationship as human beings to all creation” (2012, n.pg.).

Historically, eco-spirituality emerges as a reaction to the Western world's materialism and consumerism (Delaney, 2009, p.32), as well as the “mechanistic and capitalistic world view” (Schalkwyk, 2011, p.1), believed to be responsible for many intensive forms of environmental exploitation and degradation, leading to the global ecological and environmental crises as we have them today. For this reason, Annalet Van Schalkwyk is convinced that the ecological crisis is “man-made” (2011, p.2).

Several mitigating measures have been proposed by environmental experts and by several International Organizations or Conferences on Environmental Protection in view of addressing this frightening global ecological crisis. For instance, the United Nations Millennium Project's Task Force on Environmental Sustainability recommends a series of measures, including investment in cost-effective and sustainable energy technologies, elimination of distorting subsidies favouring fossil fuels at the expense of renewable alternatives, the development of climate-friendly markets (e.g., carbon trading), targets for concentrations of greenhouse gases, and rationalized consumption and production patterns (Melnick et al., 2005, p.28). Again, in the United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, member states expressed their commitment to protect the planet from degradation and take urgent action on climate change (Tarusariran. 2017, p.398).

However, given the seeming inability of these measures to halt the perilous slide of ecological crisis and its consequences on man and the earth, today many have rightly argued that these measures are merely dealing with the symptoms of the problem, rather than tackling the fundamentally spiritual issues at root of the problem, whereby the modern man's defective worldview, which denies the transcendence, secularizes and instrumentalizes nature, engenders in him the attitude of ill-exploitation and degradation of nature, leading to the present ecological crisis. In the light of this, James Speth, submits that, the top environmental problems are not only biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change, but also, and more fundamentally “human selfishness, greed and apathy, and to deal with these we need a cultural and spiritual transformation” (qtd. in Crockett, 2014, n. pg.). And Pope Francis in his Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si*, recognizes that, “The ecological crisis is essentially a spiritual problem,” (2015, para. 2015, para. 9), requiring from man a spiritual and moral response (2015, para. 206). The Pope acknowledges the interconnectedness of human beings with nature, and maintains that, “the issue of environmental degradation challenges us

to examine our lifestyle” (para. 2015, para. 206), which requires that we “look for solutions not only in technology but in a change of humanity; otherwise, we would be dealing merely with symptoms” (2015, para. 9).

The vanguards of eco-spirituality are, thereby, united in the conviction that the present ecological crisis needs to be understood as requiring a new way of life, not just a few adjustments here and there” (Ruether, 15). Particularly, the crisis is deemed to “necessitate the search for an ecological re-sacralized worldview of which an “ecological” understanding of religion and spirituality is part, and for an awareness of the sacredness of the whole reality (or the whole “web of life”); the cosmos, the earth system and its ecosystem, and of humanity as part of this whole and not separate from it” (Schalkwyk, 2011, p.3). Thus, to resolve the present global ecological crisis, there exist a serious need for an ecological spirituality, or environmentally based religion and spirituality, by which humans must re-examine and re-assess their underlying attitudes and beliefs about the earth, and their spiritual responsibilities toward it. Eco-spirituality is, therefore, “the direct consciousness and experience of the sacred in the ecology which may serve as a sustained source for communities’ and individuals’ practical struggle for the healing of the earth’s ecology and for humanity’s sustainable living from the earth’s resources” (Schalkwyk, 2011, p.6). It is the consciousness and experience of the physical-spiritual interconnections between ourselves and the environment.

In the words of Suganthi (2019), eco-spirituality is simply, “having a reverential attitude toward the environment in taking care of it while dwelling within its premises” (n.pg.). It is on the strength of this emerging view that proponents of eco-spirituality emphasize the importance of including spiritual elements in contemporary debates on environmental conservation and preservation, as well as awareness of and engagement of contemporary religion and spirituality in ecological issues. There exists the emphasis the, that ecological renewal and sustainability necessarily depends upon spiritual awareness of men and an attitude of responsibility towards the ecosystem. This includes rejection of the attitude of seeing no other meaning in the natural environment than what serves for immediate use and consumption; and on the other hand, a recognition of the sacredness of nature and the adoption of behaviours that reflect that recognition in the utilization of the earth’s resources. Lincoln (200, p.227) identifies five principles of eco-spiritual consciousness: tending, dwelling, reverence, connectedness, and sentience (cited in Suganthi, 2019, n.pg.).

Eco-spirituality includes a vast array of people and their traditional practices that intertwine spiritual and environmental experience and understanding. In case of the African traditional eco-spirituality, which is our major concern here, nature is sacred, imbued by intrinsic spiritual value, and worthy of reverent care" (Taylor, 2009, p.xi). This condition the attitudes of the traditional Africans and their way of relating with nature in a manner that manifests reverence and stewardship, to ensure their sustainable living from the earth's resources and their effective conservation of the earth's ecology.

### **African Cosmvision**

An understanding of the African cosmvision is crucial for our appreciation of our discussion on the African eco-spirituality, because the latter is an offshoot of the former. African cosmvision or cosmology defines the traditional African worldview or the African concept of the universe and what there is in the universe, which serves as a major determinant of how they perceive, interpret and relate with the universe (Ojong, 2008, p.201). Notwithstanding the presence of a variety of subcultures in the African continent, there exist some basic assumptions across borderline which defines their cosmvision, which is itself rooted in the African ontology - African concept of reality. From the ontological perspective, it is impossible to separate the life of the Africans from their religion as they maintain a densely religious or spiritual notion of reality. The religious awareness of the African people is not an abstraction, but a living component of their way of life. Kofi Busia and John Mbiti affirm this about the traditional African societies. Busia (1967, p.34) remarks that the African is "intensely and pervasively religious ... in traditional African communities it was not possible to distinguish between religious and non-religious areas of life. All life is religious". Mbiti also asserts that "Africans are notoriously religious" (1969, p.72). For B. E. Idowu "in all things [Africans] are religious... for the African to be is to be religious" (1967, p.3).

Given the background influence of this religious and spiritual ontological framework, the Africans cosmvision or worldview is also densely spiritual. Africans believe that the entire cosmos is the product of God, and that, "there are three intimately related cosmological modalities, which encompass a continuum of realities" (Ijiomah, 2014, p.97). These cosmological areas or universe include the sky, where God, major deities and angels reside; the earth, where humans, animals, natural resources and physically observable realities abide; and the underworld, where ancestors and some bad spirits live (Elemi, 1980, p.54). Irrespective of the different categories of cosmological domains, Africans believe

that they are not separate, but interrelate and interact with each other by vital force (Tempels, 1959, p.5). And although all the realities belonging to these different domains of the sky, the earth and the underworld, are categorized into two: the physical and the spiritual realities, yet, “they all relate with other” (Maurier, 1985, p.65). This relationship or interaction is made possible by the fact that every existent (including the environment) has a spirit or force inhabiting it. These forces, which must be acknowledged and treated with reverence though reverential handling of every existent, relate as contraries and yearn for each other (Ijiomah, 2014, p.99).

This belief accounts for Africans’ sense of sacredness of nature as well as their veneration of things, which prompted the early European explorers to the African continent to describe African religion as animistic. Thus, in the cosmivision of the Africans, every reality in the universe, is not only a product of God, they have both physical and spiritual elements and they relate with each other through vital force, making them yearn for each other. This creates a strong notion and conviction for the Africans that life is a unity that consists of three integrated domains, namely the natural world, the human world and the spiritual world. Mbiti captures this African integrated worldview thus: “The spiritual universe is in unity with the physical universe, and these two intermingle so much that it is not easy, or even necessary at times to draw the distinction or separate them” (1969, p.72). In other words, the African world which exists in two spheres – the visible, tangible, and concrete world of humans, animals, vegetation, and other natural elements; and the invisible world of the spirits, ancestors, divinities, and the supreme deity, is one world, indivisible, with one sphere touching on the other.

Commenting on the implications of this African unitary and integrated cosmivision, T. Okeke submits that, for the Africans, the visible and the invisible are perceived as one, interrelated, interacting systems, where agency and causality form a gigantic network of reciprocity, which translates into several acts of what we call religion, respect for nature, sacrifice, divination, communalism, which mark the relations between spirits and ancestors on the one hand, and men on the other hand (2005, p.3). It is this integrated and densely religious/spiritual cosmivision that gives the motivation gives meaning, motivation and direction to the African eco-spirituality.

### **African Eco-Spirituality**

Spirituality may be defined as “a relationship with the supernatural or spiritual realm that provides meaning and a basis for personal and communal reflection, decisions and action.” (Ver Beek, 2000, p. 32). African Eco-spirituality defines the African’s direct consciousness and experience of the sacred in the ecology which serves as a motivation for their responsible management of the earth’s resources, while at the same time living sustainably from the earth’s resources. African eco-spirituality not only presumes the sacredness of the ecosystem, it also considers the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system of spiritual connectedness. Features of this African eco-spirituality include the believe in the earth a sacred ownership of God (Lang, 2018, p.61), which has vital force and forms a part of the continuum with other spheres in the cosmological modalities; man as the steward not master of the earth; life as a continual act of prayer and thanksgiving to God the Creator, for the gift of life and the earth for man’s sustenance; knowledge and symbiotic relationship with the earth; and being aware of the impacts of one's actions in the use of the environment on the present and future generations. Such spiritual orientation about the ecosystem necessarily implies a mutuality and reciprocity between man, earth and the cosmos. It is also particularly rooted in the belief that humans communicate with the spiritual world (God, deities, ancestors) via the natural world (earth). Hence, to keep this communication channels between human and spiritual world, it is important to conserve the earth by creating a favourable environment where flora and fauna can have their habitats. This means that conservation of the environment is key for a fruitful spiritual connection between man and the spiritual world. This also means that, for the Africans, nature and the environment are part and parcel of the sacred reality of life, or one with man, since there is no separation. To destroy nature and environment is to destroy oneself. Living in harmony with the natural world translates to living in harmony with the spiritual world, as they are interconnected and co-dependent (Tarusarira, 2017, n.pg.). It is believed that punishment takes place, in the form of drought, diseases and conflicts, when the rules and norms that protect the environment are exceeded (Gonese, 1999, p.9).

Africans indeed believe that reciprocity between land, plants and humans makes life on earth possible. This is shows up in the efficient land use and management by traditional Africans, which prevented land degradation, even as land is utilized for agriculture, extraction of natural resources and other land-based activities that are considered fundamental to livelihoods, food security, incomes and employment. It is for this reason that in Africa, the entire relationship between humans and nature, including activities such as use of the environment, has a

sense of sacred, with deep religious and spiritual underpinnings. Writing about Africa eco-spirituality McDonnell says that, “relationships between nature and humans, spirit and nature are not dichotomized or compartmentalized, but are integrated into an interdependent system of existence that is tied together through spiritual interactions” (2014, p.98). Turaki (2006, p.95) observes that African eco-spirituality is steep in a “profound respect and reverence without exploitation for nature”. This has had immense positive benefits for the traditional African management of the ecosystem. This eco-spirituality automatically ensures that nature and the environment are protected. It abhors all forms of environmental degradation, while encouraging environmental conservation and preservation in diverse ways.

Furthermore, this eco-spirituality conserves biodiversity, as animals are also considered as a part of a larger spiritual system, and are respected and not killed unless in self-defence or to provide immediate sustenance or sacrifice (Tarusarira, 2017, n.pg.). For this reason, in certain cases, some animals may be regarded as sacred to devotees of a particular divinity (hence, not killed or endangered); or natural phenomena such as trees, hills, or rivers may be deified; hence, not to be degraded or polluted. Moreover, non-living elements, such as rain, are also deemed as sacred and as powerful spirits, as they are needed to sustain life. Human beings are, therefore, seen as being spiritually connected to all that happens within the greater frameworks of nature, which must be respected, conserved and used with care, rather than seen as a given to be exploited and abused through unchecked human activities. Hence, land is considered sanctified by its possession by God and ancestral spirits: “land does not belong to humans, but that it belongs to ancestors or a God” (Workineh, 2005, p.17). Humans are the custodians of the land. They have to take care for it so that they can pass it through to the yet unborn generation (Wijk, 2010, p.12). In this vision nature is seen as a living being that works together with mankind. The earth is therefore not seen as a property that can be exploited in the way humans simply desire, but has to be taken care of in a way that benefits the whole community (including the unborn).

Good care of the land can secure health and survival, through responsible farming practices, such as shifting cultivation, to allow the land to regain its lost nutrients after a period of cultivation and agricultural cycles shaped by the seasons and religious observances covering the entire year. The entire farming cycle was marked by ritual practices which included sacrifice to and appeasement of the spirits or God; prayer and requests for communal

intercession. In every community, there existed traditional religious specialists whose roles were connected with agriculture. They carried out religious observances throughout the year in an annual cycle of rituals intended to promote agriculture and ensure environmental protection (Lang, 2018, p.62). Knowledge on traditional agricultural practices was established by years of experiences to cope with environmental conditions and was induced by the strong notion of the interrelationship of human, nature and spiritual realm.

### **Loss of African Eco-Spirituality and Consequences**

Today, Africans, like the rest of humanity face mounting environmental crisis. Part of the reasons for this with regard to the African continent is the loss of African eco-spirituality, due to influence from western materialism, consumerism and secularized worldview. The origin of it all is colonialism. When in the nineteenth century, most of Africa was colonized by various European powers, it was ostensibly to bring 'enlightenment' to the 'dark continent'. However, "colonialism eventually became synonymous with material exploitation, cultural expropriation and anthropological impoverishment" (George Ehusani, 1997, p.18). Citing Ivan Sertima, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o says of the state of emergency all over Africa, occasioned by colonialism: "No human disaster... can equal in dimension of destructiveness the cataclysm that shook Africa... the thread of cultural and historical continuity was so savagely torn asunder that henceforth one would have to think of two Africas: the one before and the one after the Holocaust" (1983, p.86).

Among the swarming consequences of colonialism in Africa was the loss of African sense of eco-spirituality, because with colonization, indigenous sense of sacredness of nature was historically replaced by an imposed western colonial belief that land and the environment are commodities to be used and exploited, with exploitation of natural resources in the name of socio-economic evolution. This perspective "remove any spiritual value of the land, with regard only given for economic value, and this served to further distance communities from intimate relationships with their environments" (Ritskes, 2012, p.45), with devastating consequences for the people and their environment. Wijk writes that where the ancient agricultural systems were based on a relation between human, nature and spirituality, the western colonial world separates this triad (2010, p.15). In consequence, today in Africa, the sense of sacredness for the natural world is lost, as land, for instance, is seen merely as an acreage to be exploited, bought and sold. Ehusani confirms that, "today the characteristic African humanness, personalism, hospitality, wholesome relations, and the overwhelming sense of the sacred, have

been invested and obscured by the cankerworm of Western materialism and individualism” (1997, p.20).

Another factor responsible for this loss of African eco-spirituality is the secularist philosophy of our age and materialism, which reject the sacred value Africans attach to land and empty the land of all its spiritual roots. These spirits of secularism and materialism have long been embraced by Africans at the peril of their environmental life, as this shows up in the irresponsible use of land and other natural resources, with lethal consequences on the ecosystem in the continent. The influence of this western secularism and materialism in Africa ramifies itself in the ethno-religious conflicts and civil wars, which have become more vicious in the continent with massive loss of human and natural resources, for Africans now possess lethal weapons of war to main and kill their fellow men, since life has lost its sacred value. Also, in the last two decades, armed robbers, hired assassins, terrorists and bandits have multiplied their ranks and laid siege of the continent, killing and maiming their victims with reckless abandon, because life has lost its value with the loss of sense of sacred, inspired by materialism. With the same loss of sense of sacred for nature, herdsmen are not only frequently terrorizing human communities, but are also massively destroying the terrestrial and aquatic environments.

Globalization has also resulted in the loss of African eco-spirituality through the exposure of the Africans to the capitalistic economic system of thinking, based on the idea that one can use the natural resources one desires and that it is necessary to accumulate wealth in terms of money (Rolston, 2006, p. 308). Reflecting on this, Schalkwyk observes that, “The present ecological disaster is a result of human exploitation of the earth’s natural resources due to a capitalist and consumerist world economy, which disadvantages the larger majority of the world’s population, but most of all, which ravages the bounty of the earth in the name of using ‘natural resources’ in a productive economy” (2011, p.2). This creates a difference in approach in the Africans’ relationship with nature and the ecosystem, by which they now adopt the capitalistic and manipulative approach in dealing with nature in an attempt to accumulate wealth in monetary terms. This exploitation creates crises like the extinction of species and biodiversity, the destruction of habitats in which species need to survive; pollution of water, air and the environment in which humans, animals and plants have to exist; the depletion of mineral resources, forests and fisheries; change of climate patterns, global warming and so forth (Schalkwyk, 2011, p.2).

Thus, the spiritual elements of justice, mutual trust and respect for fellow human beings and nature have all disappeared because of the tendency to exploit the land and relationships for, personal benefit (Wijk, 2010, p.12). The intrinsic motivations by African to take good care of the land (good stewardship) induced by African indigenous eco-spirituality is now absent because of the expansion of this capitalistic thinking. Extrinsic motivations, like the pressure to behave according the new economic principles, becomes the new norm. The sense of sacred and conviction to take care of the ecosystem for spiritual equilibrium with the Supreme Being and the ancestral spirits as well as for future generations has disappeared because of exploiting the land and environment for monetary benefits. The communal cohesion and reciprocity that was established from the African eco-spirituality has also consequently disappeared. Besides, the internationalization of the food production has made the modern African farmers to focus more and more on the economic profitability of their production as the expense of the ecosystem. As Price puts it, “pressure from markets and cash undermines what farmers know as the right thing to do” (Price, 2007, p. 30). This has resulted in the over cultivation and exploitation of natural resources to fulfil the production needs (Chapin et al., 2009, p.242). In this way, the environment becomes sacrificed for development and economic benefit. With these influences Africans have been challenged to regard their cropping calendar, land rituals practices and festivals that ensured effective land management as wrong, just because the practices of the new religions in the continent are not in line with the African traditions. The strong link between spiritual values and environmental management, which has positive effects on the ecosystem has now disappeared. In general, Africans have become disconnected from the natural world, to which they attached significant spiritual value. The consequence of this is the ecological crisis facing the continent today.

Development organizations and environmental agencies neglect the importance of spirituality, focusing mainly on the same narrow capitalistic and materialistic ends. This is at the base of the environmental degradation by multinational companies operating in Africa today. These companies, which are overly concerned with profit maximization show little or no concern for the damaging effects of their resource exploitation on humans and on the ecosystem. Ken Saro-Wiwa, cited in Kekong Bisong observes as a result of exploitation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, “the once fertile African farmland has been laid waste by constant oil spills and acid rain. Puddles of ooze, the size of football fields dot the landscape, and fish and wildlife have vanished” (2005, p.36). The Wildlife Fund

for Nature has calculated that Shell's gas-flaring activities in Nigeria are a major contributor to global warming (qtd. in Kekong, 2005, p.36). And according to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, "due to the nearly four decades of oil extraction, the Niger-Delta coastal rainforest and mangrove habitats is the most endangered river delta in the world" (cited in Kekong, 2005, p.36).

### **Recommendations**

Certainly, the environmental crisis in the African continent, and by extension, the world, has created a need for environmentally based religion and spirituality. African eco-spirituality is necessary in this process as it frees man from a consumeristic and materialistic approaches to nature and imposes a sense of understanding about the interrelatedness of cosmic realities and sacredness of nature. This ultimately encourages the protection of the environment as it creates an understanding of the earth as a total community of living beings, where humans have to immerse themselves in nature, and not dominate or objectify nature. This immersion leads one to finding one's connection with nature, towards respecting and loving nature. In line with the current search for eco-spirituality for ecological conservation, African eco-spirituality in its value for nature, thus, presents a solution to the ecological crisis facing the African continent today, occasioned western materialistic, consumerist and capitalistic and secularized worldviews. Not only is it possible to counteract these degrading forces on our environment with African eco-spirituality, we can also restore our environment ruined by these forces through certain recommendations in line with spirit of this concept.

In view of this, we recommend that our ecological crisis needs to be seen not just as a crisis in the health of nonhuman ecosystems. Rather, we need to see the connection between the impoverishment of the earth and the impoverishment of our human spirit through these defective worldviews. In other, words, our ecological crisis has its root in the spiritual disconnect of many African from their sense of sacredness of nature, which must be rediscovered by reliving our belief about the interrelatedness of cosmic realities, divine ownership of the earth, and sacredness of nature, which African eco-spirituality represents. Again, we identify with the assertion that "a healed ecosystem – humans, animals, land, air, and water together – needs to be understood as requiring a new way of life, not just a few adjustments here and there" (Ruether, 1992, p.15). Hence, we recommend the re-animation of our obligation for a reverent and responsible use of nature's

resources, to be in harmony with the spiritual world, and so, ensure the conservation and preservation of the ecosystem for the present and future generations, as the African eco-spirituality commits. Again, we recommend a new ecological vision and communal ethic that can knit together Africans across religious and ethnic divides for good of our environment, where elements of justice, mutual trust, respect for fellow human beings and commitment to protect the environment is seen as a mark of authentic existence and Africanness. To preserve the earth is to be eco-spiritual; and to be eco-spiritual is to be an authentic African.

### **Conclusion**

The environmental crisis that Africa as well as the rest of world faces today, as evident in our discussion above, is closely connected with a dysfunctional worldview and lopsided concept of reality, namely, the materialism, consumerism and capitalism. These triad is manifested everywhere today in the denial of transcendence, denial of interrelatedness of cosmic realities, the illusion of man's absolute control and unlimited power of scientific knowledge. These are at the root of today's explosive wave of industrial and technological civilization and are all a by-product of the spiritual poverty of the modern man. This worldview has eroded from the hearts of many today, the sense of sacredness of nature and the requisite attitude of stewardship towards nature. With such defective worldview starved of spirituality, humans have today disrupted the harmony with nature, and dislocated the complex coherence within reality, resulting in ecological crisis swamping the entire world.

Ensnared in this web, Africans have lost their indigenous sense of eco-spirituality, by means of which they have often regulated the relationship with the environment to ensure its conservation and preservation. This calls for the re-invention of this African eco-spirituality, has the potential to save Africans not only from the spiritual bug caused by western materialism, consumerism and capitalism - which is at the root of our ecological crisis - but also effective enough to heal our ecosystem from the degrading forces of this bug. In African eco-spirituality, we therefore, see a credible alternative to the despicable forces of western materialism, consumerism and capitalism, which are destroying our ecosystem. In their place, African eco-system presents a vision of nature as a sacred living being that works together with mankind; and the earth, not as a property to be can exploited in the way humans want, but a sacred sphere to be taken care of in away that benefits the whole community (including the unborn).

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