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Back to Eden: A Practical Ecotheology and Entrepreneurial Endeavor

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

BACK TO EDEN: A PRACTICAL ECOTHEOLOGY
AND ENTREPRENEURIAL ENDEAVOR

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY
AND JAKES DIVINITY SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

LAURA W. GORDON

PORTLAND, OREGON

APRIL 2023



**PORTLAND
SEMINARY**

George Fox University



CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

Laura W. Gordon

has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on February 25, 2023 for the degree of
Doctor of Ministry in Spirit-Filled Global Leadership in the African Diaspora.

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DEDICATION

Back to Eden ecotheology is dedicated to my grandmother, Elinora A. Wright, a great and faithful woman of God, eternally my Gammy. Though she never attended seminary, she demonstrated a deep theological understanding and wisdom as she lived a life of service to “her Jesus” and to others. Gammy personified Christlike identity and agency. She used Garden of Eden principles, like creativity, fruitfulness, and multiplication, to catapult her scant socioeconomic status into an abundant heritage for her family that still yields generational blessings. She soared above temporal limitations, flowed in the Spirit of grace, and prospered in the Kingdom economy. She was an intercessor, gardener, entrepreneur, and Christian educator. Everything Gammy touched was productive, and profitable, because she dedicated the work of her hands in service unto the Lord, who gave prolific increase. Most importantly, she embodied the love of God, was empowered by the Holy Spirit, and was a brilliant example of Jesus’ sacrifice for others. I hope to honor Gammy’s legacy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to those who made this journey possible. First, to my college sweetheart and husband, Isaac, who has been a constant source of encouragement, I love you forever. My eternal love is with my children, Christina, Isaac M., and Malcolm; and with my grandkids, Azi, RJ, and Zion. The unconditional love of my mother, Edith, my father, Ernest, my siblings, Cheryl, Ernie, and Howard, and my cousin, Karen, convinces me that I can do anything. Thank you for your faithful prayers, my lifelong sisters, Wanda, Aladrian, and Dana. I deeply appreciate my Gordon & Associates team, who consistently delivers professionally. I treasure my ministry partners, Yawya, Kofi, and Dr. Kim, who during African on-the-ground site visits, helped implement Back to Eden practical ecotheology. Thank you to New Visions Christian Fellowship for prayer coverings, and to Apostle Green, Pastor Brenda, and Elder Pamela for teaching me to flow in the Holy Spirit.

Much love to my Jakes Divinity School (JDS) Doctor of Ministry in Spirit-filled Global Leadership in the African Diaspora Cohort One siblings—we are forever family. Special thanks to Bishop T. D. Jakes, JDS faculty and administration, president Dr. Felisha Ford, and Dr. Cynthia James for making this program possible. Dr. Valerie Crumpton and Tina, I cherish your caring hearts in directing the DMin program. I am grateful for my dissertation advisor, Dr. William Valmyr, who taught me to enjoy the transformational journey. I value my gifted and skillful editor, Melanie Tollett, and proofreader, Jack Scacco. Thank you to The King's University for Dr. Jack Hayford's lessons on the Kingdom of God, and for Dr. Jon Huntzinger's teachings on Garden of Eden theology—both are nutrients in the soil that yields Back to Eden ecotheology.

EPIGRAPH

“Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places shall be rebuilt. And the land that was desolate shall be tilled, instead of being the desolation that it was in the sight of all who passed by. And they will say, ‘This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden, and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.’ Then the nations that are left all around you shall know that I am the LORD; I have rebuilt the ruined places and replanted that which was desolate. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it.” (Ezek. 36:33–36 ESV)

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GLOSSARY

African—When the term African is used in this document, it generally refers to those of indigenous African ethnic descent on the continent and throughout the global African diaspora.

African Christianity—The term African Christianity in this document refers to Bible truth contextualized in African cultures. Credible, peer-reviewed African theologians are cited who are uniquely qualified to contextualize the Gospel of Jesus Christ in African communities and to dispel some long-held negative stereotypes regarding African traditions. Exploring Christianity in an African setting does not cause it to deviate from biblical truth or theological orthodoxy. African scholarship presented in this document has the potential to help Africans receive God-given identity rooted in Christ, orthodoxy, and African cultures.

The document aligns with the description of the program for which it is submitted—Jakes Divinity School Doctor of Ministry in Spirit-filled Global Leadership in the African Diaspora. It is intentionally African-focused, not American or European-focused. It is written in the voice of an American, of African descent, and makes an effort to present orthodox Christianity from African perspectives as lived within African societies.

African Traditional Religions—This document does not attempt to defend or critique traditional African religious beliefs or spirituality, as compared to Christianity. That is beyond the scope of this project. African Christian scholars are best equipped to provide a credible critical analysis.

Back to Eden (BTE) Ministry Partners¹—American nonprofit organizations, The Ashan Foundation and Gammy’s House; and African BTE project leaders on the ground in Uganda and Zambia.

Deeply Seeded—This is used in this document instead of the traditional *deep-seated* to emphasize types of garden terminology.

Ecotheology—Ecological theology is “an attempt to retrieve the ecological wisdom in Christianity as a response to environmental threats and injustices. . . . [it] is not only concerned with ethics but also with Christian doctrine. It is not narrowly focused on a reinterpretation of creation theology, but calls for a review of all aspects of the Christian faith...the entire life and praxis of the church should

¹ Ashan Foundation, “Back To Eden,” The Ashan Foundation, accessed April 2, 2021, n.p., <https://www.ashanfoundation.org/bte-initiative>; Laura Gordon, “Gammy’s House,” Gordon & Associates, accessed April 14, 2021, n.p., <http://www.gordonandassociates.biz/giving-back>.

include an ecological dimension and vision.”² Ecotheology also critiques Christian doctrine, cultural ideologies, traditions, and practices that fall short of God’s divine plan.

Extensive research in the field of ecotheology is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Back to Eden practical ecotheology attempts to integrate ancient African indigenous wisdom and traditions that are anchored in biblical truth, and are consistent with ecotheology, which unveils God’s original intention for mankind and creation—humanity is to be caretakers of God’s created universe. See Chapter 2 for more on ecotheology.

Holy Spirit—The Holy Spirit is the third person of the triune Godhead—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God. He reveals and glorifies the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ. He is the Spirit of truth who leads mankind into divine truth, convicting of sin, and regenerating and empowering believers.

Mother Earth—God is the Creator; the earth is created matter. In no way does this document or writer deify or advocate worshiping, or praying to, mother earth. Credible African Christian theologians are quoted using the term in African Christian cultural contexts. Lower case “mother earth” is used to respect and echo African Christian cultural terminology and to emphasize the indigenous African ethos of ecological stewardship. It is a way of honoring the invaluable significance and role of the earth to the life and sustenance of humanity. See more in the Chapter 2—Ecotheology section.

Spirit or Spirituality—When the “S” is capitalized, it refers specifically to the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. This document studies Christianity in an African cultural ethos. When the “s” is lower case, it refers to aspects of African spirituality, cultures, and traditional religions. African spirituality was often dismissed, ignored, erased, or belittled by some in the church, using terms like “heathen,” “pagan,” “witchcraft,” “subhuman,” “animism,” “ancestor worship,” “dark continent,” “uncivilized,” “backwards” “savages,” etc. This was a reductionist attempt to disqualify African cultures as a worthy context of Christianity. However, African theologians identify significant elements of African spirituality, cultures, traditions, and practices that are consistent with biblical truth and reveal the presence and work of the Holy Spirit on the African continent since creation. This project highlights points of alignment revealed by African scholarship between African spirituality and Christianity, which is valuable information to those in or ministering to the African diaspora.

² Ernst M. Conradie, *Christianity and Ecological Theology: Resources for Further Research*, Study Guides in Religion and Theology 11 (Stellenbosch, S. Africa: Sun Press, 2006), 3, <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=qQNAwAAQBAJ&hl=en&pg=GBS.PP1>.
<https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=qQNAwAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PP1&hl=en>.

ABSTRACT

Back to Eden (BTE) practical ecotheology is a presentation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, anchored in the Garden of Eden story, before the fall of mankind, enculturated in an African ethos within various African perspectives, traditions, and worldviews. It is useful to reclaim God-given African Christian identity and agency. Essentially, BTE ecotheology is mankind divinely integrated vertically with God and horizontally with humanity and His creation, based on Genesis 1–2. It is an appeal to become deeply rooted in the Spiritual soil of divine truth, to become entrenched in the incarnate Son, and to become planted as an ecological steward of God’s creation. It is an invitation to become grounded—heart, mind, soul, body, and spirit—in the Creator’s tangible, loving presence.

Humanity returns to Eden and receives original God-given identity and agency, when saved by the blood of Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, and surrendered to God’s will for mankind and His created universe. Redeemed humanity, in a diversity of ethnicities, is reconciled in Eden, and in divine unified community, expresses the image of God and executes His delegated authority as ecological caretakers of Earth.

Ultimately, BTE practical ecotheology addresses the need for economic empowerment, to combat the problem of poverty, through entrepreneurial opportunities. It serves as a practical ministry foundation for BTE projects, education, environmental guardianship, and entrepreneurial endeavors. The research focuses on two rural, African independent, Pentecostal communities in Uganda and Zambia.

This topic is personal. As a minister of the gospel, a thirty-one-year business owner, a certified public accountant, and a third-generation entrepreneur, the writer serves as a consultant to entrepreneurs as they envision, launch, and scale businesses.

CHAPTER 1: DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM

“When the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. They said ‘Let us pray.’ We closed our eyes. When we opened them we had the Bible and they had the land.”¹ Desmond Tutu

Introduction

Back to Eden (BTE) ecotheology offers a paradigm of the Garden of Eden story that is enculturated in an African ethos within various African perspectives, traditions, and worldviews. It is an appeal to become deeply rooted in the Spiritual soil of divine truth, to become entrenched in the incarnate Son, and to become planted as an ecological steward of creation. It is an invitation to become grounded—heart, mind, soul, body, and spirit—in the Creator’s tangible, loving presence.

BTE practical ecotheology addresses God-given African Christian identity and agency. It explores what it looks like to be authentically African and fully Christlike. It revisits biblical principles and African wisdom related to education, entrepreneurship, and ecological stewardship. It highlights the rich African spiritual heritage and massive contributions of Africans to the biblical and historical records, thus revealing the African seedbed of early Christian theology and scholarship, which was exported throughout the world.² Reminders of ancient African wisdom, civilizations, and vibrant cultural

¹ Desmond Tutu, “Desmond Tutu Quotes 107531,” Brainy Quotes, accessed December 5, 2022, n.p., https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/desmond_tutu_107531.

² Thomas C. Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007), 9.
<https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2016/12/died-bible-scholar-thomas-oden-1931-2016/>

traditions reinforce African Christian identity and agency. In this document, the term “African” includes those of African descent throughout the diaspora.

BTE ecotheology serves as a practical ministry foundation for BTE curriculum, business development, and environmental guardianship. This research specifically focuses on two rural, African independent, Pentecostal communities in Uganda and Zambia. BTE initiatives empower Africans to develop best-use, environmentally enhancing strategies for ancestral lands; to establish local sustainable food supplies; and to pursue entrepreneurial endeavors.

This study applies Dr. Justin Ukpong’s methodology of inculturation biblical hermeneutics, which is to use a culturally contextualized approach to exegete Scripture within sensitive political, economic, social, and religious issues of diverse African societies and to practically implement biblical interpretation in a way that addresses the existential circumstances of people who are daily living out their faith as African Christians.³ Each BTE site is in a different African country with a distinct group of people. On-the-ground practical theology at each site is impacted by political, economic, social, and cultural dynamics at the global, national, regional, local, community, and individual levels. Research proceeds with the intention to learn and understand the societal challenges of the people at each site, and how they live and sort out their faith in community.

³ Justin S. Ukpong, “New Testament Hermeneutics in Africa: Challenges and Possibilities,” *Neotestamentica: Journal of the New Testament Society of Southern Africa* 35, no. 1_2 (January 1, 2001): 154, 161, AtlaSerialsPLUS, <https://journals.co.za/doi/abs/10.10520/EJC83086>. Ukpong’s information: <https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/JustinUkpongObituary.pdf>.

This project employs Don S. Browning’s practical theological model in which he revisits “the tradition of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) or practical reason” as he draws from Augustine and several Western philosophers.⁴ Perspectives from Augustine, Athanasius, African church and monastic fathers, and African scholars and theologians are highlighted in this study. It also employs Browning’s “practice to theory and back to practice” approach to practical theology.⁵ It starts by assessing needs, problems, and opportunities. Next, it reviews current on-the-ground practical theology. Then, it incorporates biblical concepts that might add more texture and illumination to current orthopraxy. Afterward, it evaluates the impact of BTE practical ecotheology.

Finally, Dr. Elizabeth Siwo-Okundi’s research methodology and findings on African Christian homiletics inform the BTE approach. She uses a grassroots style that includes disenfranchised voices of people typically left out of academic research on African Christianity. Her research starts as informal conversations and bridges theory and practice into a balanced practical theology.⁶

The Story

Uganda is the BTE model and first project site. A husband and wife (Pastor G and Pastor C) co-pastor a church and run a primary school in Uganda. The wife (Pastor C) reports that there is a “hopelessness” among many locals which “slowly kills us as

⁴ Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), introduction, Kindle.

⁵ Browning, introduction.

⁶ Elizabeth Siwo-Okundi, “Development of Christianity in Africa and Ministry in Kenya” (lecture, Jakes Divinity School, Dallas, TX, October 11, 2021).

Africans . . . many think God does not love us like He does the Americans . . . There has been a pervasive thought that they need to beg the West for help.”⁷ She says, “We must teach our people who they are and what they can do; Uganda is an agricultural country, it’s our backbone, we have nature that is supposed to feed us.”⁸ In 2018, she engaged BTE ministry partners⁹ who provided curriculum, tools, and resources to birth her vision. She implemented experiential agricultural education, teaching students to cultivate school gardens. She reports improved student self-esteem, teamwork, and appreciation of nature.

While engaging in BTE concepts, the husband remembered that he owned ancestral land in Uganda, which he ignored for 18 years after his father died. He returned and reclaimed his land. He partnered with his brothers, and they planted 250 citrus and avocado trees, plus larger community vegetable gardens that abundantly yield produce. During the 2020–2021 COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns, their parish ate fresh fruits and vegetables from the trees, and from the school and community gardens. In 2022, several teachers launched small businesses and modeled entrepreneurship to the students.

Need, Problem, Opportunity

“The opportunity is in the problem. The moment I see a problem, I immediately begin to think about the opportunities that can be created by trying to solve it.”¹⁰ Strive Masiyiwa

⁷ Video interview with Ugandan pastors as a follow-up to their Questionnaire responses, March 6, 2022; Pastor C, “Pastor C Video Clip,” June 2021, IMG_4173.MOV.

⁸ Video interview with Ugandan pastors.

⁹ Ashan Foundation, “Back To Eden,” The Ashan Foundation, accessed April 2, 2021, n.p., <https://www.ashanfoundation.org/bte-initiative>; Laura Gordon, “Gammy’s House,” Gordon & Associates, accessed April 14, 2021, n.p., <http://www.gordonandassociates.biz/giving-back>.

¹⁰ Strive Masiyiwa, “Strive Masiyiwa Quotes,” AZ Quotes, accessed December 5, 2022, n.p., <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/808036>.

The need, problem, or opportunity (NPO) is contextualized within African and world history and within contemporary political, environmental, and socioeconomic conditions. The Garden of Eden was paradise until Adam (male/female) sinned, setting mankind on a downward spiral that propelled them farther from God and closer to evil. Expelled from Eden, humanity was forced to live in a fallen world, full of sinful people, on a collision course to destroy the earth and each other.

Despite the extraordinary missionary work of countless kind-hearted, well-intentioned, and authentically loving Christian people from around the world, the global institutions of slavery, colonialism, and missionary imperialism caused a catastrophic breach that disrupted African history, identity, and agency. Additionally, perversion of biblical truths by some in the church gave cover to and emboldened such evil on the continent of Africa and in the diaspora. Unfortunately, some churches repel many people of African descent who then reject the Gospel outright because they think that it is a “White Man’s Religion,” based on the way it has historically been presented by some.¹¹ Countless souls are at stake.

This is an opportunity for sons, daughters, heirs, and stewards of the Kingdom of God to remind the world that written in the Bible is the truth that God created Adam (male/female) in His image and likeness. All human beings, of all ethnic origins (including Africans), are made in God’s image and, therefore, are so precious to the Father that He gave his son, Jesus, who died to save all mankind and the earth. Those called to the great commission can seize the opportunity to correct the historical record

¹¹ Antipas L. Harris, *Is Christianity the White Man’s Religion? How the Bible is Good News for People of Color* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020) n.p., <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=NLJPBB8AAAAJ&hl=en>

by sharing the truth: The Bible documents a global, all-inclusive, multicultural Gospel, which includes many biblical characters of African descent, with critical scenes taking place on the African continent. Those called to the ministry of reconciliation have a chance to repair the breach by transforming the political, social, and economic systems that were created by corrupt, sinful people and are reinforced by unjust practices.

Problem

Adeshina Afolayan, Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso, and Toyin Falola say that Western “Christianity came to Africa . . . as part of the total package of the colonial enterprise. The missionaries, together with the European traders, laid the initial groundwork for the colonial situation in Africa.”¹² Gosnell Yorke (Bible translator, African Caribbean diaspora—St. Kitts-Nevis) stresses, “Europe has contributed in no small measure to the unconscionable underdevelopment of Africa and her people . . . Africa, through the enslavement of her people at home and abroad, has contributed substantially to the over-development of Europe.”¹³

Afolayan details that colonialism “represented a regime of violence and force that expropriated the colonies [native lands] and undermined the being of the natives.”¹⁴

¹² Adeshina Afolayan, Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso, and Toyin Falola, “Introduction: The Pentecostal and Political in Africa,” in *Pentecostalism and Politics in Africa*, ed. Adeshina Afolayan, Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso, and Toyin Falola (Cham, Switz.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 5, xi–xv, Kindle.

¹³ Gosnell L.O.R. Yorke, “The Bible in the Black Diaspora: Links with African Christianity,” in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends*, ed. Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube (Boston: Brill, 2000), 128, https://brill.com/view/book/edcoll/9789004497108/B9789004497108_s010.xml.

¹⁴ Adeshina Afolayan, “Pentecostalism, Political Philosophy, and the Political in Africa,” in *Pentecostalism and Politics in Africa*, ed. Adeshina Afolayan, Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso, and Toyin Falola (Cham, Switz.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 230, Kindle.
<https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=bFWMIXIAAAAJ&hl=en>.

Asonzeh Ukah (Chair of Religious Studies, University of Cape Town, South Africa) confirms that native Black Africans were called “savages,” “backwards,” and “subhuman.” Some were enslaved and sold away to foreign lands, while others were treated as slaves on their ancestral lands.¹⁵ This stripped Africans of agency and the ability to benefit from the work of their hands. Colonial rule imposed a perverted version of the Bible that was intended to displace African traditions while elevating Western culture.

These acts were deliberate and strategically executed schemes of the devil which assaulted African identity and agency. African Christianity, on the continent and in the diaspora, rejects devilish lies and deceptions. Yorke presents, “According to [Jesse Mugambi], ‘Both in Africa and in the African diaspora . . . Christianity and the African religious heritage have contributed positively to the resistance against slavery, colonial domination, and the denial of civil rights.’”¹⁶ Falola (Humanities Chair, University of Texas, Austin) reveals that Africans today wrestle “to reclaim a lost identity,” to restore damaged “indigenous institutions,” and “to use culture as a tool of resistance” to regain agency of power in the face of post-colonial economic exploitation.¹⁷ The tactics of God’s enemy may have won a few historical battles, but Jesus’ completed works cause Christians to triumph.

¹⁵ Asonzeh Ukah, “Neither Jew nor Greek? Class, Ethnicity, and Race in the Pentecostal Movement in Africa,” in *Pentecostalism and Politics in Africa*, ed. Adeshina Afolayan, Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso, and Toyin Falola (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 211, Kindle. Ukah’s information: <http://www.religion.uct.ac.za/religion/staff/academicstaff/asonzehukah>.

¹⁶ Yorke, 138.

¹⁷ Toyin Falola, *The Power of African Cultures* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2003), 2, 6–10. Falola’s information: <https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/history/faculty/falolaoo>; <https://toyinfalolanetwork.org/about-us/>.

A persistent impact of such a breach in African history, identity, and agency is the high incidence of African poverty. Furthermore, the COVID-19 “pandemic has caused immense economic suffering in sub-Saharan Africa with \$115 billion in output losses and an expected 3.3 percent contraction of the GDP [gross domestic product],” hitting small businesses especially hard.¹⁸ “The pandemic led to 97 million more people [worldwide] being in poverty in 2020,” and there were 478 million in poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁹ Over 87% of people in Uganda and Zambia live on less than \$5.50 per day.²⁰ Poverty, hunger, and a sense of hopelessness remain stubborn problems.

Oppressive global financial structures exacerbate these problems. Falola declares, “The economy is integral to culture,” and “a chaotic global system is unfair to the continent.”²¹ Falola also explains, “The World Bank and the [IMF, International Monetary Fund] imposed . . . the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP)” that devalued African currencies, forced them to export goods at cheaper rates, and required the privatization of state-owned enterprises.²² All of this crippled African economies, while

¹⁸ Daniel F. Runde, Conor M. Savoy, and Janina Staguhn, “Supporting Small and Medium Enterprises in Sub-Saharan Africa through Blended Finance,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 7, 2021, 2, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/210707_Runde_Supporting_Sub-Saharan_SMEs_0.pdf?cbppgk5HzqGe0qOfQ4dMsRvZ9D1.Jz6X.

¹⁹ Daniel Gerszon Mahler et al., “Updated Estimates of the Impact of COVID-19 on Global Poverty: Turning the Corner on the Pandemic in 2021?” *World Bank Blogs*, June 24, 2021, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/updated-estimates-impact-covid-19-global-poverty-turning-corner-pandemic-2021>.

²⁰ World Bank Group, *Sub-Saharan Africa, Poverty and Equity Brief*, 2020, accessed March 12, 2022, 87, 89, https://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/33EF03BB-9722-4AE2-ABC7-AA2972D68AFE/Global_POVEQ_SSA.pdf.

²¹ Falola, 71, 73.

²² Falola, 85.

facilitating the export of African natural resources (mined by cheap African labor) to give the advantage to global financial markets.

In his PhD dissertation, using Zambia as a case study, Mbosonge Mwenechanya informs that “colonial capitalism appended African countries onto the global political economy as suppliers of cheap labor and raw materials and as new markets for mass produced goods.”²³ He then explains:

In the current postcolonial era, global capital’s interests are represented by the neoliberal development policies imposed upon countries . . . to ensure the transfer of resources from developing countries to developed countries through different mechanisms such as debt servicing, repatriation of profit or unfair trade. At the local level, the transfer of resources has crippled the capacity of the state to provide support to communities, thereby perpetuating their poverty and vulnerability . . .²⁴

Mwenechanya notes, “Among poor Zambians, poverty is created and perpetuated by alienating the people from their source of livelihood through the neo-liberal privatization of their land.”²⁵ Indeed, “Mainstream development in Zambia is based on the erroneous assumption that both growth and development can only be achieved through the privatization of indigenous land.”²⁶ Mwenechanya shows, “Along with cash crop plantations, privatization of land in Zambia happens through preservation of tourist game reserves and appropriation of land for mineral extraction.”²⁷ He found that “Mainstream development portrays poor people as needing assistance because they are

²³ Mbosonge Mwenechanya, “The De-Africanization of African Development: International Development Programs and Political Economy of the Local in Zambia” (PhD diss., Northeastern University, Boston, 2009), 24, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

²⁴ Mwenechanya, 24–25.

²⁵ Mwenechanya, 4.

²⁶ Mwenechanya, 3.

²⁷ Mwenechanya, 3–4.

weak . . .” and “has treated indigenous agriculture as backward and this has provided a pretext for the type of development and modernization that is destroying the environment and impoverishing more Zambians.”²⁸ Mwenechanya indicates that Western International Development Projects are “conceptualized in pure economic terms,” and, “There is no consideration that Africans may define development differently . . . Development itself has been equated with westernizing Africans . . .”²⁹ One of his conclusions is that “development should be based on small, bio-diverse farms that will ensure access to land for the majority and environmental sustainability.”³⁰ Mwenechanya believes: “It is important to point out that African societies were not always under-developed or materially poor . . . [P]rior to colonial rule Zambians lived self-sustaining lifestyles that were not poor. They provided themselves with life’s necessities and were not deprived of basic needs. . . . [T]he diversified food economy in Bulozzi (now the Western province of Zambia) was a surplus producing economy.”³¹

Need

There is a need for economic empowerment. Also, there is a need to be delivered from poverty and the systems that perpetuate it. According to the Ugandan pastors interviewed, many of their people need a renewed sense of African Christian identity and

²⁸ Mwenechanya, 18, 3.

²⁹ Mwenechanya, 10, 13.

³⁰ Mwenechanya, 4.

³¹ Mwenechanya, 16.

agency. In addition to financial resources, they consider education that endows African Christian identity and agency to be a major need.

Also, there is a need for what Thomas H. Groome calls “hermeneutics of retrieval, suspicion, and creative commitment to the ‘text.’”³² In a community of believers sharing and practicing faith, one first “reclaim[s] and make[s] accessible the truths and values symbolically mediated in the texts of [the] Christian Story/Vision . . . [which] educate[s] participants in Christian identity and agency.”³³ The positive use of a hermeneutic of suspicion works to “recognize and refuse” historically destructive “Christian” interpretations of the texts, such as “teachings and practices that approved of racism, . . . unbridled capitalism, . . . anti-Semitism, . . . sexism and patriarchy, [and] allowed Christians to be irresponsible toward their ecology”³⁴ Within an African ethos, the Holy Spirit reveals a “hermeneutic of creative commitment to construct more adequate understandings of Christian Story/Vision . . . to envision more faithful ways of living it with personal and social transformation.”³⁵

Opportunity

BTE practical ecotheology is an opportunity to address a major need that is reported by on-the-ground pastors and project site leaders: education that reaffirms African Christian identity and agency. This project also recognizes and rejects

³² Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry; The Way of Shared Praxis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 230.

³³ Groome, 231.

³⁴ Groome, 226, 233.

³⁵ Groome, 234.

historically destructive “Christian” interpretations, while it revisits truths in the Garden of Eden narrative, through African cultural lenses. No attempt to add to or subtract from foundational Bible truth is made. BTE ecotheology is a reexamination of the primeval biblical garden story from fresh perspectives—African worldviews.

Asante Sana declares, “In the spirit of Africa taking charge of its destiny and proposing African solutions to African issues, . . . [the African Union is] at the forefront of addressing the various challenges to peace and security on the continent.”³⁶ The African Union explains, “The AfCFTA [African Continental Free Trade Area] will be one of the largest free trade areas since the formation of the World Trade Organization (WTO), given Africa’s population of 1.2 billion people, which is expected to grow to 2.5 billion by 2050.”³⁷ At that point, Africa’s population “will comprise 26 percent of what is projected to be the world’s working age population, with an economy that is estimated to grow twice as rapidly as that of the developed world.”³⁸

Commencing January 2021, AfCFTA “progressively eliminate[s] tariffs on intra-African trade, making it easier for African businesses to trade within the continent and . . . benefit from the growing African market. . . . [E]liminating import duties . . . has the potential to boost intra-African trade by 52.3 percent.”³⁹ Furthermore, “AfCFTA is

³⁶ African Union, *African Union Handbook 2021* (Addis Ababa, Eth.: African Union Commission, 2021), 7, https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/31829-doc-AU_HBK_2021_-_ENGLISH_web.pdf.

³⁷ African Union, *African Union Handbook 2021*, 30.

³⁸ AfCFTA, “Who We Are,” Au.afcfta.org, accessed April 10, 2022, n.p., <https://afcfta.au.int/en/who-we-are>; Worldometer, “Africa Population,” Worldometers, accessed April 22, 2022, n.p., <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/africa-population/>. <https://au-afcfta.org/>. <https://au-afcfta.org/who-we-are/>.

³⁹ AfCFTA, “Who We Are,” n.p.

expected to expand the size of Africa's economy to US\$29 trillion by 2050.”⁴⁰ This is a significant move towards correcting unbalanced trade scales because, without AfCFTA, businesses face higher tariffs on trade between neighboring African nations than with international trade partners outside the continent. Consolidating the continent into one trade area provides promising opportunities for businesses and consumers across Africa and supports sustainable development.

Sana believes that “The AfCFTA should free Africa from being a raw material supplier to the rest of the world and enable it to become a region that actively participates in world trade as a producer of goods and services.”⁴¹ David Thomas presents, “The World Bank estimated that by 2035, . . . intra-continental exports would increase by more than 81%, while exports to non-African countries would rise by 19%,” and it “predicts that the [AfCFTA] agreement could contribute to lifting an additional 30m people from extreme poverty and 68m people from moderate poverty.”⁴²

Thomas presents findings from Gyude Moore, Senior Policy Fellow at the Center for Global Development, who states:

This is an African project that will require African commitment to succeed. It must proceed regardless of what happens elsewhere. We can expect external actors to continue to pursue policies that run counter to Africa's objectives as long as such policies benefit them. Even as we have made clear our intent to move trade along a multilateral track, Africa's largest partners may seek to pursue a bilateral one. Despite the rhetoric of Africa's external partners, the continent's

⁴⁰ AfCFTA, “Purpose of the AfCFTA,” Au-afcfta.org, n.p., accessed September 9, 2022, <https://au-afcfta.org/purpose-the-afcfta/>.

⁴¹ African Union, *African Union Handbook 2021*, 8.

⁴² David Thomas, “What You Need to Know about the African Continental Free Trade Area,” African Business, last updated July 8, 2022, n.p., <https://african.business/2022/02/trade-investment/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-african-continental-free-trade-area/>.

prosperity has never been the true objective of their policies and we cannot expect that to change now.⁴³

Thomas also quotes “African economist Carlos Lopes” as declaring that “Europe needs to understand the direction Africa is going in with the setting up of the AfCFTA. . . . We Africans must be more united to defend our own interests.”⁴⁴

The African Union (AU) Agenda 2063 “provides for three specific financial organs to be created, the African Central Bank (ACB), the African Investment Bank (AIB) and the African Monetary Fund (AMF).”⁴⁵ Pursuant to this, “The agreed timeframe . . . for establishing the AMF is 2023,” and its “purpose will be to facilitate the integration of African economies by eliminating trade restrictions and providing greater monetary integration”⁴⁶ The purpose of the AIB “will be to foster economic growth and accelerate economic integration in Africa,” and its target date is 2025.⁴⁷ The purpose of the ACB “will be to build a common monetary policy and single African currency as a way to accelerate economic integration,” and its timeframe is “between 2028 and 2034.”⁴⁸ The AU Agenda 2063 aspirations include, “Africa takes full responsibility for financing her development” and “transforming Africa’s economies through beneficiation from Africa’s natural resources” in order to reduce aid dependency and to prosper “Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development,” while developing

⁴³ Thomas, n.p.

⁴⁴ Thomas, n.p.

⁴⁵ African Union, *African Union Handbook 2021*, 144.

⁴⁶ African Union, *African Union Handbook 2021*, 145.

⁴⁷ African Union, *African Union Handbook 2021*, 144–145.

⁴⁸ African Union, *African Union Handbook 2021*, 144.

“environmentally sustainable climate and resilient economies and communities” that have “a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics.”⁴⁹

As of 2021, the AU recognized eight Regional Economic Communities (RECs) (all with United Nations “observer status”), the:

- Arab Maghreb Union (UMA)
- Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)
- Community of Sahel–Saharan States (CEN–SAD)
- East African Community (EAC)
- Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)
- Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)
- Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)
- Southern African Development Community (SADC).⁵⁰

Uganda and Zambia are part of COMESA. Uganda is also with EAC and IGAD. Zambia is a member of SADC.⁵¹

The AfCFTA cultivates an economic climate that could create opportunities for African entrepreneurship. In America, 62% of new jobs are created by small businesses.⁵² Runde, Savoy, and Staguhn point out, “In Africa, SMEs [small and medium enterprises] provide an estimated 80 percent of jobs across the continent, representing an important driver of economic growth. Sub-Saharan Africa alone has 44 million micro, small, and medium enterprises, almost all of which are micro.”⁵³ African entrepreneurship strengthens local economies, fills market gaps, and creates generational wealth. Under the

⁴⁹ African Union, “Our Aspirations for the Africa We Want,” African Union, accessed April 14, 2022, n.p., <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/aspirations>.

⁵⁰ African Union, *African Union Handbook 2021*, 152.

⁵¹ African Union, *African Union Handbook 2021*, 19.

⁵² U.S. Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy, “Frequently Asked Questions,” Advocacy.sba.gov., revised December 2021, 1, <https://cdn.advocacy.sba.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/06095731/Small-Business-FAQ-Revised-December-2021.pdf>.

⁵³ Runde, Savoy, and Staguhn, 1.

AfCFTA, this renewed economic climate creates opportunities for small business owners to expand trade. This is divine timing for BTE projects that provide skills training, educational and financial resources, which empowers entrepreneurs.

Thesis Statement

Garden of Eden theology, seasoned with African history, cultures, spirituality, and worldviews, as well as embedded in ecotheology, births Back to Eden (BTE) practical ecotheology, which is rooted in God-given African Christian identity and agency. It is a biblically based paradigm that is useful to reclaim African Christian identity, activate agency, and empower Africans to overcome entrenched oppressive world economic structures. BTE ecotheology serves as a practical ministry foundation for BTE education, entrepreneurship, and ecological stewardship.

Impact on Research

Back to Eden (BTE) ecotheology recognizes the impact of mankind's fallen, sinful condition, and it invites all people to go back to the beginning and start over again. Eden is an image of God's original intention for mankind. The Gospel of Jesus Christ and the ministry of reconciliation, which Jesus delegates to his disciples, require believers to repair the immeasurable breach that was detailed in the NPO above. The BTE paradigm calls upon the human spirit, mind, soul, and body to return to the pre-fall Garden relationship with the Creator and the environment. Literally, it is a call back to the likely original Eden, African soil, from which mankind was created, and for humanity to be restored as caretakers of the earth through BTE endeavors. This dissertation documents

BTE projects that are developed and implemented in partnership with the Ashan Foundation⁵⁴ and Gammy's House.⁵⁵

In the first two project sites of Luba, Uganda, and Nakonde, Zambia, BTE empowers Africans, who are developing their ancestral tribal lands, in three general phases. The first step is to cultivate best-use strategies for the land, starting with building water systems (wells, irrigation, rain capture and storage), planting trees and gardens, and farming. The goal is to create a sustainable local food supply to nourish the community. People depend on the land, so ecological theology (a fundamental ethic of traditional African mindsets) is incorporated as these projects are conceived and executed. BTE ecotheology illuminates the critical activity of water in the creation progression. Dr. Johnathan E. Alvarado points out that the water was not created, "it was already there, as if it partnered with God in creation."⁵⁶ This revelation is the reason that water projects are the first step in BTE projects. Shortly after Alvarado's lecture, ministry partners dug water wells in Luba and Nakonde.

The second phase is to develop STARS (solar, technology, agricultural, renewable energy, science) programs that empower these communities to use the land, sun, human and educational resources that are readily available to build strong, dynamic, prosperous local economies; and to birth entrepreneurs. Layer three aims to help build bridges between African Americans and African entrepreneurs that bring additional resources to both sides. Also, BTE has emerging educational, environmental, and

⁵⁴ Ashan Foundation, n.p.

⁵⁵ Gordon, n.p.

⁵⁶ Johnathan Alvarado, "Global Pentecostalism and Its African Roots" (lecture, Jakes Divinity School, Dallas, TX, October 26, 2020).

entrepreneurial endeavors in Ogun State, Nigeria; Accra, Ghana; and in the United States of America.

Field research consists of a series of meetings, discussions, and interviews with key stakeholders in the United States and Africa. The methodology includes reviewing the field research questionnaires and the letters of consent approved by George Fox University and completed by stakeholders in advance of Zoom interviews. This approach uses an informal discussion format, with open-ended questions, during the Zoom interviews to allow pastors and leaders to share their experiences freely, without the constraint of discussing each question on the questionnaire. Also, the goal is to make stakeholders feel comfortable and to build relationships with each of the ministry partners. Since oral traditions and storytelling are vital elements of African culture, the aim is to encourage stakeholders to share their BTE experiences in a relaxed manner. In each interview, ministry partners openly recounted the status, achievements, struggles, and praise reports related to their respective BTE projects.

Weekly Zoom calls are held with BTE initiative founders, the Ashan Foundation, and the writer of BTE practical ecotheology and seed funder, Gammy's House.⁵⁷ Ministry partners on the ground in Uganda and Zambia, and in an emerging project site in Nigeria, provide periodic updates in some weekly calls. Also, a few of the weekly meetings are dedicated to strategizing with two Ghanaian professors (one in a US university and the other in Ghana) and with one African American professor about developing an immersive study abroad program.

⁵⁷ Ashan Foundation, n.p.; Gordon, n.p.

Eastern Garden—Uganda

A husband-and-wife pastoral team (pastor G and pastor C) established the initial BTE pilot project site. They teach BTE concepts and implement BTE initiatives in Uganda—in their church, parish, school, and ancestral community. During Zoom interviews with the Ugandan pastors, pastor C reports that there is a “hopelessness among many locals which slowly kills us as Africans.”⁵⁸ Added to that is a sense of helplessness, self-hatred, and a lack of personal agency. Many think that “God does not love us like He does the Americans.”⁵⁹ She says there has been a pervasive thought that they need to beg the West for help. She comments that one of the biggest needs is re-education to overcome destructive thoughts and behaviors; they need to be taught who they are as Africans. She says her people need teaching about the powerful history of Africa, its ancient wisdom, and the beauty of its traditions and customs. Faith comes by hearing, so more teaching on who they are as African Christians will help transform and renew their minds. She says, “BTE education stresses ‘Hands Up,’ not hands out. ‘Hands Up’ means look around and ask yourself, what do I already have? How can I use that to better my situation?”⁶⁰ She says “Land is our greatest resource,” and she teaches that “God is always with you,” so “if you want something different, you have to change it yourself.”⁶¹

The Ugandan pastors model BTE concepts first by doing them, then by teaching others. Pastor G left his family’s ancestral land for eighteen years after his father died.

⁵⁸ Video interview with Ugandan pastors.

⁵⁹ Video interview with Ugandan pastors.

⁶⁰ Video interview with Ugandan pastors.

⁶¹ Video interview with Ugandan pastors.

However, because of BTE initiatives, he and his brothers returned to their birth land and planted trees and agricultural projects. Family members who had struggled before are now sustained by the fruit of the land. Pastor C plans to establish BTE centers in four regions of Uganda to teach practical skills to mobilize her community and use local materials. She says, “We connect the land to the Creator; it is His earth, and we must not destroy it, but care for it. God gave us the land and He gave us the ability to care for it so that it feeds us and use its resources to build businesses that benefit the community and environment.”⁶² She shares, “Life is in the Garden; healing is in the Garden.” She says her community is now hopeful because they have land. The soil will give them everything they need.⁶³

Southern Garden—Zambia

Zambia is the second BTE site, led by husband-and-wife pastors (bishop K and pastor A). Bishop K, is a living epistle of BTE ecotheology. Upon returning to his ancestral lands in Zambia, he was freshly reminded about his ethnic and tribal identity as first-born of his generation. His birthright and responsibility as first-born is to make decisions on matters of community governance, direction, and land use. Elders reaffirmed his authority and his duty to help his people. In line with the BTE “Hands Up” concept, he took inventory and reasserted that God gave him the gifts of land and organizational skills. Local leaders had been approached by the Chinese to purchase land, but Bishop K, with the agreement and approval of the local Chieftainess, head man, and elders,

⁶² Video interview with Ugandan pastors.

⁶³ Video interview with Ugandan pastors.

designated thirty-eight hectares of land in Wulongo Village to use for BTE projects, to benefit the local community and economy. Bishop K has a vision of feeding his people as a God-given mandate, and to alleviate poverty in the area. He teaches his community BTE ecotheology by focusing on “who they are and what they can do.”⁶⁴

Chapter Summary

To effect change, needs and problems must be clearly identified and defined, strategies must be proposed, and resources must be allocated to execute solutions. Needs on the African continent and among African peoples in the diaspora are extensive yet are definable and quantifiable. They are the results of historic systematic pilfering of African lands, minerals, resources, and human beings. Problems are manifold and multifaceted with global implications. However, opportunities are rife with potential to empower African peoples to create solutions to African problems. Emerging trade deals and economic structures are poised to recalibrate Africa’s position in global financial markets.

During October/November 2022 on-the-ground site visits in Uganda and Zambia, BTE ministry partners observed evidence of positive local advancement as a result of BTE initiatives and financial support. BTE leaders and their communities are exercising agency as they cultivate land to create local sustainable food sources. In Uganda, six acres of agricultural land has been dedicated to BTE projects and is being developed. More trees have been planted, and gardens and agricultural projects are expanding. In

⁶⁴ Video interview with Zambian pastors as a follow-up to their Questionnaire responses, February 13, 2022.

Zambia, the chieftainess and traditional elders increased the land designated for BTE projects from 38 hectares to between 160 and 180. That is from roughly 94 acres to between 395 to 445. No doubt, this is empowering for these African communities.

CHAPTER 2:
BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

“CREATOR OF OUR LAND

O Lord, O God,
creator of our land,
our earth, the trees,
the animals and humans,
all is for your honor.
The drums beat it out,
and people sing about it,
and they dance with noisy joy
that you are the Lord.

You also have pulled the other continents out of the sea.
What a wonderful world you have made out of wet mud,
and what beautiful men and women!
We thank you for all the beauty of this earth.
The grace of your creation is like a cool day between rainy seasons.
We drink in your creation with our eyes.
We listen to the birds’ jubilee
with our ears.
How strong and good
and sure your earth smells,
and everything that grows there . . .

Prepare us for the service that we should render . . .

Ashanti, Ghana”¹

Back to Eden Ecotheology

Garden of Eden theology is the cornerstone of the Back to Eden paradigm.
Garden theology is based on the creation sequence before the fall of mankind. The

¹ Desmond Tutu, *An African Prayer Book* (New York, NY: Image/Doubleday, 2009), 59-60, Kindle.

Genesis chapters 1 and 2 Eden scene serves as “the thesis story that informs all that follows in the Scriptures.”² Bishop T. D. Jakes says, “It is the nut of the whole tree of the gospel. Everything that will ever be shared is in Genesis . . . all of the rest of the story finds its roots in the book of beginnings . . . God says, ‘Let there be light;’ Jesus is the light.”³

On the first day of creation, God said, “‘Let there be light;’ and there was light” (Gen. 1:3 NKJV). However, as Louth explains from Ephrem the Syrian, this light did not come from the sun.⁴ It was not until the fourth day that God created the lights in the firmament of the heavens: sun, moon, and stars (Gen. 1:14-19 NKJV). Augustine makes the distinction between “the light born from God” and “the light made by God. . . . The light born from God is the very Wisdom of God.”⁵ God spoke, Jesus is the Word, and Jesus is the light (John 1:1-5). On day one, God spoke, and Jesus is the light that displaced the darkness.

Jakes speaks to the heart of Garden theology as he discusses pneumatology. He details how, in creation:

. . . the Holy Spirit hovers over the waters of the deep, intimately involved, sitting on, brooding over the creative process, like a birthing to deliver the manifestation of God’s spoken Word. God speaks; His Word is called seed—semen, Adam. Adam understands who God is and who he is. The Holy Spirit hovers from Genesis to Revelation. God has never hidden his male and female attributes. He is

² Jon Huntzinger, *Trees Will Clap Their Hands: A Garden Theology* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2012), 4.

³ T. D. Jakes, “Glimpses of Jesus—Bishop T. D. Jakes,” July 15, 2021, video, 1:01 hr, at 24 min, <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=cLDYb8PhOtg>.

⁴ Andrew Louth, “Creation of the Light,” in *Genesis 1–11*, ed. Andrew Louth, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament 1 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 7.

⁵ Augustine, “The Light Born from God Distinguished from the Light Made by God,” in *Genesis 1–11*, ed. Andrew Louth, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament 1 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 7.

our Father and El Shaddai, the Breasted One. God is complete within Himself, lacking nothing—male enough to impregnate; female enough to give birth. Adam is “them;” God pulls Eve out of Adam. Adam gave the first recorded birth, as Eve came out of him. He looks at her and sees his body and his bride. They cleave to become one flesh as they were in one body. God created “them” in his image. Adam embodies an intimate Spiritual infusion as God breathes “lip to lip” into them. Everything that God does has a rhythm. God is rhythmic—man’s pulse, heartbeat, blood flow, breath. The Holy Spirit is always in motion—the rustling of the wind through the trees, the spinning of planet Earth, the movement of the sun, solar system, and waves. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit speaks as he comes like a mighty rushing heavenly wind pouring His Spirit over all flesh. He is the Spirit of truth who guides them into all truth.⁶

The lifeblood of Garden theology and Back To Eden ecotheology is man’s spirit rooted in and moving in cadence with the Holy Spirit. Adam’s spirit was in sync with the Spirit of God as the breath of life made them a living soul. In Eden, humanity moves to the beat of God’s heart and to the rhythm of His love.⁷ This is the divine connection that Adam (male/female) maintained with the Father vertically, and with each other and all of creation horizontally, before the fall. There is no separation, no division, no sin, and no disease. They are one with God, one with each other, and one with creation.

In discussing Genesis 2:7–9, Jakes says:

God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life, and he became a living soul . . . God breathed an eternal breath into a human vessel, revealing an interaction between divinity and humanity . . . [activated] by breathing into [man’s] nostrils the breath of lives (*zoe*—it is plural) . . . in the same breath He breathed Eve, and everything that would come out of them. And God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food . . . God has created this interconnected system between the celestial and terrestrial, and [man’s] body is sustained by that

⁶ T. D. Jakes, “Gleanings on Pneumatology” (lecture, Jakes Divinity School, Dallas, TX, November 16, 2020).

⁷ TRIBL, “Thank You (Feat. Steffany Gretzinger & Chandler Moore)—Maverick City—TRIBL,” March 3, 2020, music video, 7:32, at 1:58 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gVltipE0h9g>.

which is terrestrial, but [man's] spirit is sustained by that which is celestial . . . The Utopia of the Garden was self-sustaining.⁸

Jon Huntzinger summarizes Garden of Eden theology as the place of God's provision, purpose, and presence, while tracing garden themes throughout the Old and New Testaments. In Eden:

. . . humanity's most basic needs and desires are satisfied. . . . need of beauty, physical nourishment, relationship with Him, and an understanding of how to live. . . . The garden is a place of increase and the expansion of life. . . . a place of beauty, knowledge, and flourishing life that is encircled with wealth and treasure. . . . [a place of] abundant provision for aesthetic, physical, and intellectual needs of the man so that he may fulfill the grand purpose to be God's image.⁹

Huntzinger explains that God made the "first divine covenant" with Himself (Gen. 1:26–27) while bestowing purpose in Eden.¹⁰ Furthermore, God is "to be represented in creation through Adam."¹¹ Adam, then, is to be a faithful steward of Eden—to carefully nourish, cultivate, sustain, and preserve the rich resources of the garden and to maintain the divine ecological balance. Man is "to be God's image in the garden as a sub-creator" by partnering with God in "naming every living creature."¹² Adam communes with God and treasures creation as he names it, making him a priest in constant worship of God and in service to God's creation.¹³ Eden represents a place of God's presence and where man worships God, like a tabernacle, temple, or church.¹⁴ As a

⁸ Jakes, "Glimpses of Jesus," 33:25–1:06:00.

⁹ Huntzinger, 8–9.

¹⁰ Huntzinger, 13–14.

¹¹ Huntzinger, 14.

¹² Huntzinger, 11, 13–14.

¹³ Huntzinger, 9–14.

¹⁴ Huntzinger, 34, 36.

priest in the temple, Adam worships God in Eden, and Adam attends to the holy elements of creation.

God is present with Adam in the garden as “a loving presence” and as a type of “gardener, who tends to him and cultivates purpose in his life.”¹⁵ In John 15:1, Jesus identifies the Father as the gardener. “At the Garden Tomb, the risen savior was mistaken as the gardener (John 20:14–15). He is the ‘Resurrected Gardener’ . . . of God’s eternal and living presence . . . cultivating provision, purpose, and the ministry of reconciliation in the lives of his disciples.”¹⁶

Huntzinger shows that in Eden, “Adam is a social being,” living in relationship with the Father, endowed with the breath of life from the Holy Spirit, who reveals the Word. Adam lives in community with the triune Godhead and as male/female—“Only Adam and Eve, together, will display God’s image and complete His purposes.”¹⁷ Eden is restored, and Garden theology reaches its climax in New Jerusalem, where “The nations walk in the presence of God even as God intended Adam to walk with Him in the garden in the beginning and they look upon His face (Rev. 22:1–5 NIV).”¹⁸

In Eden, the earth, nature, living creatures, and mankind move in perfect harmony with the Spirit of God, in a divine ecology. The Garden of Eden provides a visual of the vertical relationship that God desires to have with mankind, as well as the horizontal relationship that man is to have with other humans and with God’s created universe or

¹⁵ Huntzinger, 15.

¹⁶ Huntzinger, 80–81.

¹⁷ Huntzinger, 14, 17.

¹⁸ Huntzinger, 104.

nature (ecothology). God creates a perfect environment for man to thrive—a place to enjoy harmony with Elohim. God makes Adam (male/female) from the ground, and they are to be caretakers of the earth from which they came. God molds them into His divine image and inscribes His Spirit on their hearts. Adam (male/female) is to be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth. God ascribes man's purpose: to name and be a steward of creation, and to preserve the divine ecological balance.¹⁹ Their God-given original identity is a direct reflection of His image and likeness. God equips and empowers mankind with agency: to be environmental guardians.

Eden is a place of divine intimacy. It is like the image of a wedding and a marriage. The community attends the wedding and enjoys the festivities. The closest family members and friends participate in the wedding. The best man and the maid of honor give speeches. The parents give away the bride. However, only the bride enters the chambers of the bridegroom. Only the bride and groom consummate the union. It is holy intimacy, a divine exchange. Eden is where the bride walks in the Garden in the cool of the day with the Beloved. It is where Jesus whispers how much He loves her. It is where Jesus tells her who she is and what she is created to do. It is where Jesus gives her His identity and His agency.

Only the Creator, the One who fashioned man in His hands, can tell man who he is. He made man (male/female) in His image and likeness, as a reflection of Himself. No one but the Creator can speak to the essence of one's identity—not family, friends, or haters. Identity is distorted by the lies of the enemy, who constantly says who one is not and what one cannot do.

¹⁹ Huntzinger, 9–14.

The first Adam is tempted in the Garden, sinned, and was ejected from Eden. By Genesis 3, Adam is exiled from Eden, which sentences creation to futility, thereby causing Adam and the ecosystems to need salvation.²⁰ Sin corrupts man's soul, grotesquely distorting his identity and obstructing her agency. Over the course of human history, mankind spirals so far from a healthy relationship with God that Jesus, the second Adam, is tempted (not in a garden, but in a desert), yet does not sin (Luke 4:1–13 NIV). Jesus gained victory over the enemy in the desert place, and He “initiates the overthrow of the effects of Adam’s disobedience in Eden.”²¹

In a second type of Garden of Eden (Gethsemane), Jesus subjected his will to the will of the Father, gaining victory over his human flesh. Huntzinger declares, “When Jesus commits to the will of his Father . . . he fulfills the original purpose of Adam.”²² Antipas Harris alludes to Garden theology, saying that Jesus accepts “his fate in the Garden of Gethsemane.”²³ The goal of Christ’s redemptive work on the cross is to restore mankind to the pre-fall Garden of Eden state. In another type of garden, “Golgotha,”²⁴ Jesus dies on a tree surrounded by nature (His creation), defeats the devil, rises from the dead, and ascends to the right hand of the Father, thereby purchasing reentry into Eden for man and creation. The completed work of Jesus on the cross, enables the restorative

²⁰ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “‘The Earth is the Lord’s’: Mainstreaming Ecological Issues in African Theology,” in *Essays on the Land, Ecotheology, and Traditions in Africa*, ed. Benjamin Abotchie Ntrel, Mark S. Aidoo, and Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2019), xix, Kindle. <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/J-Asamoah-Gyadu>. <https://henrycenter.tiu.edu/contributor/kwabena-asamoah-gyadu/>.

²¹ Huntzinger, 66.

²² Huntzinger, 75–78.

²³ Harris, *Is Christianity the White Man’s Religion?* 22–23.

²⁴ Huntzinger, 79.

process for man and creation.²⁵ Jesus is the way to Eden. Jesus is the blood-stained road Back to Eden. Jesus is the seed of righteousness who replants mankind into holy, fertile, Garden of Eden soil. Jesus restores mankind to that divine rhythmic connection with the Spirit.

Indigenous, Coptic, Orthodox African Bishop of Alexandria, Athanasius in 318 A.D.,²⁶ in his work “On the Incarnation of the Word,” asserts that “the central fact of Christian faith . . . is the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. [Jesus is] the [physical] presence of God amidst humankind, made human—that is the heart of Christianity . . .”²⁷ The incarnation also reconciles mankind back to a pre-fall, pre-sin transfigured human state, which makes human beings “capable of living in communion with the divine”²⁸ on earth in this reconciled, rehabilitated, renewed, restored, reinstated, and reestablished Garden of Eden human condition.

The redemptive work of Jesus includes creation. Reflecting on Garden theology, rooted in African spirituality and textured with ecotheology, Solomon Waigwa details that before missionaries, the indigenous people believed in a “supreme monotheistic God . . . Ngai . . . all humans are God’s children by virtue of having originated from God.”²⁹ Waigwa continues, “As the creator and Lord of the universe Ngai rules over all creation and presides over all human affairs. God’s ultimate purpose is to redeem creation and

²⁵ Huntzinger, 66, 75–79.

²⁶ Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, 172.

²⁷ Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 1, *The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (New York: Harper One, 1984), 173.

²⁸ González, 175.

²⁹ Solomon Wachira Waigwa, *The Akorino Church in Kenya: An Indigenous Original Pentecostal Church* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2018), 185.

restore it back to the relationship it had with God before the fall . . . All lands belong to Ngai, for the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, and the world, and all who live in it," so God provides land to nations as an inheritance.³⁰ The purpose is to redeem all of creation, not just man. This indigenous African Pentecostal mindset reveals a Spirit-centered, holistic, ecotheological, Edenic narrative that redeems all of creation.

The book of Genesis chapters 1-2 reveals God's original plan for humanity and the created universe. Genesis contains the word "gene" in its first four letters. The words *genesis* and *gene* come from the same root word, *ginomai*. Genesis (Strong's Greek #1078—feminine noun, "origin, birth, source, lineage, descent, genealogy, ancestry")³¹ denotes the beginning, the origin. Gene (Strong's Greek #1085 *genos*—gender neutral noun, "family, offspring, descendant, race")³² refers to the human race. *Ginomai* (Strong's Greek #1096—verb, "to come into being, to become, born, to emerge; transitioning from one point, realm, or condition to another")³³ implies the beginning, the birth, the original gene, the archetype DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid), the blueprint, or God's original design.

The program for which this dissertation is submitted is Jakes Divinity School Doctor of Ministry in Spirit-filled Global Leadership in the African Diaspora. Waigwa defines the word *diaspora*, "*dia* (across) plus *spora* (seed)," as seeds scattered across the

³⁰ Waigwa, *The Akorino Church in Kenya*, 191–192.

³¹ Bible Hub, "1078. genesis," Biblehub.com, n.p., accessed November 28, 2022, <https://biblehub.com/greek/1078.htm>.

³² Bible Hub, "1085. genos," Biblehub.com, n.p., accessed November 28, 2022, <https://biblehub.com/greek/1085.htm>.

³³ Bible Hub, "1096. ginomai," Biblehub.com, n.p., accessed November 28, 2022, <https://biblehub.com/greek/1096.htm>.

seas.³⁴ In 1 Peter 1:1 (NKJV), Peter speaks to the elect in the *diaspora* (Strong’s Greek #1290—a feminine noun, “a dispersion . . . a scattering abroad of seed by the Sower;” from two root words “*dia* meaning through and *sperma* meaning seed”).³⁵ *Dia* means “across” (Strong’s Greek #1223—a preposition, “through, on account of, because . . . throughout, across, successfully, thoroughly across to the other side”).³⁶ *Sperma* means “that which is sown” (e.g. seed, sperm; Strong’s Greek #4690—a neutral gender noun, “that which is sown, seed . . . offspring, descendants”).³⁷ And *spora* is seed (Strong’s Greek #4701—a female noun, “a sowing, by implication a seed.”)³⁸ Jakes refers to God’s Word as “seed, semen.”³⁹

Diaspora is a sowing or scattering of seed, *sperma*, semen, gene, *genos*, *ginomai* throughout the world. A seed or gene carries the DNA of an organism. Sarah Bates reports that “the DNA from any two people is 99.9% identical, with that shared blueprint guiding our development and forming a common thread across the world. The differing 0.1% contains variations that influence our uniqueness, which when combined with our environmental and social contexts give us our abilities, our health, our behavior.”⁴⁰

³⁴ Solomon Waigwa, “Rethinking the Role of a Doctor of the Church” (lecture, Jakes Divinity School, at Cape Town, South Africa, October 18, 2022).

³⁵ Bible Hub, “1290. diaspora,” Biblehub.com, n.p., accessed November 28, 2022, <https://biblehub.com/greek/1290.htm>.

³⁶ Bible Hub, “1223. dia,” Biblehub.com, n.p., accessed November 28, 2022, <https://biblehub.com/greek/1223.htm>.

³⁷ Bible Hub, “4690. sperma,” Biblehub.com, n.p., accessed November 28, 2022, <https://biblehub.com/greek/4690.htm>.

³⁸ Bible Hub, “4701. spora,” Biblehub.com, n.p., accessed November 28, 2022, <https://biblehub.com/greek/4701.htm>.

³⁹ Jakes, “Gleanings on Pneumatology,” n.p.

⁴⁰ Sarah A. Bates, “Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA),” National Human Genome Research Institute, n.p., last modified May 10, 2022, <https://www.genome.gov/genetics-glossary/Deoxyribonucleic-Acid>.

God made Adam in His image and likeness, and He placed them in community with Himself, each other, and an ecological paradise, Eden. Humanity originated in Adam, and DNA reveals that Adam's common human blueprint remains 99.9% the same today. Throughout history, humanity has been scattered across the globe and has been replanted in foreign soil, in some cases, for thousands of years. Nevertheless, the genetic composition that God placed in Adam remains fundamentally unchanged.

Peter reminds "that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:17-19 NKJV). *DNA* is in the blood. Jesus literally spilled His *DNA*, His *seed*, to redeem humanity. The incorruptible *seed* is the very *DNA* of Jesus. Jesus is the *Seed*, the incarnate *Word* of God. He is the living active *Word* of God through whom the universe was created (John 1:1-3). The power of the *Word* spoke creation into existence.

The original Adam sinned, causing both humanity and creation to be corrupted. The ecological universe is sacred because the Most-High Holy God created it in the beginning. Therefore, the Father sacrificed his only begotten son not only to restore humanity, but to redeem creation. The incorruptible *seed*, Jesus, redeems all of creation. "For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility The creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now" (Rom. 8:19-22 NKJV). Therefore, those born of the incorruptible *seed* have an ecological mandate to esteem both humanity and creation as the Father does. Obeying the truth in the Spirit requires being environmental curators. Creation is waiting for the sons,

daughters, heirs, and stewards of the Kingdom of God to return to their originally intended purpose as ecological stewards of creation, and to exercise agency as caretakers of mother earth. God created Adam, the original *gene*, the human prototype. Through this one original *DNA* came all of humanity. Likewise, through one, the *DNA* of Jesus, humanity and creation are redeemed.

Ubuntu (Community)

“We say in our African idiom: ‘A person is a person through other persons.’ A solitary human being is a contradiction in terms. A totally self-sufficient human being is ultimately subhuman.”⁴¹ Desmond Tutu

South African Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu explains, “Adam was having the time of his life in the Garden of Eden. He enjoyed his work as the primal gardener. The animals loved him and lived in an idyllic, undisturbed harmony. . . . [Yet,] God said, ‘It is not good for man to be alone.’”⁴² Therefore, out of Adam’s body, God formed female. “This beautiful story tells a fundamental truth about us—that we are made to live in a delicate network of interdependence with one another, with God and with the rest of God's creation.”⁴³

Professor Michael Battle, a former adjutant to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, not only draws upon “the great volume and scope of Tutu’s writings” but also upon his personal interactions with Tutu during “communal activities” while “identifying the

⁴¹ Tutu, *An African Prayer Book*, Introduction. Kindle.

⁴² Tutu, *An African Prayer Book*, Introduction. Kindle.

⁴³ Tutu, *An African Prayer Book*, Introduction. Kindle.

living tissues of his theology.”⁴⁴ Ubuntu theology is presented within the historical context of Apartheid South Africa, and it challenges European theologies that promote racial segregation based on white supremacist beliefs. Tutu embraces the “African concept of community” as a correction to Western theologies that focus on individualism.⁴⁵ Ubuntu emphasizes humanity created in the image of God, *Imago Dei*.⁴⁶ “Ubuntu as life in relation to God and neighbor, nourished by worship, manifests the church’s integrity to show a hostile society a better way”⁴⁷

Battle explains that “*Ubuntu* is the plural form of the African word *bantu*” which identifies “a similar linguistic bond among African speakers. . . . It is from a “proverbial Xhosa expression.”⁴⁸ Tutu describes the African worldview accordingly, “*Ubuntu* means ‘humanity’ . . . [and] each individual’s humanity is ideally expressed in relationship with others,” much like the concepts of “ujamaa in Tanzania and harambee in Kenya.”⁴⁹ Someone with *Ubuntu* “cares about the deepest needs of others and faithfully observes all social obligations. . . . [and] is conscious not only of personal rights but also of duties to her or his neighbor.”⁵⁰ “Only by means of absolute dependence on God and neighbor—including blacks and whites—can true human identity be discovered. . . . such human

⁴⁴ Michael Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1997), xi-xii.

⁴⁵ Battle, 4-5.

⁴⁶ Battle, 4-5.

⁴⁷ Battle, 9.

⁴⁸ Battle, 39.

⁴⁹ Battle, 39-40.

⁵⁰ Battle, 39.

interdependence is built into our very creation by our being created in God's image, our common Imago Dei."⁵¹

Nontombi Tutu, Archbishop Tutu's daughter, writes that one cannot "try and understand Desmond Tutu unless you recognised how fundamental his faith and his African identity are to who he is, and how he has lived."⁵² She explains, "It was always important for my father that we know that our faith was not something that corrected our Africanness."⁵³ It was his "significant contention" that "God did not need us to try and become Western in order to be fully Christian."⁵⁴ Missionaries, the church, and colonial governments taught that "becoming Christian meant doing away with our African identity" and turning "our backs on a large part of our culture," falsely claiming that "one could not be a good Christian and still hold on to a full African identity."⁵⁵ European names were said to be Christian names. African names were forbidden in church and workplaces, while European names were required.⁵⁶ European instruments and styles of worship were taught to be Christian, while African drums, musical instruments, and expressive worship were not considered to be "pleasing to the Lord."⁵⁷ She quotes Archbishop Tutu, "They would have us believe that God created this whole continent of

⁵¹ Battle, 39-40.

⁵² Nontombi Tutu, "Ubuntu and Imago Dei," in *Ecumenical Encounters with Desmond Mpilo Tutu: Visions for Justice, Dignity and Peace*, ed. Sarojini Nadar, Tinyiko Maluleke, Dietrich Werner, Vicentia Kgabe, and Rudolf Hinz, Regnum Studies in Mission (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2021), 162.

⁵³ N. Tutu, 162.

⁵⁴ N. Tutu, 162.

⁵⁵ N. Tutu, 162.

⁵⁶ N. Tutu, 162.

⁵⁷ N. Tutu, 162.

Africa then turned around and forgot all about the people and created order here. That not until white people came did we have a relationship with God. This is a lie.”⁵⁸ He affirmed “that God did not make mistakes, that God made us African because he wanted us to be African, and God desired us to praise God as Africans.”⁵⁹

The church incorrectly taught that African traditional rites of passage ceremonies, like funerals, mourning, weddings, etc., were about ancestor worship, which is not part of Christian faith. Archbishop Tutu asserted that these practices are important parts of African culture which “have historically marked significant life events” that “tied us to the stories of our heritage and our faith” and “connected our lives to the larger created order and therefore to God.”⁶⁰ Archbishop Tutu makes it clear that these rites of passage do not involve ancestor worship. How are these cultural traditions different from the example in the Hebrews 11 Hall of Faith? The lives of these Hebrew ancestors are remembered and celebrated as living epistles of faith in action. Likewise, faithful African ancestors who lived exemplary lives are worthy of being recognized and honored.

Nontombi Tutu stresses that the bedrock of Archbishop Tutu’s faith and way of living life is the cultural and theological belief systems of “*Ubuntu and Imago Dei*.”⁶¹ “It is in these two concepts that my father’s Christian faith and African identity are most clearly seen.”⁶² N. Tutu goes on, “It was always clear to him that the concept of *Ubuntu*

⁵⁸ N. Tutu, 162.

⁵⁹ N. Tutu, 162.

⁶⁰ N. Tutu, 162-163.

⁶¹ N. Tutu, 163.

⁶² N. Tutu, 163.

was a companion piece to the centrality of *Imago Dei* in our Christian belief system.”⁶³

Indeed, “Both ideas teach that our connection to one another as human beings is of utmost importance to our culture on the one hand and our faith on the other.”⁶⁴

Desmond Tutu taught his children to “look for God in all whom we encounter and to live our lives governed by Ubuntu.”⁶⁵ They were instructed to “be people with Ubuntu” and to respect human worth and dignity because each person is a God-bearer; each is “the image of God.”⁶⁶ In Desmond Tutu’s Xhosa culture:

. . . someone who has *Ubuntu* is a person not only to be emulated and admired, but is also to be recognized as one who is fully human in the best meaning of that term. One cannot be fully human and refuse to acknowledge the humanity of others. So the person who does not have *Ubuntu* is actually to be pitied because they have cut themselves off from some aspect of their own humanity. This is also the measure of a true Christian, one who recognises the fully created image of God in others, and treats them with dignity and respect for that reason if for no other reason.⁶⁷

N. Tutu declares that “discrimination against people based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity is not just wrong, it is sin. It is possibly the very worst sin that we can contemplate, because it is what leads to the abuse of some of God’s children. But it is not just the physical violence that comes from discrimination that goes against God’s plans for humankind. For my father it is the very act of behaving as though

⁶³ N. Tutu, 163.

⁶⁴ N. Tutu, 163.

⁶⁵ N. Tutu, 163.

⁶⁶ N. Tutu, 163.

⁶⁷ N. Tutu, 163.

anyone is less than a child of God.”⁶⁸ She believes, “That is the true sin, and it is that sin that both Ubuntu and the recognition of Imago Dei call out.”⁶⁹

The root sin is the failure to recognize and honor the image of God in each human being, especially in those whom one perceives as *other* or as an enemy of God. This sin produces the belief that a person, race, or group of people is somehow less human and, therefore, is not worthy of being treated as equals, loved, respected, or treated with kindness. This sinful root, *deeply-seeded* in the hearts of mankind, yields the poisonous fruits of white supremacy, anti-Blackness, Black self-hatred, neo-Nazism, antisemitism, hate against Asians, hate against LGBTQ, hate of *otherness*, etc. Such belief systems lead to spiritual and physical separation from those considered to be *others*. Discrimination against *others* often leads to violence, which can be mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual. Even if a person is living what some consider a sinful lifestyle, that person is still worthy of being loved as a child of God, made in God’s image. *Ubuntu* requires that each human being be loved and valued as a member of the family of God, regardless of current lifestyle or religious affiliation. After all, “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8 NIV).

Consistent with the concepts of *Imago Dei* and *Ubuntu*, Jack Hayford teaches the requirement to love people to life. “Love is the very nature of God.”⁷⁰ God created humanity in His image with His nature, which includes the capacity to love as God loves.

⁶⁸ N. Tutu, 163.

⁶⁹ N. Tutu, 163.

⁷⁰ Jack Hayford, “The Power of Love,” Jack Hayford Ministries, 2011, n.p., <https://www.jackhayford.org/teaching/articles/the-power-of-love/>.

When one is filled with the Holy Spirit, one has “The Power of Love.”⁷¹ God’s “love reminds us that God values each one of us.”⁷² God does not love any person, race, or community more or less than another. Hayford echoes the essence of Ubuntu: “God desires that His power be manifested through us as we live out His love toward one another—in graciousness, in gentleness, in unselfish consideration for others, and in forgiveness toward those who have been unloving to us.”⁷³ The power of love activates the ability to live a life governed by Ubuntu.

N. Tutu proclaims that “compassion for others is the central tenant of an identity that is both African and Christian.”⁷⁴ Even when dealing with members of the apartheid government who were guilty of unspeakable crimes against humanity, Desmond Tutu treated them as “his brothers,” as “fellow human beings made in God’s image,” despite the fact that they were not living as such.⁷⁵ *Imago Dei* and *Ubuntu* are more than theological, cultural, and biblical concepts—they are the lived experiences of Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

The most essential element of African views of man is that he is a communal being. In community, he experiences childhood, puberty, rites of passage, marriage, procreation, and death. He is not alone; whatever happens to one happens to all. Dr. John S. Mbiti (considered the father of African theology) explains:

In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. . . . He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore

⁷¹ Hayford, n.p.

⁷² Hayford, n.p.

⁷³ Hayford, n.p.

⁷⁴ N. Tutu, 164.

⁷⁵ N. Tutu, 164.

make, create or produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group. . . . Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges and responsibilities towards himself and towards other people. . . . Just as God made the first man, as God's man, so now man himself makes the individual who becomes the corporate or social man. It is a deeply religious transaction.⁷⁶

Traditional African worldviews are less concerned about personal freedom and individual liberty and are more focused on personal roles and individual responsibilities to the community. Harris stresses this foundational African truth:

African ubuntu philosophy teaches that human beings are born out of community and sent to community. The foundational ubuntu principle is "I am because we are." This means that human identity is communal. When others remind us of our worth, they remind us that our identity is inextricably bound up in community. Apart from the community, one can neither know who he or she is, nor can one understand his or her worth.⁷⁷

At creation, God said that it was not good for man to be alone, so He created woman—family. Man cannot reflect the full character of God alone but only in community, male and female. This is the proper horizontal relationship in Eden; a community that nurtures individuals to be one with each other and one with God.

Mbiti articulates a profoundly intricate community structure that plants African identity deeply in a shared sense of kinship and family. An African nation is made up of many tribes, which include several clans, sub-clans, and families. Tribes share the same language, history, customs, key founders, and religious system; one is born into a tribe and cannot change tribal membership.⁷⁸ The kinship system binds together the entire life of people within a tribe and by marriage to a person from another tribe. "Everybody is

⁷⁶ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999), 106. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/24/world/africa/john-mbiti-dead.html>.

⁷⁷ Harris, *Is Christianity the White Man's Religion?*, 53.

⁷⁸ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 98–101.

related to everybody else” in a horizontal, interconnected, multigenerational, extended community, and is related “vertically to the departed and those yet to be born.”⁷⁹

Iain MacRobert reports that the earliest, precolonial African Traditional Religions (ATRs), from over a thousand African ethnolinguistic communities, shared “a common theological perspective and worldview.”⁸⁰ They were monotheistic, communal, and wholistic. MacRobert continues:

Unlike Western Protestantism [ATRs were] not individualistic but social; not so concerned with an individual’s relationship with God as with the interrelationships between God, the spirits, the ancestors and the community: “a person is only a human being in relation to other people.” African primal [ancient] religion was anthropocentric and ontological. . . . the ethnic community was the worshipping community and religion was concerned not simply with the “soul” but with the whole of life and existence.⁸¹

Furthermore, MacRobert delineates, “The native religions of West and Central Africa had a single dominating characteristic . . . a profound belief that both the individual and the community had a continuous involvement with the spirit world in the practical affairs of daily life.”⁸² The individual was intertwined with the community and related to God, creation, and the spirit world as a part of that community. Salvation was not just for an individual but for the community. An individual cannot have a holy vertical relationship with God unless he has a holy horizontal relationship with the community and nature.

⁷⁹ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 102–103.

⁸⁰ Iain MacRobert, *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 13.

⁸¹ MacRobert, 12.

⁸² MacRobert, 12.

Ecotheology

“If you destroy the forest then the river will stop flowing, the rains will become irregular, the crops will fail and you will die of hunger and starvation.”

Professor Wangari Maathai⁸³

“When we plant trees, we plant the seeds of peace and hope.” Maathai⁸⁴

Ecological theology is anchored in foundational biblical truth that reveals God’s original intention for humanity and creation. It is more than just reimagining ways to stop abusing the environment. It reexamines and critiques Christian doctrine, cultural ideologies, traditions, and religious practices related to humanity’s responsibility to God’s created universe.

Garden theology pervades African spirituality, which is rooted in a profound reverence for nature that encapsulates contemporary ideas of ecotheology. There is congruency between many African understandings of humanity’s role as stewards of God’s divine creation and ecological theology. Adam’s Edenic relationship with God, community, and creation is foundational to various African worldviews. An essential ethic of Back to Eden ecotheology is mankind’s divine responsibility to the created universe, which reflects the basic premise of ecotheology.

The writer is not an expert in ecotheology, nor has she conducted broad research in this area. Extensive research on the field of ecological theology is beyond the scope of this dissertation. The purpose of this document is to discuss and to integrate practical,

⁸³ Wangari Maathai, “Tree Planting and Water Harvesting,” The Green Belt Movement, accessed July 10, 2021, n.p., <https://www.greenbeltmovement.org/what-we-do/tree-planting-for-watersheds>.

⁸⁴ Wangari Maathai, “Home,” The Green Belt Movement, accessed July 10, 2021, n.p., <https://www.greenbeltmovement.org/>.

traditional African worldviews that reflect themes of ecotheology. Ancient indigenous ideologies regarding the sacredness of creation and humanity's responsibility to nurture the environment are consistent with ecotheology.

South African scholar Ernst Conradie, University of the Western Cape, provides a comprehensive definition of ecotheology:

Ecological theology is an attempt to retrieve the ecological wisdom in Christianity as a response to environmental threats and injustices. At the same time, it is an attempt to reinvestigate, rediscover and renew the Christian tradition in the light of the challenges posed by the environmental crisis... Ecological theologies offer a Christian critique of the cultural habits underlying ecological destruction and an ecological critique of Christianity. In other words, ecological theology is not only concerned with how Christianity can respond to environmental concerns; it also offers Christianity an opportunity for renewal and reformation... An ecological ethos touches on virtually all aspects of life and has implications for all ethical sub-disciplines (e.g. social, political, economic, business, medical, sexual, or personal ethics). Moreover, ecological theology is not only concerned with ethics but also with Christian doctrine. It is not narrowly focused on a reinterpretation of creation theology, but calls for a review of all aspects of the Christian faith – the trinity, God as Father, creation, humanity, sin, providence, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, salvation, the church, the sacraments and Christian hope... the entire life and praxis of the church should include an ecological dimension and vision.⁸⁵

Conradie presents a research guide that introduces scholarly contributors to the field of ecotheology that offers a

wealth of literature which has emerged from around the world. This constitutes a rich mosaic of cultures, languages, local contexts, bioregions, gender perspectives and theological traditions, etc. Indigenous ecological theologies have emerged in numerous local contexts, often reflecting the geography, topography and demographics of such a context. The aim of this research guide is...to provide...a brief orientation...an advanced introduction to this literature, something like an extensive bibliographic essay[.] [The goal is] to provide a 'map' to organise various aspects of the debates...to provide some direction for further research...

⁸⁵ Ernst M. Conradie, *Christianity and Ecological Theology: Resources for Further Research*, Study Guides in Religion and Theology 11 (Stellenbosch, S. Africa: Sun Press, 2006), 3-4, <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=qOQNAwAAQBAJ&hl=en&pg=GBS.PP1>.
<http://repository.uwc.ac.za/xmlui/handle/10566/2170>.

that would not be a repetition of the myriad of existing contributions to the field of ecological theology.”⁸⁶

Harris refers to ecotheology when he says, “Nature is central to the biblical narrative and salvation story. Genesis chapters 1 through 3 begin the Bible with a nature-centered spiritual environment in which God communed with humanity.” Additionally, “Jesus . . . accepted his fate in the garden of Gethsemane. . . . He carried a tree trunk up a hill. His funeral was in Golgotha, where he hung on a tree in an open field.”⁸⁷ Also, Jesus was buried in a Garden Tomb where, after three days, He rose from the dead and was mistaken as the gardener (John 20:14–15).

African spirituality provides some answers that Christianity seeks in contemporary discussions of ecotheology. J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu submits from Romans:

“For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to the decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:19–23). . . . both creation and humanity groan for existential and eschatological redemption. We cannot talk about salvation without being holistic in our thinking.⁸⁸

Asamoah-Gyadu provides African wisdom on this topic, explaining that in “African worldviews . . . the custodianship of the ecosystems . . . lies in the hands of transcendent beings,” which is “given by the Supreme Being and entrusted to humanity

⁸⁶ Conradie, *Christianity and Ecological Theology: Resources for Further Research*, 5.

⁸⁷ Harris, *Is Christianity the White Man’s Religion?*, 23.

⁸⁸ Asamoah-Gyadu, xix.

by the ancestors who previously served as its custodians.”⁸⁹ He also submits, “The human being and communities are in kinship with nature because humanity is sustained by nature’s bounty. . . . We eke out our living from the natural resources of Mother Earth.”⁹⁰

Asamoah-Gyadu goes on to expound:

In African ethical understanding, the earth is given to humanity as a gratuitous gift and all human beings possess an equal claim to it and the resources it offers. What this means is that any individual can only hold land in trust for one’s descendants on behalf of the clan or ethnic group. Water sources, mineral resources, and forests are, in principle, public property. They are communally owned and have to be cared for and used as such.⁹¹

Asamoah-Gyadu declares:

Mother Earth . . . is the center of many a traditional celebration because she is the one who mothers the community by providing the means of economic sustenance. . . . [T]he earth is . . . the soil that feeds the child through its lifetime and so the earth is the most sacred thing above all that dwell in or on it. In most communities therefore, Mother Earth has sacred days on which no tilling is to be done on it. This is to avoid desacralization through overexploitation.⁹²

As mentioned in the Glossary, God is the Creator; the earth is created matter. In no way does this document deify or advocate worshiping, or praying to, mother earth.

Asamoah-Gyadu uses the term in African Christian cultural contexts. In this document, lower case “mother earth” is used to respect and echo African Christian cultural terminology and to emphasize the indigenous African ethos of ecological stewardship. It is a way of honoring the invaluable significance and role of the earth to the life and sustenance of humanity.

⁸⁹ Asamoah-Gyadu, xii.

⁹⁰ Asamoah-Gyadu, xv.

⁹¹ Asamoah-Gyadu, xv–xvi.

⁹² Asamoah-Gyadu, xvi.

The use of the word “sacred” in reference to mother earth is not necessarily an attempt to deify it. The word “sacred” commonly denotes something that is set aside, consecrated, or dedicated for use in worship of God. The creation sequence uses birthing imagery. In the beginning, God creates earth, and at the power of his Word (seed, semen), the earth (like a birthing mother) brings forth vegetation, plants, and fruit trees (Gen. 1:1, 1:11-13 ESV). God forms man out of soil, the dust of the ground, then breathes into him the breath of life (Gen. 2:7 ESV). God creates earth, and at His word, earth (like a mother) births ecological features. Organic matter from earth’s body is used to form man. Like a sacred, consecrated element, God places earth in service to mold man, birth foliage, to nourish humanity during life, and to bury mankind upon death. Therefore, humanity should respect and highly value the earth, from which mankind was formed. A holy God sanctifies earth for his service. Likewise, those born of the Spirit of God should esteem the earth, and carefully protect it.

Asamoah-Gyadu posits that “it should be impossible to study theology in Africa without due attention to the environment. . . . This calls us to engage in a new African theology of salvation that not only encapsulates salvation from sin with its eschatological implications, but which also takes the redemption of our ecosystems seriously.”⁹³

Kenyan founding father and first democratically elected president, Jomo Kenyatta, reports that land in Kenya was not solely owned by the community (as Asamoah-Gyadu says above) but that Kikuyu respected individual land rights within the community. Kenyatta reports, “According to the Gikuyu customary law of land tenure every family unit had a land right of one form or another. While the whole tribe defended

⁹³ Asamoah-Gyadu, xviii–xix.

collectively the boundary of their territory.”⁹⁴ Additionally, “Every inch of the Gikuyu territory had its owner, with the boundary properly fixed and everyone respecting his neighbor’s”⁹⁵ Therefore:

The sense of private property vested in the family was highly developed among the Gikuyu [and] . . . it was a man’s pride to own a property and his enjoyment to allow collective use of such property. This sense of hospitality which facilitated the communal use of almost everything, has been mistaken by the Europeans who misinterpreted it by saying that the land was under communal or tribal ownership, and as such the land must be . . . Government property. . . . The British Government began to drive away the original owners of land.⁹⁶

Kenyatta points out that land “is the key to the people’s life; it secures for them that peaceful tillage of the soil which supplies their material needs.”⁹⁷ Indeed, “The Gikuyu consider the earth as the ‘mother’ of the tribe the soil . . . feeds the child through lifetime Thus the earth is the most sacred thing above all that dwell in or on it.”⁹⁸ An African relationship with land is a sacred connection with God, who created the earth. This relationship acknowledges and honors the truth that God created mankind from mother earth, and that it is earth that sustains human life. Therefore, it is critical to place the responsibility to be faithful stewards of mother earth above individual, corporate, and political desires.

Kenyatta recounts a tribal legend (a form of African oral tradition). In the beginning, Mogai (Lord of nature) called Gikuyu (founder of the tribe) and gave him “his

⁹⁴ Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 22.

⁹⁵ Kenyatta, 26.

⁹⁶ Kenyatta, 27.

⁹⁷ Kenyatta, xxi.

⁹⁸ Kenyatta, 22.

share of land with ravines, the rivers, the forests, the game and all the gifts that . . . (Mogai) bestowed on mankind.”⁹⁹ Then, Mogai made Mount Kenya “as his resting-place . . . and as a sign of his wonders. . . . He then took the man Gikuyu to the top of the mountain . . . and showed him the beauty of the country that Mogai had given him. . . . Mogai pointed out . . . a spot full of fig trees, right in the centre of the country.”¹⁰⁰ When Gikuyu “reached the spot, he found that . . . Mogai had provided him with a beautiful wife Both lived happily.”¹⁰¹ This narrative reveals a spiritual reverence for God and his created universe. It recounts an intimate vertical relationship with God and balanced horizontal relationships—joyful male/female and perfect ecological harmony. Elements of this Gikuyu creation story resemble the biblical Garden of Eden sequence.

First democratically elected South African President Nelson Mandela’s childhood experiences reveal insights into a mutually interdependent Xhosa community based on respect for each member, a high esteem for nature, and reliance on the land. Mandela’s childhood village of “Qunu was a village of women and children: most of the men spent the greater part of the year working on remote farms or in the mines They returned perhaps twice a year, mainly to plow their fields. The hoeing, weeding, and harvesting were left to the women and children.”¹⁰² Mandela explains, “The land itself was owned by the state. . . . Africans at the time did not enjoy private title to land in South Africa but

⁹⁹ Kenyatta, 5.

¹⁰⁰ Kenyatta, 5.

¹⁰¹ Kenyatta, 5-6.

¹⁰² Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1994), 7.

were tenants paying rent annually to the government.”¹⁰³ Historically, Europeans appropriated land from Indigenous South Africans, and employment opportunities were far from ancestral rural areas, which separated men from their families.

Mandela’s “mother presided over three huts . . . one was used for cooking, one for sleeping, and one for storage.”¹⁰⁴ He writes that maize (“mealies”) and “sorghum, beans, and pumpkins formed the largest portion of our diet.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, “Everything we ate we grew and made ourselves. My mother planted and harvested her own mealies. . . milk from our cows and goats was always plentiful.”¹⁰⁶ At age five, Mandela became “a herd-boy, looking after sheep and calves in the fields.”¹⁰⁷ Xhosa view cattle “as a blessing from God and a source of happiness,” a “source of food and wealth.”¹⁰⁸

Mandela spent most of his “free time in the veld playing and fighting with the other boys of the village”—then at night he shared his “food and blanket with these same boys.”¹⁰⁹ He reminisces: “It was in the fields that I learned how to knock birds out of the sky with a slingshot, to gather wild honey and fruits and edible roots, to drink warm, sweet milk straight from the udder of a cow, to swim in the clear, cold streams, and to catch fish with twine and sharpened bits of wire.”¹¹⁰ He continues, “From these days I

¹⁰³ Mandela, 8.

¹⁰⁴ Mandela, 8-9.

¹⁰⁵ Mandela, 8.

¹⁰⁶ Mandela, 9.

¹⁰⁷ Mandela, 9.

¹⁰⁸ Mandela, 9.

¹⁰⁹ Mandela, 9.

¹¹⁰ Mandela, 9.

date my love of the veld, of open spaces, the simple beauties of nature, the clean line of the horizon. . . . Nature was our playground.”¹¹¹ Xhosas depended on land, nature, and community to thrive.

Mandela likely replayed these fond childhood memories in his head while imprisoned for twenty-seven years in South Africa for demanding human and political rights for Indigenous South Africans. Eighteen of those years were spent on Robben Island. During a Jakes Divinity School Advance in Cape Town, South Africa, on October 24, 2022, cohort one visited Robben Island. Plaques in section B courtyard report that prisoners created the courtyard and planted a garden, which once yielded “grapes, peaches, vegetables and flowers” (see Appendix B). One sign says that a prisoner planted an apple tree, and that “by late 1975, they had raised 2000 chilis, nearly 1000 tomatoes, a few radishes, onions and sweet melons and two watermelons” (see Appendix B). Grapevines were still growing there (see Appendix B). A plaque in that Robben Island prisoner courtyard garden entitled “A Taste of Freedom” epitomizes Back to Eden practical ecotheology. It quotes Nelson Mandela, “To plant a seed, watch it grow, to tend it and then harvest it, offered a simple but enduring satisfaction. The sense of being the custodian of this small patch of earth offered a taste of freedom” (see Appendix B). Even while physically incarcerated, Mandela’s soul and spirit experienced freedom and personal agency while participating in God’s original intent for mankind—tending to garden soil as an ecological steward of the earth.

It is likely that Mandela translated lessons from the garden to his leadership approach, based on the following quotation. A sign in the prison garden labeled “The

¹¹¹ Mandela, 9-10.

Gardener” quotes Mandela saying, “Like the gardener, a leader must take responsibility for what he cultivates; he must mind his work, try to repel enemies, preserve what can be preserved, and eliminate what cannot succeed” (see Appendix B). This is sage wisdom for Doctor of Ministry Students—Global Leaders on the verge of graduating.

Dr. Wangari Maathai was the founder of the Green Belt Movement (GBM), an environmental conservation advocacy organization that works to combat the negative impact of climate change, by planting one tree at a time. Since 1977 the GBM has “planted over 51 million trees in Kenya.”¹¹² Maathai was the first East African woman to earn a PhD. Additionally, she was the first African woman and the first environmentalist awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 for her work with the GBM. She championed ecologically sustainable, social, economic, and culturally viable development in Kenya and in Africa. The Nobel committee honored her

holistic approach to sustainable development that embraces democracy, human rights and women’s rights in particular. She thinks globally and acts locally.” In accepting the award . . . Maathai said: “I believe the Nobel committee was sending a message that protecting and restoring the environment contributes to peace; it is peace work. . . . I always felt that our work was not simply about planting trees. It was about inspiring people to take charge of their environment, the system that governed them, their lives, and their future.”¹¹³

Maathai called out selfish, individualistic, corrupt mindsets and consciousness that devalued women and the environment. She led peaceful protests, hunger strikes, and movements to restore God’s divine ecological order as she experienced it in her

¹¹² Maathai, “Tree Planting and Water Harvesting,” n.p.,

¹¹³ Green Belt Movement, “Wangari Maathai,” The Green Belt Movement, accessed July 10, 2021, n.p., <https://www.greenbeltmovement.org/wangari-maathai>; Green Belt Movement, “Biography,” The Green Belt Movement, accessed July 10, 2021, n.p., <https://www.greenbeltmovement.org/wangari-maathai/biography>; Green Belt Movement, “The Nobel Peace Prize,” The Green Belt Movement, accessed July 10, 2021, n.p., <https://www.greenbeltmovement.org/wangari-maathai/the-nobel-peace-prize>.

childhood. She was a repairer of the breach, a restorer of equality, and one who reclaimed a Godly ecological world order.

Maathai modeled “The African philosophical framework of Maat, and the principle of *serudj-ta* (repairing, renewing and restoring the world)” which is a core element of Maat.¹¹⁴ Jennifer Lara Simka Kushner explains, “Maat can be sourced to ancient Africa in the area originally known as Kemet, now Egypt . . . [and it] is rooted in holism rather than duality, and thus speaks to the interconnectedness of nature, humans, and the divine. . . . [A] key principle of Maat is an understanding of spirit-matter unity.”¹¹⁵ Kushner quotes: “This idea of Ma’at is the idea of justice not merely in legal terms but in terms of the proper relationship between a human person and the universe, between the person and nature, between the person and another person. (Asante 1990, 90).”¹¹⁶ This aligns with the biblical example in Genesis chapters 1-2 where Adam (male/female) lived in a righteous, sinless relationship with God, in a balanced healthy male-female union, and in ecological kinship with creation. In Eden, there was no abuse of the environment, no disharmony among the animals, and no strife between male and female. There was a Divine wholeness and an interconnectedness among the Creator, humanity, and ecosystems. Spirit, flesh, and created matter existed in unity and wholeness.

¹¹⁴ Jennifer Lara Simka Kushner, “Righteous Commitment: Renewing, Repairing, and Restoring the World—Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Movement” (EdD diss., National-Louis University, 2009), 5, <https://digitalcommons.nl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1023&context=diss>.

¹¹⁵ Kushner, 78.

¹¹⁶ Kushner, 79.

Even before earning advanced degrees in biology and anatomy, Maathai was compelled by her deeply-rooted intuitive understanding of the interconnectedness of humanity with the environment based on oral traditions taught during her childhood. Kushner quotes Maathai as saying, “Because Kikuyu culture was oral, refined methods had been developed of passing knowledge to, and shaping the values of, future generations through, among other activities, stories.”¹¹⁷ Kushner reports, “The worldview reflected and taught through Kikuyu stories portrayed relationships between humans and nature as reciprocal.”¹¹⁸ As an educator, Maathai brought “people back to their indigenous knowledge base, which had provided for sustainable management of the environment for centuries.”¹¹⁹ She emphasized how “a belief that relationships between humans and nature are *not* reciprocal will lead to the destruction of both.”¹²⁰ Maathai’s childhood story about a fig tree captures the essence of such human-nature reciprocity, and the concept of Maat, in an African oral storytelling tradition:

Her mother said this fig tree was sacred; it was a tree of God. Everyone in the community considered this tree sacred. Near the tree there was a stream, with clear, clean water that ran abundantly. As a child she would play in the water, looking at frog eggs and tadpoles. She did not know at the time of the intimate biophysical relationship between fig trees and water—their roots draw water up to the surface. She only knew that the two existed together and that the tree was sacred. . . . [Years later, she] returned to the site of this tree and stream, only to find it replaced by a church. The tree had been cut down and the stream had dried up.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Kushner, 84.

¹¹⁸ Kushner, 84.

¹¹⁹ Kushner, 84.

¹²⁰ Kushner, 84.

¹²¹ Kushner, 88-89.

This story shows the intrinsic capacity of African oral traditions to instill spiritual wisdom. Specifically, this story reveals the complex ecotheological concepts of human-nature reciprocity and the three-way interconnectedness of the Divine, mankind, and creation. This form of African oral narrative imparts an understanding of such profound doctrine into the hearts of children. Prior to written history, African culture and thousands of years of tradition were preserved in rich oral methodologies—stories, parables, proverbs, narrations, songs, dances, poems, rhythms, chants, plays, theatrical performances, etc. Likewise, Jesus was the master storyteller. He shared parables to explain deep theological concepts, using common examples the entire community could understand. Maathai

tells this story to illustrate the power of culturally grounded knowledge, and in particular, the significance of a traditional African worldview . . . in which there is a connection between nature, humans, and the divine. In talking about the destruction of the sacred fig tree she makes the link between the worldview one holds and the way a person is in relationship with her world. She suggests her traditional African (Kikuyu) worldview respects the three-way relationship between nature, humans, and the divine and that this worldview is what had protected the environment for so many centuries. . . . Conversely, the worldview of the Europeans (British) did not value reciprocity between humans and nature, which in turn led to exploitation and destruction of the environment.¹²²

Maathai points out that the de-centering of African people from their worldview that is harmonious, non-exploitive, and reciprocal can literally kill them as the natural resources needed to sustain life (such as water), go away. “Culture is coded with wisdom, wisdom that has been accumulated over thousands of years and generations. Coded in our songs, dances, and values . . . there was something in our people that helped them preserve those forests. They were not looking at trees and seeing timber . . . All people have their own culture. And when you take that culture away from them you kill them in a way. (Merton and Dater 2008).”¹²³

¹²² Kushner, 89.

¹²³ Kushner, 89.

Jakes Divinity School sells a sweatshirt that says, “Theology Matters.” This is a prime example of that truth. What a person believes and what a culture teaches about God, humanity, and God’s creation matters—it informs behavior.

Genesis reveals God’s original purpose for humanity, “Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground’” (Gen. 1:26 NIV). How a person interprets the word “rule” in this verse matters. Some other Bible versions instead of the word “rule” use: “reign” (NLT), “have dominion” (KJV, ASV, ESV), “have power over” (GNT), “be masters over” (ISV), “have complete authority” (AMP).¹²⁴

Some might interpret the concept of ruling or having dominion as a license to control, dominate, and exploit the earth for personal gain. Yanatan Neril and Leo Mark Dee quote Rabbi David Sears as saying that ruling:

comprises a form of stewardship for which humanity is answerable to God. Both Talmudic and kabbalistic sources state that it is forbidden to kill any creature unnecessarily, or to engage in wanton destruction of the earth’s resources. All forms of life are precious by virtue of the Divine wisdom that brings them into existence, whatever rung they may occupy in the hierarchy of creation . . . The Divine mandate for man to dominate the natural world is a sacred trust, not a carte blanche for destructiveness.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Bible Hub, “Genesis 1:26,” Biblehub.com, accessed November 15, 2022, n.p., <https://biblehub.com/genesis/1-26.htm>.

¹²⁵ Yonatan Neril and Leo Mark Dee, eds., *Eco Bible*, vol. 1, *An Ecological Commentary on Genesis and Exodus* (Jerusalem: Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development, 2020), 34-35, Kindle.

Additionally, humans ruling over creation is based on their being made in God's image. God intends for mankind to care for creation like God does and in a manner that reflects God's image.¹²⁶

Adam (male/female), before the fall, reigned in God-like stewardship over creation. After the fall, sin distorted their ability to reflect a pure image of God and hindered their capacity to care for the earth as God originally intended. Jesus' redemptive work includes the reconciliation of mankind with creation. The transformative work of the Holy Spirit renews the human mind and makes it possible for the mind of Christ to have dominion through individuals towards creation. In a renewed Edenic condition, humanity reflects the image of God and honors the sacred trust to be Godly stewards of creation, as well as to rule, reign, and have dominion over creation in a manner that brings healing, restoration, and reconciliation to mother earth.

Maathai treasured the fig tree before studying science, based on African oral traditions. The Spirit revealed the intrinsic value of that tree to human survival. The tree drew water for their refreshment and provided fruit for their nourishment. This imagery of the sacred fig tree by a stream echoes Garden of Eden theology. It reflects the perfect ecological balance in Eden, which had a river that proceeded from the Garden and trees that were pleasant to the sight and good for food (Gen. 2:9-10). Maathai's story highlights Spiritual truths revealed in Eden—God is in mankind, God is in nature, and they are both in God. Humanity cannot exist outside of God or the environment. Traditional African values respect the significance of the tree and intuitively understand the trifold Spiritual connection and reciprocity between God, humans, and nature.

¹²⁶ Neril and Dee, 33-35.

A new generation of African ecological warriors, climate change activists, and environmental advocates are awakening and arising, using their voices and social media platforms to challenge world leaders, nations, corporations, and world economic institutions to halt destructive practices and to heal mother earth. Inspired by the legacy of Maathai, one such champion for ecological justice is twenty-five-year-old Ugandan Vanessa Nakate.¹²⁷ In her book, Nakate introduces several of her global contemporaries, while highlighting others from the Southern Hemisphere, including African climate change activists such as Zambian earth warrior Veronica Mulenga.¹²⁸ It is important for this project to include the perspectives of young African leaders, especially from Zambia and Uganda. They are experiencing the negative impact of centuries of poor political and business decisions that result in catastrophic climate events in each of their respective countries.

Nakate details a myriad of complex, interrelated Ugandan and global ecological and climate change issues. She sounds the alarm, calling upon political and economic African and world leaders to address environmental injustices.¹²⁹ In her home town of Kampala, Uganda, Nakate is personally affected by one of these ecological problems, air pollution, which harms human health. During Back to Eden team site visits to Entebbe, Kampala, and Luba, Uganda, in November 2022, it was noted that individuals randomly burn personal trash, which sends toxins into the air, immediately causing people to cough

¹²⁷ Vanessa Nakate, “Vanessa Nakate Wants Climate Justice for Africa,” *Time*, October 28, 2021, n.p., <https://time.com/6109452/vanessa-nakate-climate-justice/>.

¹²⁸ Vanessa Nakate, *A Bigger Picture: My Fight to Bring a New African Voice to the Climate Crisis* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2021), 209-214. Kindle.

¹²⁹ Nakate, *A Bigger Picture*, 143.

and their eyes to water. Additionally, many women do not have access to gas or electric stoves, so they prepare meals over open fires that are fueled by wood or charcoal, often in enclosed cooking quarters. Mothers with babies strapped on their backs while cooking, expose both mom and baby to dangerous fumes. Nakate reports, “In 2019, the World Health Organization listed Kampala as the fifteenth most polluted city on the planet, with vehicle emissions the main cause.”¹³⁰ She notes, “Although I’m fortunate that my home is surrounded by trees, when I step out of the gate and onto the street, I can feel the grit in my mouth, taste the thick air in my throat and lungs, and smell the diesel.”¹³¹

Nakate stresses the urgent need to change course on global air pollution conditions by recounting the 2013 story of little Ella, a nine-year-old girl, who died of “a fatal asthma attack in London after experiencing a seizure, the sort that had required her to be hospitalized twenty-seven times in the previous three years.”¹³² According to the coroner’s report, Ella’s death was caused by excessive “levels of nitrogen dioxide higher than current European Union or World Health Organization guidelines” in the southeast, Lewisham, London, neighborhood where she lived.¹³³ Nakate explains that “Nitrogen dioxide . . . contributes to toxic ground-level ozone, [and] is a by-product of car engines that run on diesel,” which is a fossil fuel that contributes to the “ever-upward trajectory of parts per million of atmospheric carbon dioxide.”¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Nakate, *A Bigger Picture*, 155.

¹³¹ Nakate, *A Bigger Picture*, 155-156.

¹³² Nakate, *A Bigger Picture*, 153.

¹³³ Nakate, *A Bigger Picture*, 153-154.

¹³⁴ Nakate, *A Bigger Picture*, 154.

Even though Ella lived and died in London, she was a child of the African diaspora. She lived in an economically disadvantaged area of London. According to Nakate, “Her neighborhood is crisscrossed, as many low-income urban areas are, by highways packed with traffic.”¹³⁵ One sad truth about many poor urban areas is the scarcity of trees, parks, hospitals, decent schools, and even grocery stores that sell fresh fruits and vegetables. They are urban deserts devoid of resources critical for good human health. Additional environmental hazards like oil refineries, trash dump sites, and factories that leak toxic waste into the air and water are often located in urban centers rather than suburbia.

Ella’s tragic death exposes the connection between the climate crisis, environmental socioeconomic and racial injustices in the area of public health.¹³⁶ Nakate reports, “London has some of the most polluted air in Europe, and the costs to public health, at . . . US \$14.3 billion . . . are the highest in Europe.”¹³⁷ Additionally, “Chinese researchers concluded that reducing air pollution would save their country . . . US \$9.22 billion . . . a year in health-care spending.”¹³⁸ Nakate continues, “In Delhi, widely considered to be one of the most polluted cities in the world, more than 50,000 people died in 2020 due to air pollution, according to a report from Greenpeace Southeast Asia.”¹³⁹ Human deaths caused by lethal air quality is a man-made tragedy. Man is intelligent enough to solve this environmental issue.

¹³⁵ Nakate, *A Bigger Picture*, 156-157.

¹³⁶ Nakate, *A Bigger Picture*, 153.

¹³⁷ Nakate, *A Bigger Picture*, 155.

¹³⁸ Nakate, *A Bigger Picture*, 155.

¹³⁹ Nakate, *A Bigger Picture*, 155.

Traditional African spirituality considers mother earth sacred and land as a gift from God, which leads to harmony with nature. God created the universe, placed mankind (male/female) in an ecological paradise, and assigned them the responsibility of stewarding Eden. They did not exploit or abuse creation; rather, they cared for and lived in kinship with nature. They enjoyed unbroken fellowship with God, each other, and ecosystems until they sinned. The Bible begins and ends with ecotheology, and everything in between is the path to reconcile mankind and creation Back to Eden. In the final heavenly Garden there is “a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:1-2 NKJV).

Chapter Summary

Back to Eden ecotheology is holistic. It includes salvation and restoration for Adam (male/female), the entire human community, and all of creation. It is grounded in the principle of *Imago Dei*, humanity made in God’s image. The African concept of Ubuntu reflects biblical truth regarding God’s original intention for mankind to live and thrive in community. God’s original purpose and assignment for Adam was to tend to the garden, name the animals, and be an ecological steward of creation. Therefore, Back to Eden is a practical ecological theology.

Traditional African cultures respect and value the significance of nature, and intuitively understand the trifold Spiritual connection and reciprocity among God, humans, and nature. Likewise, Hebrew biblical interpretations define God’s original intention for mankind to rule and have dominion over creation as a sacred calling to

divine stewardship. Post-colonial Africans are redeeming ancient African wisdom that embodies ecotheology. Also, a new generation of ecological warriors is continuing the legacy of their ancestors and are challenging elders and world leaders to reclaim the Godly call to heal the land.

CHAPTER 3:

THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

“In the Nile Valley, civilization resulted from man’s adaptation to that particular milieu. As declared by the Ancients and by the Egyptians themselves, it originated in Nubia. This is confirmed by our knowledge that the basic elements of Egyptian civilization are neither in Lower Egypt, nor in Asia, nor in Europe, but in Nubia and the heart of Africa; moreover, that is where we find the animals and plants represented in hieroglyphic writing”¹ Cheikh Anta Diop

Scholarship on the Location of the Garden of Eden

The intention of this discussion is not to debate whether the Garden of Eden exists physically on the earth, nor is it to prove or disprove various theories on Eden’s location. The truth is that no one knows. God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden; therefore, the exact location of Eden will never be found. Mankind cannot find its way back to Eden based on theology, scholarship, intellect, reason, or science. Jesus is the way back to Eden. His death, resurrection, and ascension purchased the right for each soul to return to Eden. Wrapped in his blood, humans can return to their pre-fallen Edenic state of divine, unbroken communion with the Creator. Jesus is the tree of life, and through the grace of the Holy Spirit, redeemed humanity partakes of His Spiritual fruit.

The purpose of this investigation on the possible location of Eden is to anchor Back to Eden (BTE) ecotheology in credible biblical, historical, cultural, and scientific scholarship, which undergirds the practical implementation of BTE education, and ecological and entrepreneurial projects. Dr. Vince Bantu states, “Many early Christian

¹ Cheikh Anta Diop, “Cheikh Anta Diop Quotes,” Quotefancy, accessed November 29, 2022, n.p., <https://quotefancy.com/quote/2595661/Cheikh-Anta-Diop-In-the-Nile-Valley-civilization-resulted-from-man-s-adaptation-to-that>.

writers spoke about the Garden of Eden allegorically.”² Some theologians today still consider the biblical accounts of Eden to be legends, folklore, and myths. However, religious scholars and scientists throughout the ages, after critical analysis, postulate locations of Eden based on Bible accounts and ancient historical records, as well as geographical, geological, and ecological markers. Dr. Santiago García-Jalón reminds that “many . . . expeditioners have tried to locate it.”³

An objective of this brief survey of literature and science is to view this topic through the lenses of a myriad of contributors from various historical time periods, countries, and worldviews. Regardless of how unbiased a researcher thinks that she might be, a scholar’s cultural, economic, and political ideologies influence her critical analysis and conclusions regarding texts, data, and historical facts.⁴ Various theories are presented, but some are more credible than others because they are supported by multidisciplinary evidence.

Today many Christians and scholars believe that Eden was once a real garden located on earth, based on Genesis 2:8–14. Most scholars agree that the third and fourth rivers are most likely the Tigris (Hiddekel) and Euphrates, and that the second river, the Gihon, is probably the Blue Nile that flows throughout Ethiopia (Cush). There are different positions on the first river, the Pishon, that encompasses the land of Havilah;

² Vince Bantu, “Early African or Eastern Orthodox Writings on Possible Locations of the Garden of Eden,” email message to researcher, August 3, 2022. Bantu’s information: <https://www.fuller.edu/faculty/vince-bantu/>.

³ Santiago García-Jalón, “The Impossible Spaces: A Commentary on Gen. 2:8–15,” *Religions* 12, no. 8 (2021): 6 of 10, ProQuest Central, <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/12/8/656>. García-Jalón’s information: <https://www.upsa.es/actualidad/santiago-garcia-jalon-decano-de-la-facultad-de-filosofia>.

⁴ Ukpong, “New Testament Hermeneutics in Africa,” 149.

some consider it to be the Ganges River in India or the White Nile in present-day Sudan (Map 6 and Map 4 in Appendix A).

Genesis 2:8–14 provides biblical detail on the geographical location of Eden, with supporting geological and ecological markers.

⁸And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. ¹⁰And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads. ¹¹The name of the first *is* Pison: that *is* it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where *there is* gold; ¹²And the gold of that land *is* good: there *is* bdellium and the onyx stone. ¹³And the name of the second river *is* Gihon: the same *is* it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia. ¹⁴And the name of the third river *is* Hiddekel: that *is* it which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river *is* Euphrates. (KJV)

García-Jalón points out that the Garden of Eden was made and “grown by God at the beginning of time...for man [male/female] to inhabit.” Additionally, “If Adam is created good and must live in harmony with the world, which is also good, it becomes necessary for him to inhabit a place where that harmony is possible, where there are plenty of fruit trees suitable for feeding upon effortlessly and without animal sacrifice or exploitation of land.”⁵ García-Jalón explains, “The idea that such a paradise exists is in accordance with that of a creator God who has done everything right and who has put man in an environment fit for him to reach fulfillment. Consequently, defending the existence of paradise on earth becomes of the essence in order to properly appreciate the divine creation as narrated in Gen. 2.”⁶

⁵ García-Jalón, 6 of 10.

⁶ García-Jalón, 6 of 10.

Map 6 (Appendix A) illustrates what some Jewish rabbis teach today, according to Shaul Wolf.⁷ The four rivers are considered the White Nile (or the Ganges), Blue Nile, Tigris, and Euphrates. Wolf reports: “Rashi, the foremost biblical commentator, identifies the Pishon as the Nile River. . . . Other commentators identify the Pishon as the Ganges River, which flows through India . . . [based on] Yonatan ben Uziel, who translates the area of Havilah as *Hindki*, an Aramaic translation for India. . . . Josephus believed that it referred to the Indus River, which flows through India.”⁸ The second river, Gihon, is considered to be the Blue Nile. Wolf explains, “The land of Cush is typically associated with Ethiopia, and the Gihon is therefore understood to refer to the Blue Nile. The Blue Nile begins in Lake Tana in Ethiopia and meets the White Nile in Khartoum, Sudan, where together they form one river that flows all the way to Egypt.”⁹ Then Wolf presents, “R. David Kimchi, a 12th-century biblical commentator, explains that the name Gihon means ‘to diverge,’ which symbolizes the numerous tributaries that diverge off the Blue Nile in Ethiopia.”¹⁰ The Tigris and Euphrates are widely accepted as the third and fourth rivers flowing through ancient Babylon, which is present-day Iraq.

Citing various Jewish and Islamic scholars from Flavius Josephus in the first century through the 21st century, Abdol Majid Hosseinizadeh surveys the four rivers of Eden in Judaism and Islamic traditions. He concludes that some “scholars believed that the Pison river is the Ganges river in India and India is the land of Havilah, and the Nile

⁷ Shaul Wolf, “Where are the Four Rivers that Come from Eden?” Chabad.org, accessed August 2, 2022, n.p., https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3082157/jewish/Where-Are-the-Four-Rivers-that-Come-from-Eden.htm.

⁸ Wolf, n.p.

⁹ Wolf, n.p.

¹⁰ Wolf, n.p.

river is the Gihon and Ethiopia is Cush land; East of Assyria is the land of Tigris river or Hiddekel and Euphrates as well,” although many Jewish scholars consider the Pishon river (not the Gihon) to be the Nile River.¹¹ Some scholars are not convinced of the locations of the Pishon and Gihon, and these scholars suppose that these rivers may have been destroyed in Noah’s flood or gone underground, while other scholars believe that the Garden of Eden encompassed global boundaries.

Hosseinzadeh reports, “Ibn ‘Ezra believed that the Garden of Eden was exactly located on the Earth’s equator; much more southern than the origin of Nile.”¹² S. David Sperling cites *Tamid* (32b) as placing Eden in “the center of Africa.”¹³ While the Qur’an shows no connection to the four biblical rivers, the prophet Muhammad listed the Euphrates and Nile among the four rivers of paradise; also, Islamic literature includes the equivalent names for Gihon and Pishon.¹⁴

Antiquity and Middle Ages

García-Jalón explains the historical linguistics that describe the four rivers of Eden in ancient texts. The first river Pishon flows around Havilah, which in Hebrew can be interpreted two ways: first as a “toponym” (name of a place derived from a topographical or geographical feature), or second as a person’s name. “In the Bible,

¹¹ Abdol Majid Hosseinzadeh, “The Four Rivers of Eden in Judaism and Islam,” *Al-Bayan: Journal Bayan: Journal of Qur’an and Hadith Studies* 10, no. 2 (December 2012): 33–47, https://brill.com/view/journals/jqhs/10/2/article-p33_4.xml?language=en.

¹² Hosseinzadeh, 39.

¹³ S. David Sperling, “Garden of Eden,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., vol. 7, ed. Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference, 2007), 388, Gale eBooks.

¹⁴ Hosseinzadeh, 33–47.

Havilah is listed among the children of Cush, the oldest son of Ham and grandson of Noah (Gen. 10:7; 1 Chron. 1:9). Masoretic Text admits either reads, whereas Septuagint favors the latter.”¹⁵ Both ancient texts support the theory that the land of Havilah could be present-day Sudan, making the Pishon, which encompasses the entire land, likely the White Nile (Map 1 and Map 4 in Appendix A).

García-Jalón expounds that “the second river, the Gihon . . . encircle[s] the entire land of Ethiopia . . . [as named in the] Septuagint. . . [the] Masoretic Text speaks of the ‘land of Cush’. . . . The Scripture mentions the Cushites somewhat frequently, understanding as such a dark-skinned people (Jer. 13:23).”¹⁶ Then García-Jalón declares, “Based upon the translation of Septuagint and on Flavius Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews* 1, 6), it is safe to assume that Cush can be identified as a territory more or less coincident with present-day Ethiopia.”¹⁷ The Masoretic Text calls the third river Hiddekel, while the Sinaiticus names it Tigris. The fourth river in the Masoretic Text is the Phrat, and is translated as Euphrates.¹⁸

Gerald West (PhD, Old Testament and Biblical hermeneutics, European South African) clarifies, “While there is some debate about the geographical location of Cush, with the traditional argument favoring Ethiopia (both the Septuagint and the Vulgate translating the Hebrew word as ‘Ethiopian’), other scholars preferring Nubia or Sudan,

¹⁵ García-Jalón, 4 of 10.

¹⁶ García-Jalón, 4 of 10.

¹⁷ García-Jalón, 4 of 10.

¹⁸ García-Jalón, 4–5 of 10.

and some arguing for a generic reference to Africa, Cush is definitely within the geographical boundary of Africa.”¹⁹

First-century Jewish historian and pharisee Josephus (37–100 CE) writes that the Phison, “(a name meaning ‘multitude’) runs towards India . . . being called by the Greeks Ganges . . . [T]he Euphrates, is called Phoras, signifying either ‘dispersion’ or ‘flower,’ and the Tigris Diglath expressing . . . ‘narrowness’ and ‘rapidity’ . . .”²⁰ Both of these rivers “end in the Erythraean Sea.”²¹ Josephus notes that the “Geon, which flows through Egypt, means ‘that which wells up to us from the opposite world,’ and by Greeks is called the Nile.”²² However, Paul Haupt (PhD, Assyriology and Semitic languages, European-German, 1858–1926) says that before the source of the Nile was discovered in 1862, many ancient Greeks, including Alexander the Great, thought the Nile source to be India. “The ancients believed that there was a continental connection between India and eastern Africa.”²³ Thus, the ancient Greeks had limited geographical knowledge regarding the source of the Nile and were unaware of the possibility that the Pishon could be the White Nile. Haupt clarifies, “The main headstream of the Nile”²⁴ as originating from Lake Victoria in East Africa and flowing through Sudan (Nubia) where it converges with the

¹⁹ Gerald West, “Before the Missionaries: The Bible in North Africa,” *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 36, no. 2/3 (August/November, 2008), 243, Gale Academic OneFile. West’s information: <https://ukzn.academia.edu/GeraldWest/CurriculumVitae>.

²⁰ Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities, Volume 1: Books 1–3*, trans. Henry St. John Thackeray, The Loeb Classical Library 242 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930), 20, LoebClassics.

²¹ Josephus, 20.

²² Josephus, 21.

²³ Paul Haupt, “Etymological and Critical Notes,” *The American Journal of Philology* 47, no. 4 (1926): 305–306, JSTOR Arts & Sciences II, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/289993?origin=crossref>. Haupt’s information: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/593237>.

²⁴ Haupt, 305–306.

Blue Nile to form the Nile River that flows through Egypt (Map 4 in Appendix A). Haupt points out that at Khartum (Arab for “elephant’s trunk”), “a promontory at the confluence of the White Nile and the Blue Nile resembles an elephant’s trunk”²⁵ (Map 2 and Map 4 in Appendix A).

García-Jalón recounts a brief history of theories on the location of Eden, starting with antiquity which espoused allegorical and literal understandings of the text.

“[S]ymbolic interpretations of the four rivers were frequent since Christian antiquity, linking them to virtues, the four gospels, . . . [etc.].”²⁶ Origen of Alexandria argued for a “symbolic interpretation,” while Augustine and Thomas Aquinas insisted that allegory does not negate “the actual existence of the Garden [of] Eden.”²⁷ García-Jalón explains that “from antiquity, it was taken for granted that two of those rivers were the Tigris and the Euphrates, and it was thought that the other two had to be the Nile and the Ganges, which were deemed sacred . . .”²⁸

Additional insights can be gleaned from early church fathers. Cyprian (200–258 CE) was born into a wealthy indigenous Berber family in Carthage, North Africa, during its occupation by the Roman Empire. He was trained in Latin and in 248 CE became bishop of Carthage until martyred in 258 CE.²⁹ Cyprian viewed the rivers of Eden

²⁵ Haupt, 305.

²⁶ García-Jalón, 9 of 10.

²⁷ García-Jalón, 9 of 10.

²⁸ García-Jalón, 6–7 of 10.

²⁹ Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, 62–77.; Thomas C. Oden, ed., *Commentary Index and Resources*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament and New Testament (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019). 24, 42; *New World Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Saint Cyprian of Carthage,” last modified August 31, 2019, n.p., https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Saint_Cyprian_of_Carthage. https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Saint_Cyprian_of_Carthage.

symbolically as prefiguring the Christian Church, which “encloses fruitful trees within its walls. It waters these trees with four rivers, that is, with the four Gospels, from which it bestows the grace of baptism by the salutary and heavenly inundation.”³⁰

Ephrem the Syrian (306–373 CE) credits Moses as the author of Genesis, and he believes, “When the river of Eden flows out of the garden, it divides into four rivers, which are different in nature and taste from the head.”³¹ Ephrem explains, “Although the places from which they flow are known, the source of the spring is not known. . . . The earth then spits out” the four rivers: the Danube (Pishon) in the west, the Nile (Gihon) in the south, and “the Tigris and Euphrates, between which we dwell,” in the north.³² It should be noted that of the scholars studied, Ephrem is the only one to mention the Danube as a possible river.

Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (333–397 CE), says that the Hebrews call the first river Pishon, but the Greeks, who believe that it flows in the direction of India, call it the Ganges. He writes, “Gihon is the river Nile, which flows around the land of Egypt or Ethiopia.”³³ Ambrose lists the Tigris and Euphrates as the other rivers. He writes

³⁰ Cyprian, “The River of Eden Symbolically Prefigures the Christian Church,” in *Genesis 1–11*, ed. Andrew Louth, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament 1 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001). 59.

³¹ Andrew Louth, “The River of Eden: Overview,” in *Genesis 1–11*, ed. Andrew Louth, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament 1 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 55; Oden, *Commentary Index and Resources*, 25, 45.

³² Ephrem the Syrian, “Description of the River of Eden,” in *Genesis 1–11*, ed. Andrew Louth, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament 1 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001). 56.

³³ Ambrose, “Symbolic Meaning of the Four Rivers,” in *Genesis 1–11*, ed. Andrew Louth, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament 1 (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2001). 56–58; Oden, *Commentary Index and Resources*, 20, 44.

extensively in allegory.³⁴ Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople (344/354–407 CE), warns that the “rivers must not be treated so allegorically that they are assumed to have no actual existence.”³⁵

John of Damascus, Arab orthodox monastic and theologian (650–750 CE), identifies the four rivers as the Ganges, Nile, Tigris, and Euphrates. He adds that “the ocean that encircles the entire earth” is like “a river that flowed out of paradise,” which divided and became four rivers.³⁶

García-Jalón notes that “during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, many thought that . . . Eden was . . . the entire Earth, or that it should be regarded as a state of mind or a symbolic place. . . . however, . . . the mainstream conviction was that paradise was located in a specific place.”³⁷ A Muslim theory names Mount Ararat, in Armenia, “where Noah’s Ark came to rest after the flood (Gen. 8:4),” as a possible location of Eden, while others believed that the flood in the days of Noah may have “altered the shape of the earth.”³⁸ Some believed that Eden was located in Old Palestine. García-Jalón reports that “trading and geographic expeditions, [and] . . . missionary journeys, encouraged the idea that paradise was in Africa,” while others thought it to be in the New World (Americas).³⁹

³⁴ Ambrose. 56–58.

³⁵ Louth, 56; Oden, ed., *Commentary Index and Resources*, 30, 45.

³⁶ John of Damascus, “The River of Eden is the Ocean that Encircles the Earth,” in *Genesis 1–11*, ed. Andrew Louth, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Old Testament 1* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2001). 58–59; Oden, *Commentary Index and Resources*, 30, 47.

³⁷ García-Jalón, 6 of 10.

³⁸ García-Jalón, 7 of 10; Thomas Nelson Publishers, ed., *Nelson’s Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts*, 3rd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010). 23–24. Kindle.

³⁹ García-Jalón, 7 of 10.

García-Jalón shows that theories on the location of Paradise evolved based on the hermeneutical perspective of the era. “[T]hese two models of exegesis—literal and allegorical—are not mutually exclusive . . . [A]llegorical interpretations . . . generate a profusion of representations . . .” and “literal interpretations result in cartographic productions.”⁴⁰ García-Jalón declares, “Given the abundant cartographic data, Gen. 2:8–15 appears to be challenging the reader to locate the Garden of Eden. . . . [Which] makes elaborating on the cartography of paradise worthwhile.”⁴¹

Today, some scholars and Bible commentaries disregard the first two rivers as unknown.⁴² However, Yorke concludes that Eden was in Africa because the Genesis 2:8–14 passage “indicates that two of the rivers of Eden, the Pishon and the Gihon, were closely associated with Cush or ancient Ethiopia . . . [which] most likely refer to the White and Blue Nile respectively.” Furthermore, “in Ge’ez, or ancient Ethiopic, the lexical term for the Nile is Gihon.”⁴³ Most contemporary scholars agree on the Tigris and the Euphrates.

Cain Hope Felder (PhD, Bible scholar, past editor of *The Journal of Religious Thought*, 1943–2019) says of Genesis 2:10–14, “This passage gives the exact physical boundaries of the garden . . . [and] the ancient names of the four rivers . . . [as] Pishon, Gihon (White and Blue Nile), Hiddekel (Tigris), and the Euphrates.”⁴⁴ Felder says that

⁴⁰ García-Jalón, 8 of 10.

⁴¹ García-Jalón, 3 of 10.

⁴² Thomas Nelson Publishers, 23–24.

⁴³ Yorke, 143.

⁴⁴ Cain Hope Felder, ed., *The Original African Heritage Study Bible* (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, 1998), 4, 1895. Felder’s information: <https://www.christianbenevolent.com/obituary/dr-cain-felder>.

“the Pishon . . . [is] in relation to the land of Havilah. In Genesis 10:7, Havilah is said to be a son of Cush . . . thereby helping to clarify the association between the Pishon River and ancient Africa”⁴⁵ (Maps 1 and 6 in Appendix A). Felder continues, “Genesis 2:13 states unambiguously that the Gihon River ‘compasseth the land of Ethiopia’ . . . [which is] an allusion to the Blue Nile.”⁴⁶ Additionally, Felder argues that much of what is now called the Middle East was northeast Africa in ancient days, which could also place the third and fourth rivers in Africa.⁴⁷

Biblical scholarship throughout history credibly locates the Pishon (White Nile) and Gihon (Blue Nile) rivers in ancient Nubia (Sudan) and Kush (Ethiopia) respectively (Map 4 in Appendix A). The National Geographic Society describes:

The Nile River flows from south to north through eastern Africa. It begins in the rivers that flow into Lake Victoria (located in modern-day Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya), and empties into the Mediterranean Sea . . . In addition to Egypt, the Nile runs through or along the border of . . . Burundi, Tanzania, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, and South Sudan.⁴⁸

The source of the Nile River is in the heart of Africa: Lake Victoria, from which the White Nile flows, and Ethiopia, the source of the Blue Nile. “A river went out of Eden to water the garden” (Gen. 2:10 KJV). It is possible that the first two rivers named in the Bible are in Africa, placing the Garden of Eden somewhere near the Nile River in Africa.

⁴⁵ Felder, *The Original African Heritage Study Bible*, 1895.

⁴⁶ Felder, *The Original African Heritage Study Bible*, 1895.

⁴⁷ Felder, *The Original African Heritage Study Bible*, x–xi.

⁴⁸ National Geographic Society, “Nile River,” National Geographic, last modified May 20, 2022, n.p., <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/nile-river/>.

Adamo

Dr. David Tuesday Adamo (PhD, theologian, scholar, Nigerian) shares extensive credible scholarship that Eden was likely in Africa. He details biblical traditions, primeval African oral accounts, ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Assyrian records, as well as multidisciplinary scientific data. Adamo reveals, “Africans have an abundance of oral traditions of the creation of man, God’s provision, and the eventual fall of mankind similar to both the Babylonian and biblical stories.”⁴⁹ He then details oral creation accounts from various African people groups throughout the entire continent. These creation stories “represent a floating oral tradition in Africa, passed from generation to generation probably with a prehistoric background. . . . [They] have the common motif of God’s creation of the first person, his provision and enjoyment, and the failure of mankind as in the biblical and Babylonian stories of creation.”⁵⁰ Adamo points out that “the children of Israel lived in Egypt for about 430 years. . . . [And] they [probably] came in contact with this ancient African tradition and mastered it.”⁵¹

Some scholars point to Mesopotamia as the source of the Garden of Eden story. However, Adamo emphasizes “there is a strong possibility that the Paradise story had its ultimate source in African tradition rather than Mesopotamian.”⁵² This would have been because “as early as the third millennium B.C.E.” there is evidence that Africans and

⁴⁹ David Tuesday Adamo, “Ancient Africa and Genesis 2:10–14,” *The Journal of Religious Thought* 49, no. 1 (Summer-Fall 1992): 35, Religion and Philosophy Collection. <https://web-p-ebshost-com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=4&sid=cd5a3052-c0cd-4808-a47e-778cfdc4dfc7%40redis>. Adamo’s information: <https://wipfandstock.com/author/david-t-adamo/>.

⁵⁰ Adamo, “Ancient Africa and Genesis 2:10–14,” 37.

⁵¹ Adamo, “Ancient Africa and Genesis 2:10–14,” 37.

⁵² Adamo, “Ancient Africa and Genesis 2:10–14,” 38.

Mesopotamians engaged in extensive trade of articles and possibly oral traditions.⁵³

Furthermore, “The similarity in their system of writing and the biblical tradition that Cush, Mizraim, and Nimrod are brothers also support the theory of early contact between Africans and Mesopotamians.”⁵⁴ It is likely that Mesopotamians adapted this ancient African oral tradition and enculturated it.

Adamo acknowledges that most scholars name the Tigris and the Euphrates as the third and fourth rivers. He then discusses various theories on the location of the second river, Gihon, which encompasses the whole land of Ethiopia (Cush). Adamo reveals that some scholars, such as G. C. Aalders, Clyde T. Francisco, Claus Westermann, E. A. Speiser, and George Rawlinson, outright dismiss the thought that the land of Cush or the Gihon could be in Africa. Adamo challenges those who hold this view because they “ignore the fact that the names of these two rivers, Pishon and Gihon, are Hebrew descriptive or translation names . . . Gihon [is] derived from *push* meaning ‘to jump or run to and from’ . . . from the root *guh* ‘to flow.’”⁵⁵ Again, Josephus explains that the “Geon, which flows through Egypt, means ‘that which wells up to us from the opposite world,’ and by Greeks is called the Nile.”⁵⁶ Confirming Josephus, archaeologists Terje Oestigaard and Firew Abawa Gedef (Swede and Ethiopian) affirm, “*Gish* means ‘bring forth’.”⁵⁷ They explain, “Before the Nile was called Abay its name was Gihon . . . one of

⁵³ Adamo, “Ancient Africa and Genesis 2:10–14,” 37.

⁵⁴ Adamo, “Ancient Africa and Genesis 2:10–14,” 37–38.

⁵⁵ Adamo, “Ancient Africa and Genesis 2:10–14,” 40.

⁵⁶ Josephus, 21.

⁵⁷ Terje Oestigaard and Firew Abawa Gedef, “Gish Abay: The Source of the Blue Nile,” *WIT Transactions on Ecology and the Environment* 153 (December 2011): 33, ProQuest Central. <http://library.witpress.com/viewpaper.asp?pcode=WS11-003-1>.

the four rivers . . . of Eden . . . [and] its outlet at Gish Abay.”⁵⁸ The authors put forth, “The source of the Blue Nile is a spring called Gish Abay in Ethiopia,” which is believed to be one of “the vents of a great subterranean lake,” and the “direct source from heaven.”⁵⁹ Indigenous religions consider this place sacred—the place to sacrifice oxen to God—and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church considers it holy, calling it “God of Peace.”⁶⁰

Adamo provides strong evidence supporting the probability that the Gihon is the Blue Nile: “According to the ancient Egyptian records (where this term originates), the term *Kush*, *Kash*, or *Kesh* refers exclusively to Africa south of Egypt. In ancient Assyrian records (especially from the eighth century B.C.E.), the word *Kush* or *Kusu* unquestionably refers to Africa.”⁶¹ Adamo also notes, “According to the ancient Egyptians (inscription of Queen Hatshepsut), most of their gold, precious stones, resin, and wood came from Kush and Punt. The Sumerians as early as the third millennium B.C.E. emphasized the fact that they obtained gold in dust form, precious stones, and wood from Africa . . . The ancient Greeks emphasized the fact that gold was so plentiful in Ethiopia, they used it to bind their prisoners (*Herodotus* III, 23, 114).”⁶² Furthermore, “The earliest Egyptian reference to the term *Kush* or *Kash* is in the inscription of Ameni written during the reign of Sesostri I. Other references include the Carnarvon Tablet I, the Annals of Thutmose III, and others.”⁶³

⁵⁸ Oestigaard and Gedef, 32.

⁵⁹ Oestigaard and Gedef, 27–29, 32.

⁶⁰ Oestigaard and Gedef, 30.

⁶¹ Adamo, “Ancient Africa and Genesis 2:10–14,” 40–41.

⁶² Adamo, “Ancient Africa and Genesis 2:10–14,” 40.

⁶³ Adamo, “Ancient Africa and Genesis 2:10–14,” 40.

Regarding the first river, Pishon, some scholars list India and Arabia among possible locations. However, Adamo places it in Africa based on Genesis 2:11–12, which states that it encompasses the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold, bdellium, and onyx stone. Adamo emphasizes, “It is clear that according to the Sumero-Akkadian document, Egyptian hieroglyphics, and Greek records, Africa south of Egypt (Kush, Punt, or Ethiopia) has been the most famous place for these products of Havilah. . . . [N]o ancient record has ever referred to Arabia or India as famous for gold, incense, and precious stones in antiquity, as was Africa south of Egypt [so] . . . the most likely location of the land of Havilah is somewhere in Africa, south of Egypt.”⁶⁴

Moses

Is it difficult to imagine that Moses, whose mother placed him in the Nile River as an infant, was referring to the Nile when writing about the Pishon and Gihon. Moses, the accredited writer of the Genesis account, was born, raised, lived, and died in Africa, according to biblical accounts. He was educated in Egypt, and cultured in African wisdom. Some scholars place the date of writing between 1440–1400 BCE.⁶⁵ However, based on an Egyptian inscription of Rameses’ successor, Merneptah, 1220 BCE, regarding Israel’s settlement in Canaan and archeological evidence of rapid population growth in Canaan at that time, some scholars place Moses and the Exodus in the 13th century

⁶⁴ Adamo, “Ancient Africa and Genesis 2:10–14,” 39–40.

⁶⁵ R. Russell Bixler, “Introduction to Genesis,” in *Spirit-Filled Life Bible*, 3rd ed., King James Version, ed. Jack W. Hayford (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Bibles, 2020). 1, Kindle; R. Laird Harris, “Genesis,” in *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary*, ed. Charles F. Pfeiffer (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000). 665.

BCE.⁶⁶ Acts 7:20–32 recounts that from three months old to age forty, Moses was raised by Pharaoh’s daughter in the Egyptian royal palace, followed by forty more years in the Midian desert. “And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians” (Acts 7: 22 KJV). His Egyptian education would have exposed him to the “doctrine of Pharaoh Akhenaten (reigned 1377–1361? [BCE]), who broke with Egyptian tradition” and established a monotheistic “worship of the Sun alone, without images.”⁶⁷ William Propp reports, “The acknowledged dependence of Ps.104 upon Akhenaten’s ‘Hymn to the Sun’ is sufficient to prove the endurance of the pharaoh’s peculiar theology.”⁶⁸ Aaron Koller (PhD, Near East studies, Yeshiva University, Jewish American) shares that Akhenaten’s theology considered “the sun disk is the one and only God,” writing of “god’s transcendence and immanence . . . divinity,” the sole source of “the forces of life,” and the source of “*ma’at* (*m’at*, justice and order).”⁶⁹

Before leading the Exodus (Maps 7 and 1 in Appendix A), Moses (a Levite) spent forty years of his life in Midian with his wife, Zipporah; two sons; and father-in-law, Jethro, the priest, under whom Moses studied. Midianites are descendants of the lines of Shem and Ham through Abraham and his second wife, Keturah, a Hamite woman (Gen. 25:1–4.)⁷⁰ Gene Rice (PhD, Old Testament language and literature, European American, 1925–2016) clarifies, “Moses’s in-laws are identified as Kenites (Num. 10:29; Judg.

⁶⁶ William H. C. Propp, “Moses,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 921.

⁶⁷ Propp, 921.

⁶⁸ Propp, 921.

⁶⁹ Aaron Koller, “Psalm 104 and Its Parallels in Pharaoh Akhenaten’s Hymn,” Thetorah.com, 2022, n.p., <https://www.thetorah.com/article/psalm-104-and-its-parallels-in-pharaoh-akhenatens-hymn>.

⁷⁰ Felder, *The Original African Heritage Study Bible*, 89.

1:16, 4:11), apparently a clan of the Midianites or possibly the priestly order of the Midianites,” and the Kenites merged with the Israelites, and entered into the promised land with the Tribe of Judah.⁷¹ Many scholars teach that Jethro trained Moses in the worship of Yahweh.⁷²

Joseph Blenkinsopp (Hebrew Bible scholar, European American, 1927–2022) presents the Midianite-Kenite hypothesis. “The basic premise of the hypothesis [is] the existence of” pre-Israelite origins of Yahweh worship by the Midianites and Kenites.⁷³ Blenkinsopp presents “Max Weber . . . [as saying] ‘that the ancient tradition neither considered Yahweh to be the original god of Israel, nor the god of Israel alone, nor to reside in Israel.’”⁷⁴ Nevertheless, Moses “was in service with” Jethro.⁷⁵ Archeological findings include “An inscription in a temple of Amon in Soleb, Nubia, from the reign of Amenhotep III (first half of the fourteenth century)” and “in the Amara West temple in Nubia from the reign of Rameses II (second half of thirteenth century), both listing “several beduin . . . territories including ‘the Shasu land of Yahu’,” which is “one of the forms of the name Yahweh.”⁷⁶

⁷¹ Gene Rice, *Africa and the Bible: Corrective Lenses—Critical Essays*, ed. Alice Ogden Bellis (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019), 90–92, Kindle.
<https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/washingtonpost/name/gene-rice-obituary?id=6139743>.

⁷² Wick Broomall, “Jethro,” in *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary*, ed. Charles F. Pfeiffer (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 921; Propp, 921–922.; Felder, *The Original African Heritage Study Bible*, 89.

⁷³ Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The Midianite-Kenite Hypothesis Revisited and the Origins of Judah,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 33, no. 2 (2008): 133, SAGE Premier.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0309089208099253>. Blenkinsopp’s information:
<https://www.southbendtribune.com/obituaries/psbn0180658>.

⁷⁴ Blenkinsopp, 132.

⁷⁵ Blenkinsopp, 134.

⁷⁶ Blenkinsopp, 139–140.

Rice highlights:

Moses came to know God by the name Yahweh, not in Ur or Haran . . . or in Canaan, . . . but . . . at a mountain that had long been home to Yahweh . . . Mount Horeb (also called Mount Sinai), “the mountain of God” (Exod. 3:1; 18:5; 1 Kgs. 19:8) / “the mountain of Yahweh” (Num 10:33), traditionally identified with Jebel Musa (“Mountain of Moses”) in the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula [see Map 7 in Appendix A]. Yahweh was thought either to be enthroned upon or to descend from time to time to Horeb/Sinai from heaven (Exod. 19:11, 18, 20; 24:10; 34:5; see Deut. 33:16).⁷⁷

It should be noted that the Sinai Peninsula is on the African continent. Based on Exodus 18:1–12, Blenkinsopp points out that Jethro is the principal agent in this passage. Moses and Jethro are “at the ‘mountain of God,’” where Moses does “obeisance to Jethro” and “Jethro the priest” pronounces “the blessing on Yahweh,” offers sacrifices, and hosts Aaron and the Israelite elders as they eat with him in the presence of Yahweh.⁷⁸

For the first 80 years of his life, Moses was educated in the ways of the Egyptians and Midianites. This background would have informed his worldview. Moses is considered the author of the Pentateuch and the founder of the Jewish faith. In his writings, Moses would have synthesized his understanding of the religions, ideas, traditions, and ethos of the cultures in which he was immersed throughout his life. Ancients used the Nile River—that flows through Egypt—as a major transportation system; thus, Moses would have been in contact with traders and merchants who were traveling from deep inside Africa. He would have been aware of their customs and oral traditions. Map 3 (Appendix A) shows that part of the Egyptian Empire, around the time of Moses, included Kush (Sudan) and possibly down to Khartoum (Map 4 in Appendix

⁷⁷ Rice, 73.

⁷⁸ Blenkinsopp, 134–135.

A), where the White Nile and the Blue Nile converge. Moses may have been aware of the White Nile and the Blue Nile as he wrote about the first two rivers of Eden, calling them the Pishon and the Gihon.

Cartography, Geography, Geology, Ecology

Many scholars consider the first two rivers of Eden to be the White Nile and the Blue Nile because of the specific mention of Cush, Ethiopia, and Havilah in Genesis 2:11–13. Genesis 10 reveals that Noah’s sons and their descendants initially settled in distinct parts of the ancient world. Ham’s lineage disbursed throughout present-day Africa, Israel, Lebanon, and parts of the Arabian Peninsula, including Iraq and Iran (Map 1 in Appendix A).⁷⁹ The lands of Cush, and Cush’s son Havilah, include modern-day Sudan and Ethiopia (Map 1 and Map 2 in Appendix A). The Nile River system flows throughout Eastern Africa: the White Nile from Lake Victoria through Sudan, and the Blue Nile from Ethiopia through Sudan (Map 4 in Appendix A).

It should be noted that geologically, present-day Israel and Lebanon sit on the African tectonic plate and are on the African continent (Maps 5 and 9 in Appendix A). Geologist Dr. James Saku confirms the credibility of this map, adding, “Lebanon’s tectonic history is closely related to the Levant Fracture System, a left-lateral strike-slip fault zone, separating the Arabian Plate from the African Plate. Israel is part of Africa based on plate tectonics. But based on European ideas and how people see the world

⁷⁹ “Map 1: The Nations of Genesis 10,” in *Spirit-Filled Life Bible*, 3rd ed., King James Version, ed. Jack W. Hayford (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Bibles, 2020), n.p. Kindle.

Israel is a part of the Middle East.”⁸⁰ Saku explains that it is possible that the four rivers of Eden were on the same land mass during the Gondwana geological period.⁸¹

Gondwanaland is an “ancient supercontinent that incorporated present-day South America, Africa, Arabia, Madagascar, India, Australia, and Antarctica.”⁸² Saku points out that still today, Africa, on which the first two rivers of Eden are possibly located, and the Arabian Peninsula, on which the third and fourth rivers likely flow, are on a collected land mass.⁸³ Map 9 (Appendix A, a small insert on the left) reveals divergent tectonic plates that currently comprise the African-Arabian land mass.⁸⁴ Map 9 (Appendix A) shows that when the African and Arabian tectonic plates shift, Israel and Lebanon will stay on Africa.

Adamo shares the following geological evidence. “In 1984,” American space telescopes “were able to penetrate beyond the earth land surface” and discovered “‘an old river system’ in the southern portion of Egypt” that “was as ‘large and as complex as the present Nile river.’”⁸⁵ He reports, “In cooperation with the Geological Survey of Egypt and the U.S. Agency for International Development, Cairo, U.S. Geological Survey scientists have visited the location of the ancient river and have dug test pits . . . and

⁸⁰ James C. Saku, “Geological Evidence on Possible Locations of the Garden of Eden,” email message to researcher, August 4, 2022. Saku’s information: <https://www.frostburg.edu/academics/colleges-and-departments/geography/faculty--staff.php>.

⁸¹ Saku, n.p.

⁸² *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. “Gondwana,” Britannica.com, last modified August 24, 2015, n.p., <https://www.britannica.com/place/Gondwana-supercontinent>.

⁸³ Saku, n.p.

⁸⁴ Kathelijne Bonne, “East African Rift System: A Belt of Natural Wonders,” *Gondwana Talks*, December 16, 2020, n.p., <https://www.gondwanatalks.com/l/east-african-rift-system/>.

⁸⁵ Adamo, “Ancient Africa and Genesis 2:10–14,” 42.

streambeds for verification” of this data.⁸⁶ Furthermore, “Along the radar-detected river were hand axes and ash layers that are evidence of the presence of prehistoric people who appear to have ‘migrated to Europe by following the river path’ because similar Stone Age material was found in Europe.”⁸⁷

Geological findings and ecological features of the land of Havilah (through which flows the Pishon) include gold, onyx stone, and bdellium (incense family plants) (Gen. 2:11–12). As previously mentioned, Adamo reveals that, according to ancient records (Sumero-Akkadian, Egyptian, and Greek), “Africa south of Egypt (Kush, Punt, or Ethiopia) has been the most famous place for these products of Havilah. . . . [n]o ancient record has ever referred to Arabia or India as famous for gold, incense, and precious stones in antiquity, as was Africa south of Egypt,”⁸⁸ which probably included Nubia and Sudan.

Haupt breaks down ancient terms related to the Pishon and Havilah. He reveals, “For bdellium and onyx the Hebrew has *bedolah* and *shoham*. The term *bedolah* . . . denotes the gum-resin of the *Acacia Nilotica* [Image 1, Appendix A], which is still one of the chief exports of Nubia” and is regarded as precious and used as an emollient and demulcent.⁸⁹ Additionally, *shoham* means “precious stone of green color” and “denotes *malachite*” which is “derived from *Meluxa*, the Sumerian name of Nubia, . . . *black servants*, . . . [and] a name like *Sudan*.”⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Adamo, “Ancient Africa and Genesis 2:10–14,” 42.

⁸⁷ Adamo, “Ancient Africa and Genesis 2:10–14,” 42.

⁸⁸ Adamo, “Ancient Africa and Genesis 2:10–14,” 39–40.

⁸⁹ Haupt, 306.

⁹⁰ Haupt, 307.

The passage emphasizes something special about the gold of Havilah, whether in quality or quantity, calling it “good.” According to *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, “Gold has been known from prehistoric times and was possibly the first metal used by humans.”⁹¹ Wolf reminds, “Egyptians were known to have mined gold and precious stones in pre-dynastic times, especially in the region known in ancient times as Nubia, modern-day southern Egypt and Sudan.”⁹²

Onyx stone is called beryl or emerald in some Bible translations. Haupt specifies malachite,⁹³ which is a brilliant green gemstone, “normally found in opaque green masses” within “the oxidized zone of copper deposits.”⁹⁴ S. M. Susarla et al. relate that malachite is “A basic copper carbonate ($\text{Cu}_2\text{CO}_3(\text{OH})_2$) mineral . . . [that] was mined from deposits near the Isthmus of Suez and the Sinai as early as 4000 BC.”⁹⁵ Additionally, ancient Egyptians used it for cosmetic, medicinal, and artistic purposes, and it is used today in medicine and dentistry.⁹⁶

⁹¹ Paul Lagasse and Columbia University, “Gold,” in *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, 8th ed. (Columbia University Press, 2018), n.p., CREDO Reference Academic Core. <https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/columency/gold/0?institutionId=4720>.

⁹² Wolf, n.p.

⁹³ Haupt, 307.

⁹⁴ Cally Oldershaw, “Malachite,” in *Guide to Gems* (N.p.: Philip’s, 2003), n.p., CREDO Reference Academic Core. <https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/philipsgems/malachite/0?institutionId=4720>.

⁹⁵ S. M. Susarla et al., “The Colourful History of Malachite Green: From Ancient Egypt to Modern Surgery,” *International Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery* 46, no. 3 (2017): 401, Elsevier ScienceDirect Journals Complete, <https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0901502716302508>.

⁹⁶ Susarla et al., 401.

Onyx, (SiO₂) “is a variety of agate” that can be “black, dark brown, [or] green.”⁹⁷ Additionally, “Sardonyx contains onyx,” and “Onyx marble” and “Oriental alabaster are terms applied to travertine.”⁹⁸ Agate is a “translucent . . . variety of quartz and a subvariety of chalcedony . . . identical in chemical structure to jasper, . . . [and is] often found in association with opal.”⁹⁹ Beryl, (Be₃Al₂Si₆O₁₈) “is one of the oldest recorded stones and “is sometimes known as ‘the mother of gemstones.’”¹⁰⁰ Additionally, “In its pure state, beryl is colourless,” attracts little attention, and is not considered of gem quality; however, “impurities” yield vivid colors like greens, blues, aquamarines, yellows, pinks, and reds.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, “Goshenite, the clear form of beryl, was used for lenses.”¹⁰² Emerald, (Be₃Al₂Si₆O₁₈) is a transparent to translucent green stone member of the beryl group that usually has inclusions called “their *jardin*.”¹⁰³ It is known

⁹⁷ Cally Oldershaw, “Onyx,” *Guide to Gems* (N.p.: Philip’s, 2003), n.p., CREDO Reference Academic Core
<https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/philipsgems/onyx/0?institutionId=4720>.

⁹⁸ Paul Lagasse and Columbia University, “Onyx,” *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, 8th ed. (Columbia University Press, 2018), n.p., CREDO Reference Academic Core.
<https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/columency/agate/0?institutionId=4720>.

⁹⁹ Paul Lagasse and Columbia University, “Agate,” *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, 8th ed. (Columbia University Press, 2018), n.p., CREDO Reference Academic Core.
<https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/columency/agate/0?institutionId=4720>.

¹⁰⁰ Cally Oldershaw, “Beryl,” *Guide to Gems* (N.p.: Philip’s, 2003), n.p., CREDO Reference Academic Core.
<https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/philipsgems/beryl/0?institutionId=4720>.

¹⁰¹ Oldershaw, “Beryl,” n.p.

¹⁰² Oldershaw, “Beryl,” n.p.

¹⁰³ Cally Oldershaw, “Emerald,” *Guide to Gems* (N.p.: Philip’s, 2003), n.p., CREDO Reference Academic Core.
<https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/philipsgems/emerald/0?institutionId=4720>.

that “The ancient Egyptians mined emeralds as early as 3000 BC, from a source by the Red Sea that was later known as ‘Cleopatra’s Mines’ . . . The Copperbelt in northern Zambia” is a major source “of top-quality [emerald] gemstones.”¹⁰⁴ This is a salient point, because the second Back to Eden (BTE) project site is near the Zambian Copperbelt.

Regardless of the name that various scholars give to the jewels in the land of Havilah, each one is found in the ancient Egypt, Sudan, Nile region (Map 8 in Appendix A).¹⁰⁵ Gold is abundantly located primarily in the Nubian Desert region (Sudan). Malachite is among the copper deposits in the Sinai and Nubian regions. Quartz (Onyx stone, agate, alabaster, chalcedony, jasper) is in lower and upper Egypt near Nubia.¹⁰⁶ This adds credibility to the theory that Havilah is possibly ancient Nubia, present-day Sudan.

Genesis 2:12 reveals that “bdellium” was in the land of Havilah. Bdellium is a common name for shrubs and trees in the incense family (*Burseraceae*, *Boswellia*, *Commiphora*, and *Gileadensis*) found “in tropical America and NE Africa” known for aromatic oils, gum, and resin, such as frankincense, myrrh, and balm of Gilead (also found in Arabia) used in medicines, perfumes and for embalming by the ancients.¹⁰⁷ The

¹⁰⁴ Oldershaw, “Emerald,” n.p.

¹⁰⁵ Margaret R. Bunson, “Natural Resources,” *Facts on File Library of World History: Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, 3rd ed. (New York: Facts on File, 2012), n.p., CREDO Reference Academic Core. https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/fofae/natural_resources/0?institutionId=4720. https://search.credoreference.com/georgefox.idm.oclc.org/content/entry/fofae/natural_resources/0.

¹⁰⁶ Bunson, n.p.

¹⁰⁷ Paul Lagasse and Columbia University. “Bdellium,” *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, 8th ed (Columbia University Press, 2018), n.p., CREDO Reference Academic Core. <https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/columency/bdelli>

fragrance of the Garden of Eden must have been magnificent. Bdellium refers to the Acacia Nilotica tree (Image 1, Appendix A), also called the Egyptian thorn and Scented-pod Acacia.¹⁰⁸ It is common to habitats with varying degrees of flooding.¹⁰⁹ Wolf says, “The word Pishon . . . has the connotation of gushing forth and overflowing, and symbolizes the Nile River, which would overflow and irrigate the land of Egypt. Alternatively, the word Pishon is associated with the Hebrew word *pishtan*, flax, a reference to the ancient Egyptian flax industry, which was watered by the Nile River.”¹¹⁰ According to this view, the area called Havilah refers to the Nile region, perhaps upper Egypt or Sudan.

The scientific name of *Acacia nilotica* (Image 1, Appendix A) has “Nile” as part of it. This tree is indigenous to Egypt, Kush, Ethiopia, the Sahel, East Africa, most of the African continent, Northern India, and the Arabian Peninsula. The sweet-smelling pods and leaves are rich in minerals. The pods, gum, resin, and tannin have been collected from along the Nile forests in Sudan and Egypt, since the time of the Pharaohs, and used for over 6000 years in Egypt for food, fodder, wood, timber, tools, carving, tanning, paints, and medicines.¹¹¹ It is a major contributor to ecological balance. It effectively

[um/0?institutionId=4720](https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/columency/incense_tree/0?institutionId=4720); Paul Lagasse and Columbia University. “Incense Tree,” *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, 8th ed (Columbia University Press, 2018), n.p., CREDO Reference Academic Core. https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/cabicabi/acacia_nilotica/0?institutionId=4720. CABI, “Acacia Nilotica (Gum Arabic Tree),” Cabi.org, last modified November 20, 2019, n.p., <https://www.cabi.org/isc/datasheet/2342>.

¹⁰⁸ Haupt, 306; Andrew Praciak, ed., “Acacia Nilotica,” *The CABI Encyclopedia of Forest Trees* (Wallingford, UK: C.A.B. International, 2013), n.p., CREDO Reference Academic Core, https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/cabicabi/acacia_nilotica/0?institutionId=4720. CABI, “Acacia Nilotica (Gum Arabic Tree),” Cabi.org, last modified November 20, 2019, n.p., <https://www.cabi.org/isc/datasheet/2342>.

¹⁰⁹ Praciak, n.p.

¹¹⁰ Wolf, n.p.

¹¹¹ Praciak, n.p.; CABI, n.p.

colonizes waste heaps from coal mines, is a natural pesticide against some plant viruses, a molluscicide, and a “nitrogen-fixing tree,” meaning it is one of the few plants that acts as a natural fertilizer replenishing nitrogen to the soil.¹¹²

Other Scientific Evidence

Adamo shares anthropology to support his theory on the location of Eden:

Allan Wilson of the University of California, Berkeley, [reveals that] humanity's family tree was traced to an ancient African foremother. Using genetic engineering techniques in order to highlight normal variations in genes (restriction fragment length polymorphisms), it was concluded that every human being originated from “one woman who lived in Africa . . . between 140,000 to 280,000 years ago.”¹¹³

Adamo asserts, “The biblical tradition derived the civilization of Asshur from Nimrod, who was the son of Kush. The ancient Greeks believed that the Africans (Ethiopians) were the first of all men, they originated worship of gods, and sent out colonies. If Africans were the first of all men, and a locality for the Garden of Eden existed, it should be in Africa.”¹¹⁴ He goes on to say:

Scholars must not ignore the possibility that Genesis 2:10–14 represents an ancient tradition that has a historical foundation, retold to teach certain truths. . . . [It is] a theological truth with a foundation in history. . . . This theological truth is that God created all *mankind* in a certain locality where there were abundant rivers and green vegetables. From this locality humankind and civilization spread to the entire known ancient world (Gen. 1–3).¹¹⁵

¹¹² Shamim Reza, “Introducing Nitrogen Fixing Trees: Nature’s Solution to Curing N2 Deficiency,” [Permaculturenews.org](https://www.permaculturenews.org/2015/10/20/introducing-nitrogen-fixing-trees-natures-solution-to-curing-n2-deficiency/), October 20, 2015, n.p., <https://www.permaculturenews.org/2015/10/20/introducing-nitrogen-fixing-trees-natures-solution-to-curing-n2-deficiency/>. CABI, n.p.

¹¹³ Adamo, “Ancient Africa and Genesis 2:10–14,” 42–43.

¹¹⁴ Adamo, “Ancient Africa and Genesis 2:10–14,” 43.

¹¹⁵ Adamo, “Ancient Africa and Genesis 2:10–14,” 41–42.

Therefore, Adamo concludes that if the Garden of Eden exists, with its rivers, gemstones, foliage, and first human beings, then it may be in Africa (Kush, Nubia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt), rather than Mesopotamia.

Recent scientific developments reveal:

Humans first evolved in Africa, and much of human evolution occurred on that continent. The fossils of early humans who lived between 6 and 2 million years ago come entirely from Africa. . . . Early humans first migrated out of Africa into Asia probably between 2 million and 1.8 million years ago. They entered Europe somewhat later, between 1.5 million and 1 million years. . . . [M]odern humans populated many parts of the world much later. . . . The beginnings of agriculture and the rise of the first civilizations occurred within the past 12,000 years.¹¹⁶

Scientists report massive changes in the Nile basin approximately six million years ago, when a tectonic lift tilted the earth's crust forming the East African Rift Valley¹¹⁷ (Map 9 in Appendix A). Kathelijine Bonne reports, "The western branch is the water tower of Africa: Africa's large rivers, Congo, Nile and Zambezi all start here."¹¹⁸ Drs. Tanya Furman and Laura Guertin explain that "the White Nile begins in the floor of the Western Rift," which directs the waters of its tributaries northward.¹¹⁹ Some of the earliest human

¹¹⁶ Smithsonian Institution, "Introduction to Human Evolution," Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, last modified July 11, 2022, n.p., <https://humanorigins.si.edu/education/introduction-human-evolution>; Smithsonian Institution, "East African Research Projects," Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, last modified June 24, 2022, n.p., <https://humanorigins.si.edu/research/east-african-research-projects>.

¹¹⁷ Tanya Furman and Laura Guertin, "EARTH 105 Environments of Africa: Lesson 4: The Nile River—An Overview; History of the Nile," Penn State College of Earth and Mineral Sciences, accessed August 31, 2022, n.p., <https://courseware.education.psu.edu/courses/earth105new/content/lesson04/05.html>.

¹¹⁸ Bonne, n.p.; Duncan Macgregor, "History of the Development of the East African Rift System: A Series of Interpreted Maps through Time," *Journal of African Earth Sciences* 101 (January 2015): 232–252, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jafrearsci.2014.09.016>.

¹¹⁹ Tanya Furman and Laura Guertin, "EARTH 105 Environments of Africa: Lesson 4: The Nile River—An Overview; The White Nile," Penn State College of Earth and Mineral Sciences, accessed August 31, 2022, n.p., <https://courseware.education.psu.edu/courses/earth105new/content/lesson04/06.html>.

remains were discovered in Africa along the Nile and the East African Rift Valley system.¹²⁰ It is illuminating that scientists date Nile River geological formations (six million years ago) not long before the earliest human remains in that same region. Both of the first two BTE project sites in Uganda and Zambia are located in the East African Rift Valley system. The pilot BTE location is Luba, Uganda, on the Nile River.

Geographical, geological, ecological, and anthropologic advancements are fascinating and provide revelations about God's magnificently created earth. Like Adam in the Garden, mankind is still discovering the wonders of divine creation. The scope of this document does not allow space to detail further scientific evidence, which can be explored in future studies.

Conclusion

Genesis 2: 8–14 incites various theories on the location of the Garden of Eden. From primeval indigenous oral accounts and throughout written history, civilizations are grounded by their origin stories. Some esteem Eden as solely symbolic of deeper theological truths. Bible accounts, other ancient historical texts (Sumero-Akkadian, Egyptian, and Greek), as well as geographical, geological, and ecological markers provide clues to Eden's possible location. Scientific discoveries fuel further opinions. Nevertheless, a definitive location of the Garden of Eden remains inconclusive. However, some theories are more credible than others and can be supported by multidisciplinary scholarship.

¹²⁰ Smithsonian Institution, "Introduction to Human Evolution," n.p.; Furman and Guertin, "History of the Nile," n.p.

Throughout this survey, the intent is to include theories from various historical eras, as well as scholarship from multiethnic perspectives. Theologians, Bible scholars, and scientists, like all humans, approach any subject from within specific worldviews, ideologies, and historical, cultural, economic, and political mindsets.¹²¹ Some individuals are aware of these preconceived understandings and consider them part of their critical analysis. Others pretend that these do not exist and synthesize information through such blind spots.

While theories on the location of Paradise evolve based on the hermeneutical perspectives of the era, historically, scholarship is consistent on many points regarding the location of the Garden based on the four rivers of Eden. The first river, Pishon, is disputed more than the others, depending on the scholar's assumptions about the land of Havilah. Some ignore the specific geological and ecological details provided by the biblical passage. Others do not address certain linguistic indicators and facts found in ancient texts. Additionally, recent scientific discoveries call into question some older theories. Map 1 and Map 6 (Appendix A) illustrate consistent historical scholarship on possible locations of Havilah (Nubia or India). Add to these theories evidence found in other ancient texts and current scientific knowledge, and the preponderance of evidence leans towards Africa (south of Egypt, Nubia, present-day Sudan) as the most likely location of Havilah. Based on the scholarship discussed in this document, it is concluded that the White Nile is a reasonable probability for the first river of Eden, the Pishon.

Historically, the second river, Gihon, is consistently identified as the Nile. It is sometimes disputed based on the scholar's thoughts regarding the location of the land of

¹²¹ Ukpong, "New Testament Hermeneutics in Africa," 147–167.

Kush/Cush. Map 1 and Map 6 (Appendix A) illustrate consistent biblical scholarship on possible locations of Cush. Ancient Hebrew texts specifically name Ethiopia (Cush) as the land through which this river flows. Based on this scholarship, the Blue Nile is a strong probability for the second river of Eden, the Gihon.

Some scholars do not address the possible locations of the first two rivers, or assume they were lost in the flood during the days of Noah. Others theorize that these are dried-up rivers around the Tigris-Euphrates river system. Ancient Hebrew texts connect the third river with Assyria, making it most likely the Tigris, and specifically names the fourth river as the Euphrates.

Conversely, more recent theories reject the long-held and commonly-accepted conclusion that the third and fourth rivers of Eden are the Tigris and the Euphrates. Some postulate, based on photos taken from outer space, that the third and fourth rivers are actually dried-up rivers of the Nile system. In addition, scientific evidence of the first humans in Africa indicates that Eden most likely was in Africa. These last two points are compelling evidence. As science advances and more facts are uncovered, long-held conclusions regarding the third and fourth rivers could be challenged. However, based on historical scholarship and current science, it is concluded that the third and fourth rivers of Eden are most likely the Tigris and the Euphrates.

Therefore, based on multidisciplinary scholarship, at this stage of research, the rivers of the Garden of Eden are probably the White Nile, the Blue Nile, the Tigris, and the Euphrates. Credible scholarship includes Africa as a possible location for the Garden of Eden.

The possibility that Eden could credibly be located in Africa, supported by biblical texts and historical scholarship, is an important revelation for all humans and specifically for Christians. It is especially relevant for people of African descent on the continent and in the diaspora, some of whom have felt forsaken by God. Additionally, the first two BTE project sites in Uganda and Zambia are located in the East African Rift Valley system, where the earliest human remains have been uncovered. The pilot BTE location is Luba, Uganda, on the Nile River, possibly near the biblical Garden of Eden.

African Eden

As detailed above, no one knows the precise geographical location or dimensions of the Garden of Eden. However, biblical accounts, historical maps, and science credibly locate Eden in Africa. Sperling cites *Tamid* (32b) as placing Eden in “the center of Africa.”¹²² Felder locates Eden in Africa.¹²³ Many credible Western scholars consider the first two rivers named in Genesis 2:10–14 (Pishon and Gihon) to be the White Nile and the Blue Nile.¹²⁴ The source of the Nile River is in Uganda,¹²⁵ in what the indigenous people call “Lake Nalubaale” (Lake Victoria), which flows through ten countries, “from south to north through eastern Africa.”¹²⁶ Based on a history of credible scholarship, the first two rivers of the biblical Garden of Eden were probably on the African continent.

¹²² Sperling, 388.

¹²³ Felder, *The Original African Heritage Study Bible*, 4, 1895; Map 3 (Appendix A).

¹²⁴ W. Creighton Marlowe, “Eden,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 371; Felder, *The Original African Heritage Study Bible*, 4, 1895; Map 3 (Appendix A).

¹²⁵ Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, 18.

¹²⁶ National Geographic Society, n.p.

Scientists call the African Baobab the “Tree of Life.”¹²⁷ Some live 1,800 years; they are not domestically farmed but grow wherever God places them.¹²⁸ For its “nutritional and medicinal values. . . virtually every part of the baobab tree is useful . . . [with] over 300 purposes including . . . nutritious food, livestock fodder, fiber, medicine, [cosmetics], and income to local people. Edible parts . . . include leaves, seeds, fruit pulp.”¹²⁹ This African tree of life provides virtually every nutrient, vitamin, and mineral needed for human health and wellness. Its pulp “is rich in mucilage, pectins, tartarate, free tartaric acids, calcium, vitamin B, and it contains 10 times higher concentration of vitamin C than oranges. . . . The leaves are an important component of the diet and are often eaten as staple food providing a significant protein and mineral source, especially of [magnesium, potassium,] iron and calcium, for many African communities. Baobab seeds are rich in protein and mono- and polyunsaturated fatty acids.”¹³⁰

The Tree of Life is “native to mainland Africa. It is widespread throughout the hot, drier regions of tropical Africa, extending from northern Tanzania and Namibia to Ethiopia, Sudan, and the northern fringes of the Sahara.”¹³¹ “In several West African countries (e.g., Benin, Mali, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Nigeria) the baobab is inextricably linked with cultural identity and local belief systems and its use is guided through formal

¹²⁷ Nurul Islam-Faridi, Hamidou F. Sakhanokho, and C. Dana Nelson, “New Chromosome Number and Cyto-Molecular Characterization of the African Baobab (*Adansonia Digitata* L.)—‘The Tree of Life,’” *Scientific Reports* 10, 13174 (2020): 1. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-020-68697-6>.

¹²⁸ Christine Buchmann, Sarah Prehler, Anna Hartl, and Christian R. Vogl, “The Importance of Baobab (*Adansonia Digitata* L.) in Rural West African Subsistence—Suggestion of a Cautionary Approach to International Market Export of Baobab Fruits,” *Ecology of Food and Nutrition* 49, no. 3 (2010): 156. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03670241003766014>.

¹²⁹ Islam-Faridi, Sakhanokho, and Nelson, 1-2.

¹³⁰ Buchmann, Prehler, Hartl, and Vogl, 147, 149.

¹³¹ Islam-Faridi, Sakhanokho, and Nelson, 1.

and informal regulations.”¹³² An issue is that “natural stands of baobab are already under threat due to climate change and human activities such as land clearing by an ever-increasing population.”¹³³ Another issue is that “The approval of baobab fruit pulp as a novel food on the European market provides a great opportunity. However . . . in West Africa the possibility to export baobab fruits to the EU may have a rather negative impact on local livelihoods as baobab is used extensively in subsistence.”¹³⁴ The African Baobab is the Tree of Life for many communities that rely on it for nourishment. The Tree of Life was in the Garden of Eden.

In addition to biblical creation accounts of mankind, scientists unearthed the earliest human remains in East Africa, not far from the source of the Nile River.¹³⁵ Multiple contemporary scientific disciplines place the earliest humans in Africa. The scope of this study does not allow space to detail scientific evidence beyond that which is presented above concerning scholarship on the Garden of Eden section. The relevant points to this project are that the Bible likely locates the Garden of Eden in Africa and that science also documents the first humans in Africa.

A history of scholarship on possible locations of the biblical Garden of Eden is presented in the previous section. This dissertation does not argue that Africa is the sole possible location of the biblical Garden of Eden. It simply points out that according to Genesis 2:10 (KJV), “a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it

¹³² Buchmann, Prehsler, Hartl, and Vogl, 146, 165.

¹³³ Islam-Faridi, Sakhanokho, and Nelson, 2.

¹³⁴ Buchmann, Prehsler, Hartl, and Vogl, 146, 165.

¹³⁵ Smithsonian Institution, “Introduction to Human Evolution,” n.p.

was parted, and became into four heads”—the first two of the four river heads flowing out of the Garden of Eden are possibly on the African continent. W. Creighton Marlowe shows that “Eden is the source of four great rivers. . . Options for the” Pishon and the Gihon include “the Nile (Blue and White).”¹³⁶

Therefore, if these biblical scholars and scientists are correct, then it is possible that God formed Adam (male and female, Gen. 5:2) from rich African soil. This point is vital because it replants the biblical creation story in African ground. It also affirms African identity, as made in God’s image and likeness, possibly out of African earth. This concept re-contextualizes Genesis 1:26–28 and 2:7 so that God made mankind in His image and likeness out of African soil and breathed into them the breath of life. The life-giving essence of God’s divinity was breathed into mankind—God’s Spirit. Mankind (male/female) has been connected to God by that same Spirit since creation.

This view is significantly relevant to the community at the pilot BTE project site in Luba, Uganda, which is near the Nile River, on land that could have been part of the original biblical Eden. The concept of mankind made in God’s image and likeness possibly out of African soil, can contribute to a renewed understanding and appreciation of an authentic African Christian identity.

African Spirituality

In the beginning, Africans were likely the original Adam (male/female). God created them in His image, from African soil, in the Garden of Eden. Ancient African traditional religions reveal a connection with the monotheistic, Most-High God. African

¹³⁶ Marlowe, 371.

spirituality is anchored in a deep, visceral, intuitive, uninterrupted knowing of God, which began when God breathed the breath of life into Adam. Since creation, the Holy Spirit has been present in Africa. African spirituality is foundational to Pentecostalism.

God made mankind in His image (possibly out of fertile African earth) and breathed into him the breath of life. God's Spirit is the life-giving essence of his divinity. All of creation is infused with the Spirit. Mankind has been connected to God by the Spirit since creation. MacRobert shares, "For the early Hebrew writers, the Ruach Yahweh was not only the Spirit who possessed the 'Judges' and 'men of God,' She was also the source of all life."¹³⁷ In Old Testament pneumatology, "God is the Spirit of all life—the creator and sustainer; the vital force. Thus, the pneumatology of the East is open to the idea of the presence of the Ruach Yahweh in Africa before the arrival of the gospel, and perhaps even to pre-Christian possession by the Holy Spirit, which is analogous to that of the Old Testament."¹³⁸ MacRobert stresses that "the Holy Spirit" was "in Africa before the gospel was carried there," and that "the spirit which possessed their forefathers in Africa" is the same Spirit that "baptises black Pentecostals today."¹³⁹ Some aspects of African spirituality are grounded in this biblical concept of the Holy Spirit as the breath of all life and creation.

Alvarado emphasizes that "the Spirit predates written text. The Bible is not God, the Holy Spirit is God. The Holy Spirit revealed God to humans long before the Bible

¹³⁷ MacRobert, 91.

¹³⁸ MacRobert, 91.

¹³⁹ MacRobert, 91.

was written. African people are of the Spirit, not of the book.”¹⁴⁰ The Holy Spirit revealed God to man before Christianity. Some elements of African spirituality are anchored in the Spirit, which precedes both Christianity and the Bible.

This Spiritual connection has been preserved in oral traditions and religious practices. It is an “African Apostolic memory, a 2,000-year history of a way to remember—oral narratives, songs, dance, art; much like a griot who is responsible for remembering and maintaining, mentally archiving, the stories of the village; it defies western epistemology.”¹⁴¹ This reveals some Africans as faithful caretakers of a way of being, an ontology in the Spirit, and it preserves in African epistemology, a way of knowing and remembering by the Spirit. “It is a communal memory and theology, rooted in the strong African community.”¹⁴²

Mbiti adds that as part of traditional education, African children “learn the genealogies of their descent,” which “gives a sense of depth, historical belongingness, a feeling of deep rootedness and a sense of sacred obligation to extend the genealogical line. . . . In some societies people trace their genealogies as far back as the mythological ‘first’ man”¹⁴³

Mbiti details a strong, consistent connection between ancient (precolonial) African traditional religions and biblical Eden. Tribes all over Africa tell stories of a supreme God who created heaven, earth, and all creatures, and they speak of mankind as

¹⁴⁰ Alvarado, “Global Pentecostalism and Its African Roots.”

¹⁴¹ Alvarado, “Global Pentecostalism and Its African Roots.”

¹⁴² Alvarado, “Global Pentecostalism and Its African Roots.”

¹⁴³ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 103.

children of God. Mbiti clarifies, “The people hold that ‘there was nothing before God created the world.’ This means that God created out of nothing, in the original act of creation. . . . This concept of creation [is] *ex nihilo* . . .”¹⁴⁴ Therefore, “God first creates, originates, molds and makes . . . The metaphor of the potter is commonly used to describe God’s creative activity, . . . [including how] God shapes children in the mother’s womb.”¹⁴⁵ Mbiti also tells that “the idea of man’s creation from clay is very widespread in Africa,” as well as the “tree of life.”¹⁴⁶

Ancient Africans held a “deep conception of God as Spirit.”¹⁴⁷ Mbiti explains that this “means that everybody knows of God’s existence almost by instinct, and even children know Him.” Accordingly, “African knowledge of God is expressed in proverbs, short statements, songs, prayers, names, myths, stories and religious ceremonies”¹⁴⁸—oral traditions. Like in Eden, the living Word is inscribed on the hearts and minds of people.¹⁴⁹

Precolonial African traditional religions relate to a God who is eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, almighty, supreme, self-existent, pre-eminent, holy, Great King, One, the surpassingly great Spirit.¹⁵⁰ Within African societies, God is known as Father Creator, Healer, Shepherd, Deliverer, Savior, King, Ruler, Chief of

¹⁴⁴ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 39.

¹⁴⁵ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 39.

¹⁴⁶ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 91–92.

¹⁴⁷ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 13.

¹⁴⁸ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 29.

¹⁴⁹ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 3.

¹⁵⁰ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 30–38.

chiefs, benevolent Master, supreme Judge who acts with impartiality, giver and sustainer of life, and the God who wills as in the concept of predestination.¹⁵¹

Mbiti explains that Africans have an “anthropocentric ontology” in that “everything is seen in terms of its relation to man.”¹⁵² Mbiti divides this into five categories. First, God is the source and sustainer of man and all things. Second, “Spirits consist of extra-human beings [angels/demons] and the spirits of men who died a long time ago.”¹⁵³ Third, mankind is living humans and those who are soon to be born. Fourth, living creation includes animals, plants, and all biological life. The fifth category is objects without biological life.¹⁵⁴ Additionally, God is the source and ultimate controller of a vital “force, power, or energy permeating the whole universe.”¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, “A few human beings have the knowledge and ability to tap, manipulate and use it, such as the medicine-men, witches, priests and rainmakers, some for the good and others for the ill of their communities.”¹⁵⁶

Estrela Alexander echoes Mbiti on aspects of African spirituality: “Among the most relevant was universality of belief in a supreme being—the Great Spirit or holy God. . . . As in the Judeo-Christian tradition, this transcendent Creator deity is sustainer and controller of the universe. . . . This supreme God is served by a host of lesser,

¹⁵¹ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 40–47.

¹⁵² Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 15.

¹⁵³ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 15.

¹⁵⁴ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 16.

¹⁵⁵ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 16.

¹⁵⁶ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 16.

immanent gods who function like the angelic realm in Western religious conceptions.”¹⁵⁷ Mbiti holds that “the sound of the drum speaks a religious language”¹⁵⁸ and reflects the cadence of the Spirit. Alexander declares, “Music is essential to the African spiritual reality. . . . [S]pirit possession occurs when the music is at its highest pitch; drumming, singing and dancing are most intense; and the participants become completely absorbed. The deities will not come unless they are implored . . . unless there is song and rhythm.”¹⁵⁹ Alexander further expounds, “Dancing is as important as singing. African ritual is permeated with dance.”¹⁶⁰ Dance in African worship culture “is communal. It is an expression of the collective story. No one is purely a spectator; everyone has a role in the dance.”¹⁶¹

Alexander goes on to expound:

Everyone—both men and women—are part of all African ritual life. . . . African traditional religion is less male dominated than the Western context. Women have historically played a number of significant roles in African traditional religion . . . [as] priestesses, performing sacerdotal functions in worship, including admonishing, praying and leading in the worship of deities. They have been called on as healers, . . . maintained the sacred objects of African worship . . . been prophetesses and seers given to visions that were used to guide community decision making. Gender has always had a different connotation within the African context. Each gender has a role to play; . . . [which is] important for the maintenance of the community and religious tradition[s]. There have been both male and female images of the one supreme God. And God has been identified

¹⁵⁷ Estrela Alexander, *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2011), 32–33.

¹⁵⁸ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 15.

¹⁵⁹ Alexander, 35.

¹⁶⁰ Alexander, 35.

¹⁶¹ Alexander, 36.

with male and female names. God, unashamedly, has had male and female qualities.¹⁶²

Much like in primeval pre-fall Eden, African spirituality reflects a Godly balance of Adam (male/female).

African Reverence for Nature and Ancestors

African spirituality exhibits a profound reverence for nature that encapsulates Edenic ecotheology. This is not animism but a connection to the Maker and a deep honoring of God's creation. (See the ecotheology section of Chapter 2.)

Long-held Western Christian misunderstandings of African cultures and worldviews have mistaken African reverence for nature and ancestors as worshiping them. Mbiti studied nearly 300 tribes and peoples from all across Africa.¹⁶³ Mbiti corrects the misconception that Africans practice animism, polytheism, pantheism, nature worship, or ancestor worship.¹⁶⁴ He laments, "It is unfortunate that foreign writers, through great ignorance, have failed to understand this deep religious insight of our peoples; and have often ridiculed it, or naively presented it as 'nature worship' or 'animism' . . . Traditional African societies have been neither deaf nor blind to the spiritual dimension of existence, which is so deep, so rich, and so beautiful."¹⁶⁵

Mbiti explains that intuitively "African peoples 'see' that invisible universe when they look at, hear or feel the visible and tangible world. This is one of the most

¹⁶² Alexander, 36.

¹⁶³ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 29.

¹⁶⁴ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 7–8; 56–57.

¹⁶⁵ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 56.

fundamental religious heritages of African peoples. . . . Nature . . . is filled with religious significance.”¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, “God is seen in and behind” His creation as “they manifest Him, they symbolize His being and presence. The invisible world is symbolized or manifested by these visible . . . objects of nature. The invisible world presses hard upon the visible: one speaks of the other . . . The physical and spiritual are but two dimensions of one and the same universe.”¹⁶⁷ Mbiti declares, “To African peoples this religious universe is not an academic proposition: it is an empirical experience, which reaches its height in acts of worship.”¹⁶⁸ God’s created universe and nature speak about God and reveal His Spirit.

Mbiti clarifies that particular acts of remembrance—libation, food sharing—often are mistaken as worship of ancestors.¹⁶⁹ Recently departed ancestors are called the “living-dead,” and their names are frequently referenced so that they are “still people” in the hearts of family members. Their wisdom, lessons, stories, affairs, traditions, ethics, and activities are alive in the minds of the people. The “living-dead” are present both with people, speaking their language and listening to their cries, and with God; thus they are believed to “have full access to the channels of communicating with God directly.”¹⁷⁰ Families symbolically share meals and drink with the “living-dead.” In Jewish Passover Seders, a seat, plate, food, and drink are placed for Elijah. This is not worship of Elijah, but an act of remembrance. In American culture, people place flowers and gifts on the

¹⁶⁶ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 56.

¹⁶⁷ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 56.

¹⁶⁸ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 57.

¹⁶⁹ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 8–9.

¹⁷⁰ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 82.

gravesites of departed loved ones as they share their troubles and speak of how much they miss the departed. Likewise, Africans honor and remember their ancestors and the “living-dead” through actions that keep their memories alive in families.

Alexander clarifies the distinction between ancestor veneration versus worship: “Worship ascribes deity to a being as the object of adulation, investing that being with salvific capacity, while veneration is reverential respect for a being because of their wisdom and dignity, without ascribing supernatural power except as that derived from a supernatural deity.”¹⁷¹ Alexander presents Ignatius M. Zvarevashe’s insight that “there is no deification or divinization of ancestors in spite of whatever great role they played in society.”¹⁷² Alexander then goes on to explain, “Rites to honor ancestors. . . remind the community of those collective traits that are esteemed. Their deeds are recounted through song, story, myth, folklore and proverbs; and the understanding that they are aware of one’s actions restrains antisocial behavior.”¹⁷³

African Roots of Pentecostalism

Alvarado encourages embracing an African spirituality and framing of theology from a pneumatology perspective. Salvation is a breaking of the Holy Spirit into the lives of mankind. Global Pentecostalism has African roots. Pentecostalism is a Spirituality rather than a denomination. The presence and work of the Holy Spirit continue in the community and are what tie Pentecostals to Africa. Alvarado identifies some

¹⁷¹ Alexander, 34.

¹⁷² Alexander, 35.

¹⁷³ Alexander, 35.

“Africanisms” which are prevalent in Pentecostalism: “African people and their descendants are . . . ‘notoriously religious,’ or primarily, deeply spiritual people.”¹⁷⁴ Additionally, “African people mediate divine encounters through embodied practices,” and this embodied spirituality expresses itself in “oral tradition, principally in story and song.”¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, Alvarado reveals, “African worldview is more spiritual and emotional than scientific and rational. . . . African spirituality is inherently liberationist . . . [and] strives for freedom . . .”¹⁷⁶ Importantly, “African spirituality is characterized by an appreciation for the continuity between the sacred and secular.”¹⁷⁷ Thus, African spirituality is an “embodied spirituality” that is expressed in movement in response to the Holy Spirit, often in a jerk, in rocking, and in dancing. While worshiping God, Africans instinctively move in cadence with the continual flow, hovering, and beat of the Spirit.¹⁷⁸

Even in the diaspora, the African soul has a way of knowing, reminiscing, and anamnesis: a recollection of its deeply-rooted African spirituality. Alvarado argues:

I contend that African slaves brought African religious sensibilities to North America as part of their essential existence. . . . African spirituality remained with them and [was] translated into the spiritual practices and indigenous religions of Africans in the Americas. From the beginning of the Pentecostal movement, these African sensibilities and expressions became the crucible for Pentecostal germination and flourishing . . . as embodied spirituality.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁴ Johnathan E Alvarado, “The Embodied Worship of African American Pentecostalism,” in *The Holy Spirit and Social Justice: Interdisciplinary Global Perspectives; History, Race, & Culture*, ed. Antipas L. Harris and Michael D Palmer (Lanham, MD: Seymour Press, 2019), 383.

¹⁷⁵ Alvarado, “The Embodied Worship of African American Pentecostalism,” 384.

¹⁷⁶ Alvarado, “The Embodied Worship of African American Pentecostalism,” 384.

¹⁷⁷ Alvarado, “The Embodied Worship of African American Pentecostalism,” 384.

¹⁷⁸ Alvarado, “The Embodied Worship of African American Pentecostalism,” 389, 392–395.

¹⁷⁹ Alvarado, “The Embodied Worship of African American Pentecostalism,” 392.

Alvarado then explains, “The leader of the movement, William J. Seymour, was a descendant of the slaves of the African diaspora.”¹⁸⁰ Alvarado points out:

Because the Azusa Street outpouring was led by an African American and attended largely by African Americans, much of the liturgical practices were derived from African American spiritual sensibilities. . . . Early Pentecostal adherents of the Azusa Street revival were criticized greatly for the way they used their bodies in worship. They were castigated because of the cries, moans, kneeling, tongues speech, flailing, rolling, and bodies lying in the floor in heaps.¹⁸¹

Harris also draws the connection between African spirituality and Pentecostalism while further tying it to the religious practices of enslaved Africans in America. “Through radical spiritual experience, slaves discerned God’s presence in their midst.”¹⁸² He explains that “For centuries, black people have intuitively drawn from the wells of spirituality that they transported from the Motherland, mingled with their unique vision of the biblical narrative to cope with their harsh realities in the Americas.”¹⁸³ Accordingly, “Seymour’s epistemology was passed down from his slave grandparents, ex-slave parents, and early black teachers. It follows that an experience-based religion birthed at the Azusa Street Revival was inextricably connected to deep wells of black ways of knowing. . . . [T]heir religious experience of the baptism of the Spirit proved to them that God was not only *with them* but *in them* as he was in Acts 2.”¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ Alvarado, “The Embodied Worship of African American Pentecostalism,” 385.

¹⁸¹ Alvarado, “The Embodied Worship of African American Pentecostalism,” 394.

¹⁸² Antipas L. Harris, “Black Folk Religion in Black Holiness Pentecostalism: Spiritual Formation Among Black Pentecostals,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 28, no. 1 (2019): 106, https://brill.com/view/journals/pent/28/1/article-p103_103.xml?language=en.

¹⁸³ Harris, “Black Folk Religion in Black Holiness Pentecostalism,” 104.

¹⁸⁴ Harris, “Black Folk Religion in Black Holiness Pentecostalism,” 110.

MacRobert spotlights that “there were no whites present on 6 April 1906, when glossolalia erupted at the home of the Asberys . . .”¹⁸⁵ Then MacRobert quotes Vinson Synan as recognizing “That the one outstanding personality in bringing about Pentecostal revival in Los Angeles was a Negro is a fact of extreme importance to Pentecostals of all races.”¹⁸⁶ Gastón Espinosa cites a newspaper from the time of the Azusa Revival as saying that “a Negro is the ‘founder’ of this faith.”¹⁸⁷ Espinosa shows that Seymour “proposed that the true baptism in the Holy Spirit was a ‘means to be flooded with the love of God and Power for Service, and a love for the truth as it is in God’s word’—a teaching he clung to throughout his ministry.”¹⁸⁸

Alexander asserts that “The roots of African American Pentecostalism draw from the deep wells of African spirituality.”¹⁸⁹ Parham was one of the critics of the Azusa Revival, and his comments—although intended as negative criticisms—support Alexander’s assertion. Parham was “repulsed by what he saw as worshipers’ scandalous, unrestrained and disorderly race-mixing and the ‘Africanisms’ . . . ‘crude negroisms’ . . . ‘animal spiritism’ . . . ‘Negro chanting,’ . . . [and] ‘heathenish’ elements.”¹⁹⁰ Alexander asserts that Africanisms

are perhaps the most visible examples of African retentions within Pentecostal worship, [revealing] the influence of African spirituality. . . . The orality and communal essence of African spirituality resonates in the call-and-response

¹⁸⁵ MacRobert, 83.

¹⁸⁶ MacRobert, 83.

¹⁸⁷ Gastón Espinosa, *William J. Seymour and the Origins of Global Pentecostalism: A Biography and Documentary History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 139.

¹⁸⁸ Espinosa, 141.

¹⁸⁹ Alexander, 16.

¹⁹⁰ Alexander, 28–29.

communication of preaching and gospel singing. . . . African American Pentecostalism remains a communal affair. . . . [as shown in] [t]estimony and tarrying services, congregational singing, preaching (the antiphonal call and response) . . . Pentecostal testimony service parallels the African practice of storytelling by the griot.¹⁹¹

Indeed, Alexander confirms, “The Pentecostal attempt to tap into and harness spiritual power for the good of the individual and the community finds direct parallels in African religion.”¹⁹²

Waigwa shows that the fire of the Holy Spirit blazes among African Initiated Churches (AIC) independently of outside influences, as evidenced by salvations, deliverances, tongues, healings, miracles, prophecies, etc., which had “no historical or theological connection with the Azusa revival.”¹⁹³ Akorino theology was not influenced by missionaries; rather, it came out of the indigenous prophets’ and leaders’ “experience with the Holy Spirit, along with their exposure to the . . . Bible . . . published in 1926” in their native language.¹⁹⁴

African spirituality is an intuitive epistemology, a Holy Spirit revealed way of knowing the monotheistic Most-High God, and a root of Pentecostalism. It unveils Africans as faithful stewards of the ways of the Spirit, and it shows a communal reverence for nature. African spirituality makes a massive contribution to Pentecostal heritage. Africans authentically embody the Spirit, who engraves the word on their hearts. This rich African spiritual heritage brings into focus African contributions to

¹⁹¹ Alexander, 52–53.

¹⁹² Alexander, 56–57.

¹⁹³ Waigwa, *The Akorino Church in Kenya*, vii.

¹⁹⁴ Waigwa, *The Akorino Church in Kenya*, 168–169, 240.

Pentecostalism. African spirituality enriches Back to Eden ecotheology while revealing a continual vertical relationship between mankind and God since creation, even before written history.

African Contributions to Biblical Record

The Old Testament details strong connectivity between ancient Ethiopians, Cushites, Egyptians, Nubians, and Hebrews. Much of African traditional religious folklore, mythology, parables, and anamnesis is reflected in Old Testament narratives. A rich African spiritual heritage reaffirms the constant African influence on Christianity. The Book of Acts details African contributions to the Early Church. Oden declares that Africa was an important seedbed of early Christian theology and scholarship.¹⁹⁵ Mbiti reminds that Christianity can be “described as an indigenous traditional and African religion.”¹⁹⁶

Mbiti points out that Judaism was established in northern and northeastern Africa centuries before Christianity was born. Alexandria gained eminence as a leading seat for Judaism and Jewish learning. The religious and social life of the ancient Jews is similar to that of many African societies. Some of the obvious differences are Judaism developed a prophetic movement and a messianic expectation. The ancient Jews were more “African”

¹⁹⁵ Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*. n.p.

¹⁹⁶ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 223.

than Asian in many respects.¹⁹⁷ Mbiti reports that “Falasha Jews who form part of the Agao peoples of Ethiopia” are “an indigenous representative of Judaism in Africa.”¹⁹⁸

Jakes credits “Moses, as the writer of the book of Genesis primeval creation account.”¹⁹⁹ History shows that Moses was a Hebrew man, born on African soil, educated in the Egyptian royal court, located on the Nile River. The Nile River is a major contributor to the transportation of African commerce, culture, religions, and civilization.²⁰⁰ Moses’ Egyptian education would have included the study of African traditional religions, ancient African wisdom, folktales, parables, proverbs, and oral legends of creation accounts. It is inconceivable that his education did not include studies of African traditional religions because, as shown by Joshua Mark, the earliest known religious writings are Egyptian pyramid texts.²⁰¹ Moses’ thought process was fashioned in the womb of ancient African worldviews, religious customs, and cultural practices, which are reflected in the Genesis story. The Spirit inspired Moses—a man with an African mindset and fashioned by ancient African worldviews, religious customs, and cultural practices—to scribe the Genesis sequence. Thus, African identity, culture, and wisdom are baked into the Genesis account and into other Old Testament stories like

¹⁹⁷ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 251.

¹⁹⁸ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 248.

¹⁹⁹ Jakes, “Gleanings on Pneumatology.”

²⁰⁰ Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, 18–21.

²⁰¹ Joshua J. Mark, “The Pyramid Texts: Guide to the Afterlife,” *World History Encyclopedia*, last modified January 18, 2012, n.p., <https://www.ancient.eu/article/148/the-pyramid-texts-guide-to-the-afterlife/>; see Samuel A. B. Mercer, trans., “The Pyramid Texts,” *Sacred Texts*, June 2, 2004, n.p., <https://www.sacred-texts.com/egy/pyt/>.

Joseph, the Exodus, and the Passover, that played out on African soil in Egypt (which includes the Sinai Peninsula).

Felder agrees with Origen and Jerome that “the Queen of Sheba was a Cushite, a Black Royal.”²⁰² Referencing 1 Kings 10:1–10, 13, Felder notes that “Josephus calls her ‘the Queen of Egypt and Ethiopia.’”²⁰³ Additionally, “Article II of the 1955 Ethiopian Constitution” affirms that King Menelik I was the “son of the Queen of Ethiopia, the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon of Jerusalem.”²⁰⁴ Continuity of Jewish and Christian heritage is demonstrated in Acts 8:27–39, where an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the *Kandake* (which may refer to “queen of the Ethiopians”), worshiped in Jerusalem, was baptized, and brought Christianity to Ethiopia.²⁰⁵ Mark reports that “Amantitere (r.c. 25–c. 41 CE) . . . is the queen most often identified as the Candace in Acts 8:27 . . . [and] she may have been Jewish.”²⁰⁶ Faith in the God of Israel continues today in Ethiopian Hebrews and Black Jews.

Oden illuminates that “Africa played a decisive role in the formation of Christian culture. Decisive intellectual achievements of Christianity were explored and understood first in Africa before they were recognized in Europe, and a millennium before they found their way to North America. . . . The term *African mind* points to ideas and literary products produced specifically on the continent of Africa during the first millennium of

²⁰² Cain Hope Felder, *Troubling Biblical Waters: Race, Class, and Family*, The Bishop Henry McNeal Turner Studies in North American Black Religion, vol. 3 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 13.

²⁰³ Felder, *Troubling Biblical Waters*, 33.

²⁰⁴ Felder, *Troubling Biblical Water*, 34.

²⁰⁵ Joshua J. Mark, “The Candaces of Meroe,” *World History Encyclopedia*, last modified March 19, 2018, n.p., https://www.ancient.eu/The_Candaces_of_Meroe/.

²⁰⁶ Mark, “The Candaces of Meroe,” n.p.

the common era.”²⁰⁷ Oden uses the term “early African Christianity” to refer to “all the early forms of Christianity in the first millennium” in the regions of “Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, and possibly further south . . . Early African Christians spoke many indigenous languages and were not limited to the major commercial languages along the Mediterranean coast. . . . African Christianity has arisen out of distinctly African experience on African soil.”²⁰⁸ Additionally, Oden points out that “many pivotal scenes of salvation history” occurred in Africa: “The story of the children of Abraham in Africa; Joseph in Africa; Moses in Africa; Mary, Joseph and Jesus in Africa; and shortly thereafter, Mark and Perpetua and Athanasius and Augustine in Africa.”²⁰⁹ The Nile River was a major contributor to the spread of Christianity throughout the African continent. Oden reminds that from Africa, “the great Carthaginian and Numidian writers were Tertullian, Cyprian, Arnobius, Optatus and Augustine.”²¹⁰

Mbiti recounts:

Long before the start of Islam in the seventh century, Christianity was well established all over north Africa, Egypt, parts of the Sudan and Ethiopia. It was a dynamic form of Christianity, producing great scholars and theologians like Tertullian, Origen, Clement of Alexandria and Augustine. African Christianity made a great contribution to Christendom through scholarship, participation in Church councils, defense of the Faith, movements like monasticism, theology, translation and preservation of the Scriptures, martyrdom, the famous Catechetical School of Alexandria, and liturgy . . .²¹¹

²⁰⁷ Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, 9–10.

²⁰⁸ Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, 13.

²⁰⁹ Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, 14.

²¹⁰ Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, 21.

²¹¹ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 223–224.

Tradition holds that the apostle Mark was the founder of the Coptic Church in Egypt. The Ethiopian church survived Islamic assault, and for centuries, it shared the same Patriarch of Alexandria as the Coptic Church. Except for these two churches, starting in the 600s A.D., the Islamic invasion displaced much of pre-colonial African Christianity in northern Africa and Nubia.²¹²

European Christianity came as the Portuguese established trade, and their Catholic Church converted many in the Congo to Christianity in the 1400s. European Christianity, brought along with traders, did not take significant root in Africa. The actual modern expansion of Christianity in Africa started as formerly enslaved, freed Christians returned to western Africa towards the end of the 18th century, and it spread spontaneously during the 19th century along the west coast from Sierra Leone to Nigeria, before penetrating the interior.²¹³

Also, in the 19th century, European colonial occupation, with its Christian missionaries, was established. European Mission Christianity was a white man's religion on African soil, and some falsely taught that Africans were the cursed descendants of Noah. Felder dispels the myth of the curse of Ham.²¹⁴ Ham disrespected his father Noah, but in Genesis 9:25, Noah cursed not Ham, but one of Ham's sons, Canaan. There is no biblical mention that Canaan's curse extended to his future generations. None of Ham's other sons (Gen. 10:6–20) nor their descendants were cursed. Some European

²¹² Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 224–225.

²¹³ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 223–228.

²¹⁴ Cain Hope Felder, "Race, Racism, and the Biblical Narratives," in *Stony The Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Cain Hope Felder (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1991), 129–130, Kindle.

missionaries distorted the biblical account to justify slavery, colonialism, apartheid, segregation, and oppression of African peoples.

Many Africans left the various denominations for independent indigenous African churches (AICs). AICs took mission Christianity, processed it through African theology, worldviews, culture, and traditional religions, and remade it with their own vibrant expressive worship style.²¹⁵ Mbiti elaborates, “Emphasis is also laid on the place and work of the Holy Spirit, and during worship services people seek to be possessed by Him. When they become possessed, they speak in other tongues. . . . Some of the leaders are women, and these are fully accepted and respected by their followers”²¹⁶ just as they have always been in ancient African traditional religions. In the 20th century, Christianity exploded in Africa, “making the southern two-thirds of the Continent and Madagascar predominantly Christian, while the northern one-third is predominantly Muslim. African religion is still very present . . . since it permeates the whole worldview of many Christians and Muslims.”²¹⁷

In the 21st century, Allan Anderson reports, “Recognition is being given to the increasing role played by a rapidly growing new form of African Christianity, that of independent Pentecostal and Charismatic churches and ‘ministries’ . . . [and] these newer Pentecostal movements are not *fundamentally* different from the Holy Spirit movements and ‘Spirit’ churches that preceded them in the African Initiated Churches (AICs).”²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 223–228, 235.

²¹⁶ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 229.

²¹⁷ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 236.

²¹⁸ Allan Anderson, “New African Initiated Pentecostalism and Charismatics in South Africa,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 35, no. 1 (2005): 68, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1581661>.

Waigwa shows that the Holy Spirit acts among indigenous African peoples. The fire of the Holy Spirit was lit among indigenous African leaders, as evidenced by salvations, deliverances, tongues, healings, miracles, prophecies, etc. “In Central Kenya . . . a Pentecost happened in the 1920’s . . . [which] had no historical or theological connection with the Azusa revival.”²¹⁹ Akorino theology was not influenced by missionaries; rather, it came out of the indigenous prophets’ and leaders’ “experience with the Holy Spirit, along with their exposure to the Bible published in 1926 in their native language.”²²⁰ Christ is Redeemer, Servant Leader, and Wounded Healer. The Holy Spirit is listed after the Father and before the Son in the Akorino order of the Trinity.²²¹

Chapter Summary

Based on historical and current multidisciplinary scholarship, the rivers of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:8-14) are probably the White Nile, the Blue Nile, the Tigris, and the Euphrates. Credible scholarship includes Africa as a possible location for the Garden of Eden. Science reveals the African continent as the probable birthplace of mankind. Thus, it is possible that God created Adam (male/female) in His image, and formed them into His likeness from African soil.

African spirituality is anchored in a deep, visceral, intuitive, uninterrupted knowing of God, which began when God breathed the breath of life into Adam. Since the beginning, Africans have been connected to the Spirit of God. African cultures reveal

²¹⁹ Waigwa, *The Akorino Church in Kenya*, vii.

²²⁰ Waigwa, *The Akorino Church in Kenya*, 168–169.

²²¹ Waigwa, *The Akorino Church in Kenya*, 240.

respect for nature and a tradition of caring for creation in a manner that does not exploit but nurtures. African spirituality is foundational to Pentecostalism.

Geologically, present-day Israel and Lebanon sit on the African tectonic plate and are on the African continent. African identity, culture, and wisdom are baked into the Genesis account and other Old Testament stories, most of which took place on African soil. Since the earliest days of Christianity African church fathers and scholars have made significant contributions to the biblical records. Contemporary African theologians offer fresh insight and revelation to biblical truths when explored through African prisms.

CHAPTER 4:

AFRICAN IDENTITY

“Isn't it amazing that we are all made in God's image, and yet there is so much diversity among his people?”¹ Desmond Tutu

Since Adam's fall, African identity (like all human identity) has suffered distortions caused by the consequences of sin—sins that people commit and sins that are committed against them. The enemy lies. Fallen, sinful man often exalts his ethnicity while dominating others. He is fearful of ethnic and cultural diversity, and he fails to acknowledge God's image and likeness in others. To justify all manner of evil, some people allow themselves to be agents of the devil, spewing lies by claiming that Africans are inferior, subhuman, and not made in God's image.

Unfortunately, some Africans believe such lies, and they struggle with self-hatred. Many in the diaspora, especially descendants of the formerly enslaved, were stripped of identity, history, language, culture, and any knowledge of their place of origin. This creates a hole in the soul and a void within a human's sense of identity. Pressures to assimilate to a foreign, dominant culture cause some to minimize their African heritage in exchange for the hope of acceptance and upward mobility. Cultural values and standards of beauty in a dominant culture are often different than those in African traditions,

¹ Desmond Tutu, “Desmond Tutu Quotes 454144,” Brainy Quotes, accessed November 15, 2022, n.p., https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/desmond_tutu_454144.

making it difficult for some to be accepted when living in authentic ethnic identity. Falola reveals that Africans today wrestle with reclaiming a lost identity.²

What does it look like to return to Eden and to behold the face of the Creator, without sinful distortions? What would it mean to receive identity directly from God, free from the effects of centuries of oppression? What if the lying tongue of the enemy, which like a terrorist incites fear and doubt, was silenced? What would happen if only the pure divine truth pouring from God’s loving heart and holy voice were heard? Humanity can go back to Eden, the beginning, before sin and its effects. In Eden, mankind can reset and reconnect with God’s original intention for humanity. Human beings can rest in the Lord’s peace, in sound mindedness, and in abundance. Again, mankind can enjoy the pleasures of Eden—divine intimacy with the Creator, face to face and heart to heart. God-given human identity is redeemed, recovered, restored, and treasured in Eden.

Imago Dei

Eden is the place where God ascribes human identity. In the beginning, God created male and female in His image and according to His likeness (Gen. 1:26-27). This is the foundational biblical concept of *Imago Dei*. Adam is both male and female; God “called their name Adam” (Gen. 5:2 KJV). The Hebrew word for “image” is a masculine noun *tselem* (Strong’s Hebrew #6754), which means likeness, form, resemblance, something cut out, a representative figure.³ The Hebrew word for “likeness” is a feminine noun, *demuth* (Strong’s Hebrew #1823), which means similitude, resembles, appears like,

² Falola, 2, 6–10.

³ Bible Hub, “6754. tselem,” Biblehub.com, n.p., accessed September 23, 2022, n.p. <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/6754.htm>.

figures like; is formed, shaped, patterned, fashioned, or modeled after.⁴ Both male and female human identity is given by the Creator and is a reflection of God. Humanity is not God. Humanity is God's image-bearer. Therefore, all human life is valuable and sacred, regardless of ethnicity, nationality, skin color, gender, political view, or socioeconomic status. God intentionally creates humanity in a myriad of shapes, sizes, colors, and ethnicities—all of whom are made in His image and likeness. The original intent for humanity (before the fall) is to resemble God, to be a representative figure of God.

African identity (like all human identity) is made in God's image and likeness. Creating mankind in His image and likeness is what God said, and it is what God did in Eden. Nothing can change this divine truth about any ethnic group or gender in all of humanity. God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" (Gen. 1:26 NKJV). Then God puts his hands in the earth (possibly African soil) and forms, fashions, and molds man into a resemblance of Himself; next, God breathes into man "the breath of life," and man becomes "a living being" (Gen. 1:27, 2:7 NKJV). The Spirit of God, the breath of life, makes man like God in the core of his being. God still fearfully and wonderfully creates humanity as he fashions life in a mother's womb (Ps. 139:13-16), and his Spirit still breathes the breath of life, making each one a human being.

God intentionally creates each person with specific features, gender, skin color, ethnic identity, and nationality. Every aspect of God's creation in each person is to be loved, respected, and cherished as a reflection of God's image. God creates numerous ethnic identities that are vastly different, and all are esteemed by and worthy to God.

⁴ Bible Hub, "1823. demuth," Biblehub.com, n.p., accessed September 23, 2022, n.p., <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/1823.htm>.

Jesus loves humanity equally as He pays the same price to offer redemption to all. God creates humanity in an array of skin colors, none of which are superior or inferior to another. God creates black skin; therefore, it is beautiful, and, like all human skin colors, it is a reflection of God's image and likeness. Thus, Africans, wrapped in the countless exquisite hues of black skin that God created, are God's image-bearers.

Africans (like all humans) are formed after God's likeness and endowed with his life-giving Spirit. God creates and looks upon all that He makes, including Black Africans, and proclaims that it is very good (Gen. 1:31). Africans are not inferior in any way to any other humans. Africans are fully human, and they have the same value and worth to the Creator as every other ethnicity. African theologians, historians, and scholars, on the continent and in the diaspora, are redefining and reclaiming African identity, and more specifically, African Christian identity. This document leaves retrieving African identity to African theologians.

However, some highlights from African scholarship on this subject are foundational to Back to Eden (BTE) practical ecotheology. As introduced in the Chapter 3 "African Eden" section, the concept of mankind made in God's image and likeness possibly out of African soil, is a significant paradigm shift that can contribute to a renewed understanding and appreciation of God-given African Christian identity.

Ethiopian evangelical theologian Wondimu Legesse Sonessa presents a historical, systematic review of the foundational biblical concept of *Imago Dei*; then, he shows its relevance within African contexts. "According to the story of creation narrated in the Bible, all human beings are created in the image of God. As God's image-bearers, all

people need equal freedom, dignity, and justice.”⁵ Such Godly treatment of all humanity makes possible “a harmonious and peaceful relationship between people of different ethnic heritages.”⁶ Sonessa addresses “the tension between ethnicity and humanity in the image of God from a theological perspective in order to foster a harmonious life for human beings in their day-to-day relationship with each other.”⁷

Sonessa details theological positions from many distinguished scholars including Noreen L. Herzfeld, Reinhold Niebuhr, Augustine, Karl Barth, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Wolfhart Pannenberg. The *Imago Dei* means that God uniquely created humanity in relationship to Himself, not in comparison to any other created thing. All other animals, birds, and creatures were “created according to their kind.”⁸ God spoke the rest of creation into existence. However, from the Triune unity of the Godhead, He said, “Let us” make humanity “in our image, according to our likeness.”⁹

This divine Trinitarian relationship is the standard of unity. Likewise humanity, which is created in the image and according to the likeness of this One God in three persons, is designed to reflect unity in a triune relationship with God, others, and creation. Before the fall, Adam (male/female) thrived in a harmonious community with God, each other, and ecological systems.

⁵ Wondimu Legesse Sonessa, “*Imago Dei* and the Tensions of Ethnic Identity,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 56, no. 1 (2021): 116, EBSCOhost Religion and Philosophy Collection. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/787972>.

⁶ Sonessa, 116.

⁷ Sonessa, 116-117.

⁸ Sonessa, 118.

⁹ Sonessa, 118.

Some scholars define the image of God in humanity as “natural qualities” that resemble those in God, such as mental capacity, spiritual faculties, reason, intellect, free-will, and self-consciousness. Yet others point to a “physical resemblance,” like with parents and children.¹⁰ Jesus came to earth as God wrapped in human flesh—fully God and fully human.

Augustine’s description of the image of God in humanity includes “the powers of the soul: memory, the mind or intellect, and will.”¹¹ He wrote that “there is a certain image of the Trinity: the mind itself, its knowledge, which is its offspring, and love as a third; these three are one and one substance.”¹² Augustine regards the mind as an *Imago Dei* trinity with the “mind as lover, beloved, love.”¹³ This latter point might refer to God as the lover, Jesus as the beloved, and the Holy Spirit as love. Humanity was created with the capacity to love God and others, to be loved by God and others, and to care for all of creation in the Spirit of love. Sonessa explains, “Augustine, who described being in the image and likeness of God as the true honor of humankind, stated that this likeness could only be maintained in relation to God.”¹⁴

Sonessa points to Gerhard von Rad’s belief that “the whole man [physical and spiritual] is created in God’s image” and that “humankind as both male and female

¹⁰ Sonessa, 118-119.

¹¹ Sonessa, 128.

¹² Sonessa, 119.

¹³ Sonessa, 119.

¹⁴ Sonessa, 125.

functions as the image of God.”¹⁵ God gives humanity dominion over creation, not over other human beings. God did not give one ethnic group dominion over another.

Sonessa synthesizes various theological contributions and finds parallels in African Religion.¹⁶ The Oromo of Ethiopia believe in “God the creator (*Waaqayyo Uumaa*)” and source of all life, designer, and protector.¹⁷ In African theology, “True human beings cannot live in isolation if they are to be moral and ethical persons.”¹⁸ In traditional African culture, “they live not by life of their own but by that of the community.”¹⁹ It is important to recognize “the relationship in daily life of both the individual and the community as a moral and ethical imperative.”²⁰ Furthermore, “African Religion views sin and morality in the context of social life.”²¹ African ethos of community aligns with biblical truth.

Augustine holds that “Adam could have avoided sin in virtue of the state of original perfection in which he was created.”²² He was already flawlessly made in God’s image and likeness. Nevertheless, Adam’s self-centered desires led him down a deceptive path. Pannenberg points to the “egocentricity of human beings, which in turn implies a

¹⁵ Sonessa, 121.

¹⁶ Sonessa, 132.

¹⁷ Sonessa, 132-133.

¹⁸ Sonessa, 135.

¹⁹ Sonessa, 135.

²⁰ Sonessa, 140.

²¹ Sonessa, 139.

²² Sonessa, 139.

turning away from God.”²³ Augustine describes sin as a “perverse form of love or volition” that “distorts the order of the universe by turning to inferior goods and for their sake abandoning better and higher good—namely, God, his truth and his law.”²⁴ In other words, sinful man turns away from the highest and best that God offers humanity: intimacy with God Himself, and with His truth and law; love in community; and divine ecological stewardship. Instead, man exalts himself and his selfish desires, while pursuing things that are inferior to God’s best for humanity and nature. Sonessa reports, “Niebuhr described the sin of human beings as involving the violation of the law of love . . . by pretending to be the center and source of their own life instead of acknowledging and obeying God as the center and source of life.”²⁵ Sinful, unloving human beings, living in isolation with selfish ambitions, do not reflect the likeness of God.

Sonessa summarizes, “All are descended from Adam and Eve, who were created in God’s image, are equally affected by the Fall, and can be redeemed only in Christ who carried their sin on the cross.”²⁶ Michelle J. Bartel expounds, “Because of our connection to and dependence on God, this means that freedom and relationship are inseparable in the *Imago Dei*.”²⁷ Sonessa then proclaims, “There is no nation on earth that can claim a substantive or an ontological unity between God and their ethnic identity. There is also no biblical foundation for a group of people to claim higher ethnic status than others. All

²³ Sonessa, 138.

²⁴ Sonessa, 137.

²⁵ Sonessa, 140.

²⁶ Sonessa, 146.

²⁷ Sonessa, 146.

human beings are equal in God's sight as God's image-bearers."²⁸ Sonessa believes that "It is compulsory for humanity in the image of God to promote the spirit of love and respect, a sense of belongingness, and an attitude of mutual recognition within the societies with ethnic diversity."²⁹

African theologians continue to recover their "God-given heritage" and "African spiritual values with the African mind" while evaluating the tenants of faith, thereby contextualizing African Christianity.³⁰ As discussed in the "Ubuntu (Community)" section of Chapter 2, Archbishop Desmond Tutu connects African Christian identity with *Imago Dei* and the African cultural ethos of Ubuntu. Kwame Bediako emphasizes that "modern African Theology emerges as a theology of African Christian identity."³¹ Bediako presents E. Bolaji Idowu's "concern for indigeneity" as he affirms "the continuity of God in African experience from the pre-Christian heritage into Christian confession," and he vindicates "an internal monotheism underlying African pre-Christian religious tradition."³² This insight reveals an African spiritual heritage that began in creation, and is anchored in a monotheistic God, while being led by His Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God and is present in humanity since creation, long before the birth of Christianity or the Bible. Idowu advocates for a "theology which bears the stamp of

²⁸ Sonessa, 146.

²⁹ Sonessa, 146.

³⁰ E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1973), x-xi. <https://dacb.org/stories/nigeria/idowu-bolaji/>.

³¹ Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 1999), xvii. <https://dacb.org/stories/ghana/bediako-kwame/>.

³² Bediako, xvii.

original thinking and meditation of Africans.”³³ He presents a methodology by which “religion should be studied from the inside and in true perspective.”³⁴

Yorke shows that the Bible plays “a pivotal role in the identity preservation of a displaced, dispersed, despised, and dispossessed people such as . . . enslaved ancestors . . . and their diasporic descendants.”³⁵ It serves both a “religio-cultural purpose” that helps to “foster a Black sense of identity within a religiously pluralistic milieu” and a “psycho-social-cum-political purpose. It helps to foster a Black sense of identity within a hostile environment.”³⁶

Back to Eden (BTE) practical ecotheology encourages humans to receive the completed work of Jesus on the cross (redemption, salvation, deliverance, healing) and to be restored as God’s pure image-bearers. BTE calls mankind to return to Eden and to experience a refreshing breath of the Holy Spirit. It reaffirms human identity as God initially intended, before the impact of sin. When humans receive redemption in Jesus, are empowered by the Holy Spirit, and surrender to God’s will for themselves, the community, and nature, they collectively return to the pre-fall original state of perfection, and reflect the divine image of God. The full radiance of humanity, in the kaleidoscope of ethnicities, is celebrated in Eden, and in unity expresses the image and likeness of God. In Eden, humans can experience the true untainted reality of *Imago Dei*.

³³ Idowu, xi.

³⁴ Idowu, xi.

³⁵ Yorke, 143.

³⁶ Yorke, 143–144.

It is possible to be fully African in all of the beauty, splendor, and brilliance with which God creates humans and to be fully Christlike. After all, there is a multiethnic multitude in heaven.³⁷ Revelation 7:9–17 (ESV) reveals God’s unity of humanity’s diversity—“every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (v. 9). This shows that there is no favored or superior race and that conformity to a specific culture is not God’s intent. He created diverse ethnicities to be unified in worship of the Lamb. Unity, uniqueness, diversity, and inclusion are celebrated in heaven, where none is superior or inferior to the other. Eden is an image of this passage. It is God’s will in heaven reflected on earth.

Sankofa

Sankofa! This Swahili word expresses ancient Akan wisdom—learning from the past ensures a strong future. Dr. Yolanda Pierce expounds that it “embodies the spirit and attitude of reverence for the past . . . one’s forebears . . . one’s history . . . one’s elders.”³⁸ Africans are reclaiming their birthright and redeeming the glorious elements of their well-documented ancient civilizations.³⁹ The *Sankofa* concept recovers African wisdom that is found in oral traditions, proverbs, and ancient written texts; and is foundational to

³⁷ Vince Bantu, “Is Christianity a White Man’s Religion?” (Conference Panel Discussion on Day 1 Part 3 of the Jude 3 Project—Courageous Conversations, Washington DC, 2022), 1:20:06–1:23:20, 1:43:20–1:45:10, <https://www.courageousconvos.org/cc22>.

³⁸ Yolanda Pierce, “Wonder Working Power: Black Women the Holy Spirit, and the Future of the Church” (lecture, Jakes Divinity School, October 25, 2021), <https://divinity.howard.edu/about/office-dean>.; Carter G. Woodson Center, “The Power of Sankofa: Know History,” Berea.edu, accessed December 5, 2021, n.p., <https://www.berea.edu/cgwc/the-power-of-sankofa/>.; Adinkra Symbols & Meanings, “Sankofa,” Adinkrasymbols.org, 2020, n.p., <https://www.adinkrasymbols.org/symbols/sankofa/>.

³⁹ Cheikh Anta Diop, *Precolonial Black Africa* (Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill Books, 1987), xi–xii, Kindle. <https://www.diopianinstitute.org/index.php/about/cheikh-anta-diop>.

recovering a pre-colonial African Christian Identity; and epitomizes the BTE practical ecotheology paradigm.

An example of the retrieval of ancient African oral traditions can be found in Jakes' communication style. According to Dr. Frank Thomas:

Cultural context and the characteristics of Negro expression most definitely inform the recipe of Bishop Jakes' preaching. His sermon creation and delivery result from the African American preaching tradition involving cultural performance and memory, rituals of metaphor and simile, drama, the will to adorn, and storytelling and folklore. Bishop . . . considers himself a storyteller from the lineage of storytellers of African descent.⁴⁰

Ubuntu

An essential element of African ontology is man as a communal being. Alexander stresses that the essential African core value of community is the mindset of Ubuntu. "Rugged individualism is strange to the African mind, which surrenders individualism—excessive egoism—for solidarity with the community and all of nature. . . . The well-being of the individual is intimately connected with the well-being of all of creation."⁴¹ In Genesis 2:18–24, God said that it was not good for man to be alone, so he created woman—community. Man cannot reflect the full character of God by himself but only in community. This is the proper horizontal relationship in BTE ecotheology—a community that nurtures individuals to become fully human: one with each other, one with God, and one with nature. This is an image of Edenic community. See more in the "Ubuntu (Community)" section of Chapter 2.

⁴⁰ Frank Thomas, "The Recipe," in *Don't Drop the Mic: The Power of Your Words Can Change the World*, T. D. Jakes (New York: Faith Words, 2021), 347.

⁴¹ Alexander, 33–34.

African Worldviews

Falola aggregates essential roots in diverse African cultures, stating that “the African worldview is life affirming . . . lays more emphasis on duty than on rights . . . [and] is essentially a tolerant worldview.”⁴² Some of the unifying features are: “the ethos of community and kinship,” belief in the powers in the spirit world, “the role of ancestors,” spiritual connection with nature, and “supernatural forces in creation.”⁴³ African worldviews are incorporated within the discussions of each section of this document.

Pentecostal Kingdom New Order

BTE ideals of “Hands Up” and “Hope the People” align with evidence of an emerging new Pentecostal social economic order. Afolayan argues, “This Pentecostal religious intervention is . . . a revolution that affects the constitution of the self as well as of the society.”⁴⁴ He explains, “The Kingdom of God was ready to take what belongs to it by force . . . rebuilding the individual, thus bestowing the power to be truly human . . . building the new Israel by empowering communities to participate in the foretaste of God’s reign . . . [and] using the resources of the gospel to weave a multifaceted and holistic response to the human predicament in the African ecosystem.”⁴⁵ Ukah discusses “the Pentecostal critique of state and corporate failure to produce and distribute wealth

⁴² Falola, 63.

⁴³ Falola, 55.

⁴⁴ Afolayan, 225.

⁴⁵ Afolayan, 231.

from the bottom up. . . . Furthermore, because of perceived failures in the economic system, Pentecostal leaders have frequently engineered their organizations and its doctrines to proffer alternative pathways to wealth creation and well-being.”⁴⁶

This reframed vision of social order activates African Christian agency. Afolayan argues that “the Pentecostal social [imagery] coalesces around the vision of birthing a city of God on earth that answer[s] the existential questions of Christians.”⁴⁷ It is a call to reimagine, reframe, readjust, revise, and reconcile contemporary African social, economic, and political structure with biblical ideals, as first shown in Eden. As long as sin impacts mankind, there will be a struggle to attain these archetypes. BTE models an ultimate heavenly goal towards which believers strive.

African Orthodox theologian Augustine, as early as 426 A.D., sets “forth the Christian understanding of universal history and human destiny.”⁴⁸ Afolayan cites Augustine’s *The City of God*, in which he “redirect[s] the attention of Christian away from the city of Man to the city of God in heaven.”⁴⁹

Nimi Wariboko says that his “book *The Charismatic City* provides an examination of the global city as a site of intense human encounter with God and a metaphor for the new thing that God is doing in history. . . . It is [about] charismatic spirituality . . . [in] the global city, and as an emerging disruptive cosmopolitan ethos. . . .

⁴⁶ Ukah, 214.

⁴⁷ Afolayan, 233.

⁴⁸ Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, 184.

⁴⁹ Afolayan, 234.

the charismatic city . . . [is] relationality grounded in and animated by the unlimitable Spirit of God”⁵⁰

Falola shares that “there is a flourishing informal business sector which occurs outside of excessive bureaucratic control and whose participants pay little or no tax . . . [which can be] more than 50 percent of the entire economies of a few countries. Examples include . . . service occupations (singing, repairs, and maintenance), small-scale trade, and distributions in the rural areas.”⁵¹ This informal sector is the demographic of BTE economic initiatives. Tareian King reports, “The amount of money required to start a business in most African countries is relatively small. Notable examples include five entrepreneurs in Africa who started what are now million-dollar businesses with less than \$300.”⁵²

BTE ecotheology is a biblically based alternate social order that aligns in many ways with contemporary African Pentecostalism. In practice, on the ground, BTE ecotheology reminds African ministry partners that the government is not coming to help them, and that in spite of oppressive socioeconomics, they have been made free by the blood of the Lamb and by the power of the Holy Spirit. “So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free” (John 8:36 NLT). No longer must Africans define themselves or determine the trajectories of their lives based on current circumstances. In Eden, the Father gives

⁵⁰ Nimi Wariboko, “African Pentecostal Political Philosophy: New Directions in the Study of Pentecostalism and Politics” in *Pentecostalism and Politics in Africa*, ed. Adeshina Afolayan, Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso, and Toyin Falola (Cham, Switz.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 403, Kindle. Wariboko’s information: <https://www.bu.edu/cgcm/research-associates/faculty/nimi-wariboko/>.

⁵¹ Falola, 80.

⁵² Tareian King, “Africa Remains Untapped Market for Booming Black Businesses in America,” Council on Foreign Relations (blog), August 18, 2020, n.p., <https://www.cfr.org/blog/africa-remains-untapped-market-booming-black-businesses-america>.

true identity, purpose, and destiny. The future is not determined by the past but by the promises of God. BTE practical ecotheology explores ways that local ministry leaders redefine African identity in Christ. Simultaneously, BTE provides financial resources to empower African ministry partners to plant, build, and grow communal projects that positively impact the local economy.

Chapter Summary

Back to Eden ecotheology is entrenched in the biblical truth of *Imago Dei*—each human being is made in the image of God and formed after His likeness. African Christian identity is in the image of God. Sadly, identity rooted in the Spiritual truth of *Imago Dei* is a struggle for some Africans who still suffer from *deeply-seeded* thoughts of ethnic inferiority to those of European descent. When the lies of the enemy are repeated for generations and reinforced by restrictive legal, social, and economic policies, they can be difficult to ignore. However, the truth of God’s Word is able to transform and to renew minds, thereby making righteous discernment possible (Rom. 12:2 ESV). Additionally, by the power of the Holy Spirit, “We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5 ESV).

Furthermore, when Africans retrieve ancient indigenous wisdom and remember the lessons of sage ancestors, they live out the concept of Sankofa. Ubuntu is one traditional African cultural ethos that should be reclaimed and reestablished by global Christianity. Ubuntu reflects biblical examples of healthy community and kinship dynamics. Such African worldviews empower communities to reclaim agency in the Kingdom of God.

CHAPTER 5:

AFRICAN AGENCY

“Development is about more than money, or machines, or good policies—it’s about real people and the lives they lead.”¹ Paul Kagame, President, Republic of Rwanda

“If we don’t create jobs for an extra 1 billion people in Africa by 2050, we’re sitting on a ticking time bomb.”² Fred Swaniker, CEO, African Leadership Group

African Christian agency is made possible in Eden and is empowered by ecological entrepreneurship and stewardship. The universe was created by the power of the Father’s spoken word and executed by the agency of the Holy Spirit (often shown in the feminine). Alvarado stresses the feminine pronouns used throughout the Bible for the *Ruach* breath of God, *Shekinah* glory of God, and the wisdom of God. He refers to the continent as “Mother Africa.”³ In Africa, the idea of justice and equity is personified in the feminine. Comfort comes from the mother.⁴ In the Garden, a Godly balance of male and female together are instructed to be fruitful, multiply, and care for all of creation. The Creator delegated His authority to humanity to exercise agency as they steward creation. Humanity is to operate in the Creator’s Spirit to cultivate fruitfulness and multiplication.

¹ Anna Bruce-Lockhart, “Top Quotes from Our Africa 2016 Summit,” *World Economic Forum*, May 12, 2016, n.p., <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/05/top-quotes-from-our-africa-2016-summit-day-two/>.

² Bruce-Lockhart, n.p.

³ Alvarado, “Global Pentecostalism and Its African Roots.”

⁴ Alvarado, “Global Pentecostalism and Its African Roots.”

Ecological Stewardship

In Genesis 1:9–12, God gathered the waters under heaven together into seas, letting the dry land appear, which he called earth. “And God said, ‘Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and . . . trees bearing fruit . . . each according to its kind, on the earth.’ And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants . . . and trees bearing fruit” (Gen. 1:11–12 ESV). The Creator spoke to earth, and it birthed vegetation by the power of His Word. God still speaks, and the earth still responds.

Jakes proclaims, “When God speaks, matter moves . . . things start coming together; things . . . materialize.”⁵ Jesus is the Word God spoke and the light that came out of the word, which activated the earth to yield vegetation. God is absolute, immutable, unchanging—as He was in the beginning, He is now. When Spirit-led believers, moving in their God-given authority, speak His word, in Jesus’ name, the earth still responds. God faithfully, continually, watches over His word to perform it (Jer. 1:12). His word still creates. God’s creative word is what makes Christian agency possible.

Caretakers of Mother Earth

God put Adam (male/female) in the Garden to tend and keep it (Gen. 2:15 NKJV). Everything still belongs to the Creator. God delegates His authority over creation into Adam’s care. Adam is to be a faithful steward of the land from which God formed them. God places the land and all of creation under Adam’s dominion. As in the parable

⁵ Jakes, “Glimpses of Jesus,” 18:47, 18–21, 29:25, 24–33:25.

of the faithful and wise servant (Matt. 24:45-47 NKJV), Adam is to execute his delegated authority in a manner that is consistent with God's heart and intention for His creation. Also, the story of Joseph in Egypt is an example of faithful stewardship of the resources of the Kingdom for the benefit of his nation and the global community (Gen. 40-41).

Land is a life-producing gift to humanity and all of creation. Adam (male/female) is to cultivate, maintain, manage, serve, and safeguard the land and its resources in Eden. Adam is to be creative, enterprising, innovative, imaginative, inventive, and resourceful in everything that God entrusts to them. Adam is to bring fruitfulness, increase, multiplication, and abundance to everything under his authority.

Adam (male/female) partners with God in creation (Gen. 2:19-20 NKJV). Out of the soil, God forms living creatures—cattle, beasts of the fields, birds, etc. Adam creates names for the animals. God affirms the names that Adam assigns to the living creatures. Adam (like God) brings order to that which is under his dominion. Endowed with God's creative Spirit, Adam continues God's creative process. Adam is called to divine stewardship over creation. God creates Adam and assigns His authority to fulfill that calling. Male and female, united in the triune God, function as God's image-bearers and operate as guardians of creation.

According to Cheikh Anta Diop, in precolonial Africa, "Earth is a divinity: it would be sacrilege actually to appropriate any part of it. It only lends itself to our agricultural activity, in order to make human life possible."⁶ He explains, "In Africa, the nobility never acquired [a] keen sense of ownership of land. Alongside, the 'conqueror,' the king, there is in each village a poor old man in tatters, but respected and spared,

⁶ Diop, *Precolonial Black Africa*, 11.

whom the spirit of the earth is considered to have entrusted with the land.”⁷ This reflects a divine calling and anointing to be caretakers of the earth.

Ecological Entrepreneurship

Back to Eden (BTE) practical ecotheology teaches ecological stewardship and a form of Christian agency that requires doing the Word of God. It is not enough to believe, speak, and teach the Bible. “For the word of God is alive and active” (Heb. 4:12 NIV). Executing and walking out biblical truths are necessary to activate the living power inherent in the Word. African Christian agency engages traditional indigenous esteem for creation. Ecological entrepreneurship is a core aspect of BTE ecotheology and African agency. The practical endeavor of educating, training, equipping, and empowering entrepreneurs is a vital way to activate agency.

The Entrepreneurial Spirit

The first five words of almost any version of the Bible are: “In the beginning God created.” In Genesis, God creates humanity in His image and endows them with His creative Spirit. One major attribute of mankind (male/female), that is in God’s image and after his likeness, is the capacity to create. In Eden, the Creator invites the creation (Adam-male/female) to partner with him in creation and to participate in naming the animals. God still invites humanity to partner with him in creation. Human creativity flows from the creative Spirit of God and is a reflection of His image and likeness. God’s creative Spirit is the source of human creativity and entrepreneurship. Back to Eden is a

⁷ Diop, *Precolonial Black Africa*, 11.

return to the original identity and purpose of humanity, which is also a reconnection to the divine creative Spirit. God's Spirit imparts creative gifts into human spirits as reflected in the arts and innovations in science, industry, and technology. Likewise, entrepreneurship is a creative gift from God.

An entrepreneur is "a person who organizes and manages any enterprise, especially a business, usually with considerable initiative and risk," with an intent to make a profit.⁸ In Genesis, God's creative Spirit is on full display as He organizes and manages the chaos. Out of nothing, He speaks elements into existence. He sets order to creation: sky, sun, stars, moon, earth, water, vegetation, animals, ecosystems, etc. God's creation is profitable and fruitful, as He causes it to multiply and increase. God's Spirit creates in the space of voidness. He can create economic opportunities in the midst of the void. Likewise, an entrepreneur sees a problem and then creates a profitable solution by organizing a business enterprise and managing a team to fill a market gap.

The entrepreneurial spirit operates in line with God's original intent for humanity; it receives gifts from God's creative Spirit. God's Spirit imparts ideas, dreams, and visions, and the entrepreneurial spirit executes them. Led by God's Spirit, an entrepreneur organizes, launches, and scales enterprises. The entrepreneur diligently initiates, watches over, keeps, maintains, guards, and cultivates business development and growth.

Entrepreneurs tap into the creativity of the Holy Spirit, which began in Eden. Entrepreneurship flows from God's creative Spirit. God deposits ideas, visions, dreams,

⁸ Dictionary.com, "Entrepreneur," Dictionary.com, 2022, n.p., <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/entrepreneur>.

and innovation into human spirits. To execute the vision, an entrepreneur needs education, skills training, and capital. God gives the vision and the resources, then blesses and establishes the work of human hands (Ps. 90:17). The divinely-inspired idea plus the ability to execute the dream—the two, together—give humans the power to make wealth (Deut. 8:18).

God's original intent was for mankind to be caretakers of His creation. God's creative Spirit leads the human entrepreneurial spirit to envision, execute, and establish ecologically responsible business endeavors. Entrepreneurs can serve the earth by promoting environmentally responsible projects and can care for creation through companies that bring healing to the land. Entrepreneurs can unify communities by helping business leaders establish appropriate ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) practices. Good corporate citizens heal the environment, promote social justice, and govern with diversity, equity, and inclusion, while establishing safe work environments. Standard and Poor's (S&P) 500 ESG stocks outperformed non-ESG companies during and since COVID-19.⁹ Thus, profits are not sacrificed when the environment is respected; ecological entrepreneurship is proving to be lucrative.

Empowering Agency

Back to Eden (BTE) ecotheology and a motive for higher profits compel entrepreneurs to make business decisions that honor the environment. Back to Eden ecological mandates encourage entrepreneurs to serve mother earth and humanity as

⁹ Statista Research Department, "Comparison of the Effect of the S&P 500 ESG and S&P 500 Indices between March 2019 and November 2022," Statista, November 24, 2022, n.p., <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1269643/s-p-500-esg-normal-index-comparison/>.

God's image-bearers. They are to partner with God as an extension of creation in a manner that brings healing to the land and community. They are to respect ancient African ecological wisdom and to reengage wise indigenous agricultural practices, using 21st century technology. They are to develop best-use, environmentally-enhancing land strategies. Agricultural enterprises should promote and establish Non-GMO (Non-Genetically Modified) local organic sustainable food supplies.

Education, Training, Expert Consultants, Capital

Entrepreneurs need education and skills training. Raw gifts, talents, and dreams are not enough. God finishes creation and beholds it to be "very good" (Gen. 1:31 ESV). God's Spirit of excellence operates in humanity when a person yields to it. When flowing in the Holy Spirit, as God's image-bearers, humanity co-creates with God. His creations are excellent, brilliant, and superb. Therefore, gifts and talents need to be developed, nurtured, and refined to the point of excellence. Development of gifts through education at universities or trade schools, conferences, skills workshops, online courses, internships, apprenticeships, and practice cause gifts to grow to professional levels. BTE ministry partners donate scholarship funds and provide resources for skills training workshops at project sites.

Even as professionals, entrepreneurs enhance success by retaining the services of expert consultants in key areas, such as legal, accounting, marketing, technology, etc. Consultants coach entrepreneurs in developing investable business plans that empower business owners to visualize, launch, and scale enterprises. Dreams, visions, and innovations need to be written, cultivated, and executed. BTE ministry partners include

skilled business professionals, educators, and experienced business owners who provide coaching to entrepreneurs at project sites.

Entrepreneurs should develop their natural God-given gifts and talents to mature professional levels to make them marketable. Then entrepreneurs can place their best, skilled, accomplished, practiced, expert-level gifts and talents into service unto the Lord. The entrepreneurial spirit functions at the highest level of excellence when skilled gifts are dedicated in service to the Creator. The Holy Spirit is honored when skilled gifts are accompanied with a diligent, faithful work ethic, that always gives its best. The entrepreneur gives her best gifts and effort. God blesses the work of her hands.

Entrepreneurs need capital. In the early stages, personal savings and credit, or family and friends, might be the only viable sources of funding. Bank lending is often restrictive and rarely makes loans to unproven, startup businesses. BTE ministry partners provide small-scale seed funding. Finding investment partners can be difficult. Therefore, BTE ministry partners are developing a revolving type of investment fund. Trusted local BTE leaders carefully screen and select honorable business persons in their communities, and award seed capital, which must be repaid to the investment fund. Upon repayment, resources in the fund are awarded to other entrepreneurs. One is helped, then in turn, the next, which recycles local community dollars. This motivates business owners to use community resources in a manner that minimizes waste. Also, it creates an interdependent economic network of local entrepreneurs, and it fosters mutual success by supporting local businesses.

Hope the People

Dr. Olu Menjay promotes “salvation and the way of life . . . which empowers people in a holistic way,” and stresses “Mission should ‘hope’ people.”¹⁰ “Hope the People” means to affirm more than just eschatological hope. It means activating the creativity and entrepreneurship in human spirits. It means empowering education and training. It means launching and funding business enterprises. It means advocating for and establishing fair trade in global economic systems to lift masses of people out of poverty.

Hands Up

The “Hands Up” BTE concept is based on Jesus feeding the 5,000. Jesus “said to them, ‘How many loaves do you have? Go and see.’” The disciples looked around and found five loaves and two fish. They gave these to Jesus, who “looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves [divided the two fish] and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. . . . And they all ate and were satisfied” (Mark 6:38, 41–42 ESV). Jesus makes provision from readily-available local resources to satisfy community needs. Likewise, BTE teaches believers to survey their area, consider what they already have, and then ask the Lord to bless, multiply, and increase it. Instead of focusing on what they do not have, people are to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal assets, supplies, gifts, and talents they already have, and to place them in service to the Lord. People do not

¹⁰ Olu Menjay, “Lott Carey (Cary),” (lecture, Jakes Divinity School, October 25, 2021).

need to ask for a handout. Believers can lift their hands up as they offer their resources and gifts to the Father, who blesses them.

Chapter Summary

In Eden, God assigns human agency and purpose: to be caretakers of the created universe, creatures, and mother earth. God delegates His authority over ecological systems to Adam (male/female). God's image imparted to mankind makes Adam a creative being. The human entrepreneurial spirit flows from the creative heart of God. Human agency can be activated when in alignment with the Holy Spirit. Access to practical resources, like education, training, and capital, can empower agency and entrepreneurship.

During October/November 2022 on-the-ground site visits, BTE ministry partners witnessed that the Ugandan and Zambian pastors (husband-and-wife teams) are living epistles of fully-executed African agency. They teach "Hands Up" and "Hope the People" concepts in their parishes. They implement BTE principles and inspire their people to become faithful environmental stewards, while overseeing networks of successful ecological entrepreneurs.

CHAPTER 6:

CONCLUSION

“Plant the good seeds of righteousness, and you will harvest a crop of love. Plow up the hard ground of your hearts, for now is the time to seek the LORD, that he may come and shower righteousness upon you.” (Hos. 10:12 NLT).

“Like the gardener, a leader must take responsibility for what he cultivates; he must mind his work, try to repel enemies, preserve what can be preserved, and eliminate what cannot succeed.”¹ Mandela.

The Eden Anointing

American Back to Eden (BTE) ministry partners conducted on-the-ground site visits in October/November 2022 to assess BTE progress. In witnessing BTE practical ecotheology applied in the daily lives of Ugandan and Zambian BTE project leaders, and in their respective communities, the Holy Spirit revealed and affirmed *The Eden Anointing*. When believers receive the completed work of Jesus on the cross (redemption, salvation, deliverance, healing, reconciliation), they are restored as God’s image-bearers. They return to Eden and experience a refreshing breath of the Holy Spirit. They experience human identity as God initially intended, before the impact of sin. When humans receive redemption in Jesus, are empowered by the Holy Spirit, and surrender to God’s will for themselves, the community, and nature, they collectively return to the pre-fall original state of perfection, thus reflecting the divine image of God. In Eden, humanity is in God’s image, is like God, and is a representative figure of God on earth. They are God’s loving, faithful, creative, essence on earth, lived out in community with

¹ Plaque in Robben Island Prison, “The Gardener,” quoting Mandela (see Appendix B).

God, each other, and creation. The full radiance of humanity, in a multitude of ethnicities, is celebrated in Eden, and in unity, they express the image and likeness of God. In Eden, humans experience the true untainted reality of *Imago Dei* in divine, loving, human and ecological community.

In Eden, mankind (male/female) walks in God-given human purpose and agency, doing what God does and operating in the manifold blessings of God. They exercise dominion by acting as faithful stewards of God's creation (not dominion over other human beings). They are caretakers of the earth, and they flow in God's creative Spirit.

This is *The Eden Anointing*. It is dwelling in God's divine image and likeness. It is executing agency and fulfilling God's original purpose. It is walking in God's blessings and favor. It is exercising God-given delegated authority and agency as a son, daughter, heir, and steward of the Kingdom of God. It is curating the healing of the people and the land. It is carefully protecting mother earth. It is flowing in God's creative Spirit. It is bringing increase, multiplication, and abundance to the land and community. *The Eden Anointing* is living, moving, and having being as the Creator originally intended, in a divine unified community, with God, humanity, and the environment.

In Eden, before sin entered the garden, mankind, male and female, were both Adam, one flesh: called male and female, man and woman, husband and wife (Gen. 1-3; 2:24; 5:1 KJV). In Eden, God caused a mist to spring up from the earth to water the whole ground (Gen. 2:6 NKJV). God spoke and commanded the earth to birth foliage that yields seed according to its kind: grass, herbs, fruit trees (Gen. 1:11-12 NKJV). God made every tree grow out of the ground that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, including the tree of life in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good

and evil (Gen. 2:9 NKJV). God created Eden as a perfect paradise prepared and intended for mankind. Adam did not create the Garden of Eden—he was born into it. Likewise, humanity can be born again in Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, and return to Eden.

After the fall, the consequences of sin obstructed *The Eden Anointing*. Male did not name female Eve, the mother of all living, until after the fall (Gen. 3:20 NKJV). They were separate, disjointed individuals after sin. Curses came from their sin. Both were sentenced to labor at things that God originally made available to them without effort. Eve was sentenced to endure labor pain in childbirth, and to desire after her husband, who would rule over her (Gen. 3:16 NKJV). Adam was forced to labor and toil ground that was full of thorns and thistles, by the sweat of his brow (Gen. 3:17-19 NKJV). However, the power of the curse caused by Adam's sin is broken and overthrown by the completed work of Jesus on the cross.

When mankind returns to Eden, through the blood of Jesus, wrapped in the loving power of the Holy Spirit, then the curse is broken and humanity is restored. Humanity is reconnected to the Creator, renewed by the blood of Jesus, revived by the Holy Spirit, and rejoined as one Adam, male and female, them. Adam again flourishes in *The Eden Anointing*, as the Creator originally intended. Adam and Eve are reunited, they function in tandem, male/female, like Adam in the Garden before the fall. They obediently surrender to the leading of the Holy Spirit, and they serve as ecological custodians. Together, they reflect the image and likeness of God in essence and in execution as caretakers of mother earth. They are God's image-bearers, unified in the Spirit, male and female, guardians of creation, stewarding healing to the land. When humanity goes Back to Eden, they bloom in *The Eden Anointing*.

Research Applications

Southern Garden—Zambia

Bishop K and Pastor A, Back to Eden (BTE) project leaders in Zambia, are a husband-and-wife team who exemplify *The Eden Anointing*. Like the original Adam (male/female) before the fall, this couple is joined, as one unit, in spirit and purpose. They function as one interconnected entity, interdependent on the Father and each other. Before the birth of each child, they prayed together, and they asked God for no labor pains. God spared her such agony and blessed them with healthy children. Also, God does not require Bishop to labor over cursed land. God blessed him with 400 acres of good ground: red, vitamin-rich, nutrient-dense soil, irrigated by water that springs up from a rock on his land. They live in the reality of *The Eden Anointing*. They experience unbroken fellowship with God, thrive in unity and community with each other, and exhibit a divine ecological oneness with the land. The work of their hands yields abundant, fragrant, juicy fruit.

They are humble, faithful, diligent servants who built a network of churches that serve diverse communities. They have complementary gifts, talents, and callings, which they use to empower each other. They thrive in *The Eden Anointing*. He defies the curse and does not rule over her. He encourages her to push past her natural shyness, to minister in the fullness of who God created her to be, and empowers her to accomplish everything that God created her to do. Likewise, she honors him as his faithful prayer covering and loyal partner in the work of the ministry.

Pastor A leads the women's Back to Eden entrepreneurial program called LAWA (Live Again Women's Activation). The premise is that humanity must go *Back to Eden*

to learn to *Live Again* as God originally intended. During the May 2021 American BTE ministry team site visits to Zambia, she received training in BTE ecotheology, initiatives, and activation concepts, which include mandates to develop environmentally sustainable, organic, non-GMO projects and to bring healing to the land. She selected a few trustworthy female entrepreneurs from her community. Shortly thereafter, BTE ministry partners provided seed funding to the first cohort of LAWA women.

On Saturday, October 29, 2022, American and Zambian Back to Eden ministry partners met in person as a team and conducted a LAWA entrepreneurial workshop. LAWA women shared details of their endeavors. The women recounted successes and challenges, and they defined resources that were needed to scale their businesses to the next level. Industries represented among this group of women included poultry farming, fish farming, vegetable gardening, dressmaking, and peanut processing and selling. One woman reported the devastating loss of her fish farm during a catastrophic climate event of extraordinary rains that washed away all of her fish. However, she did not give up. With the help of her community, she rebuilt and is back on track. The return on investment in these women and their businesses has proven to be multiples of, and in some cases, exponentials of, the original small investment. It is astounding to observe the diligence and faithfulness of this group of businesswomen.

The prosperity of this community of female entrepreneurs is credited to Pastor A. She has been teaching the LAWA cohort Back to Eden principles for the last year, as well as coaching them through each stage of business development. She uses the story of the Proverbs 31 virtuous woman as a model of a Godly, diligent business woman, wife, and mother to exemplify BTE ecotheology.

Daily, Pastor A and the women have prayer meetings on WhatsApp from 11 pm to 12 am. When there are pressing matters, they continue until 1 am. It is not unusual for them to continue praying until 4 or 5 am.² They are anointed praying women, and God is answering their prayers. Pastor A received the seed of BTE ecotheology in May 2021, planted that seed in good ground, watered it with her prayers, nurtured it by teaching and coaching the women, and by October 2022, she is experiencing an abundant yield.

Pastor A also oversees and administers programs and resources for young entrepreneurs and dedicated students. They are more evidence of the fruitfulness in the Zambian garden. In Lusaka, on Friday, October 28, 2022, American Back to Eden ministry partners and Zambian BTE leaders met in person as a team and conducted an entrepreneurship workshop for high school and college-age youth. The American team taught on identity, shared general entrepreneurial concepts, and encouraged students to tap into their God-given creative capacity. Students shared their dreams, visions, callings, and aspirations for their lives. Their goals spanned diverse fields, including medicine, science, engineering, accounting, actuarial science, music, and arts. A common report was a lack of funds to complete the necessary education and training. Some students were even considering not pursuing their dreams or switching majors due to a lack of funding. Also, recent graduates longed for internships or apprenticeships to gain the requisite experience to advance professionally. In response to these brilliant, disciplined, highly-motivated young people, the BTE team is establishing a scholarship fund that will be administered based on student needs. Investment in the higher education, training, and professional development of the youth in this community will empower them to walk in

² Site visit personal interviews with Zambian Pastors, October 27 to November 3, 2022.

God-given purpose. It will give them the tools and power to create and innovate as young entrepreneurs. They have the potential to be change-makers for their families and communities, to build businesses and create jobs. Such an investment has the potential to set them on a track that will change the economic trajectory of their families, churches, and communities.

Pastor A is a faithful steward of BTE ethics, and her garden is flourishing. She is on fire! Her passion for BTE values and initiatives is contagious. She is curating multigenerational environmental entrepreneurs, as well as establishing viable organic non-GMO agricultural projects. She is bringing healing to the people and to the land. She is flowing in *The Eden Anointing*.

Bishop K personifies *The Eden Anointing*. His birthright as the first-born son of his generation gives him the authority to manage certain indigenous lands in Nakonde, Zambia. In 2021, local leaders affirmed his birthright and delegated authority for him to develop 38 hectares (94 acres) of land for BTE projects. On the evening of October 30, 2022, Nakonde leadership confirmed that the American BTE team was physically in Lusaka. Hours before departing to travel the road to Nakonde, traditional leaders informed the Americans that they had decided to increase the land dedicated for BTE projects to between 160 and 180 hectares (395 to 445 acres). American BTE team members were astonished, humbled, joyful, and in awe of a God who moves on the hearts of leaders to release over 400 acres of land for BTE projects.

On the morning of November 1, 2022, the American BTE team, Bishop K, and the headman of Nakonde met with the Chieftainess. She warmly welcomed the group, granted her blessing to proceed with BTE projects, and provided sage advice on next

steps. The deference, reverence, honor, and respect shown to the Chieftainess of this people group by the men and community revealed the striking depth of thousands of years of indigenous traditions, protocols, rules, norms, etiquette, and civilization.

Next, the group met with a council of traditional leaders who thanked those members of the American BTE team that visited in 2021 for returning in 2022 with more team members and resources. Council leaders said they now trust that the American team will partner with them to build community resources. They want to educate their children, have access to technology, expand organic non-GMO agricultural projects, create sustainable local food supplies, and build businesses that transport surplus to regional markets.

On the afternoon of November 1, 2022, the American BTE team, with cameramen and videographers in tow, accompanied Bishop K as he toured the 400 acres dedicated to BTE in Nakonde. Beholding 400 acres of BTE promised land was magnificent! The borders of BTE land expand beyond what the eye could see. As Bishop walked the land, he remembered that his father told him never to cut certain trees, especially the biggest one, on the 400-acre BTE territory. The American BTE team deemed it the “tree of life.” The group hiked across the massive land, and they observed the water well and caretaker’s house currently under construction, funded by BTE ministry partners.

On trails traversing the 400-acre BTE territory, Bishop K recounted traditional lessons from his mother, and he explained the medicinal uses of various plants and the practical uses of certain leaves. He wrapped one huge leaf into the shape of a cone and said that his mother taught him to use it as a cup to drink water from the fresh water stream that sprang up from a specific rock and flowed throughout the land, providing

natural irrigation. Then he pulled small thin branches from one tree and showed how it is used to make ropes. As the sun was setting, a bird blasted a distinctive alarm, and Bishop said that his mother taught him that when that bird makes that sound, he is announcing the 18th hour of the day. BTE American team smartphones confirmed that it was 17:48.

When Bishop K strolled through the Nakonde 400-acre garden, he exuded *The Eden Anointing*. A royal, kingly mantle was on Bishop K as he moved through his garden, expounding on the types of foliage. He was relaxed and joyful, recalling lessons from his parents. His back was straighter and his countenance was regal and commanding, as he explained land features like the rock that gives water, the bird that alerts of the 18th hour, the tree of life, and the leaves of the trees used for healing. He was like Adam walking through Eden in the cool of the day, communing with the Father. Like Adam, who was first formed at creation, Bishop K is first-born of his generation. With his feet planted in the 400-acre BTE garden soil, and his delegated authority as first-born, Bishop radiated *The Eden Anointing*.

Zambian BTE project leaders are nurturing healing in the hearts of the people as they remind them of God's original identity and purpose for mankind. They are igniting hope as they activate agency in the community. They are cultivating healing in the 400 acres of land that God has entrusted to them by reclaiming ancient African indigenous wisdom that honors mother earth. They are brilliant examples of what it looks like to go Back to Eden and to live, move, and have being in *The Eden Anointing*.

Eastern Garden—Uganda

Based on scholarship presented in Chapter 3, the White Nile is possibly the Pison River, one of the four rivers of Eden (Gen. 2:10-12 KJV). On Friday, November 4, 2022,

the American BTE ministry partners beheld the source of the White Nile at Jinja, Uganda. There is something holy about that river and its surrounding, masterfully-created, exquisite beauty. God's intense presence is palpable on the White Nile. This is probably Eden. According to the tour guide and signs in the area, the source at this spot is seventy percent from Lake Nalubaale (Victoria) and thirty percent from an underwater spring where the lake pours into the river. Originally, a waterfall marked the spot, but after a dam was built, just the tops of rocks indicate the source. The Nile flows from this spot for three months, over four thousand miles north, through Sudan to the Mediterranean Sea. This area of Uganda is tropical rainforest filled with vibrant, colorful flora and symphonic nature sounds from a diversity of birds, monkeys, frogs, insects, and other creatures. Locals know that they live in Eden as indicated by the plethora of signs, hotels, restaurants, and other businesses that include some version of "Eden" in their names.

As powerful and stunning as the Nile is, nothing is as majestic as the faces of the African peoples, the joy and laughter of African children, and the promise of African youth, all of which the American BTE ministry team experienced during on-the-ground Ugandan site visits. Near the Nile, on Saturday, November 5, 2022, the Ugandan BTE project leaders, husband-and-wife team, Pastor G and Pastor C, presented the American BTE team to the Chief, Elders, and multigeneration community of Luba, Uganda. The community offered a heartfelt, festive reception, followed by a tasty meal with the Chief, who recounted thousands of years of history and traditions of his people. The American BTE team assessed the progress of BTE projects: Trees are planted and gardens are flourishing, and the water well is undergoing repair. The Chief, Elders, Pastors G and C,

and the American BTE team toured the sacred ancestral rocks on the top of one of the highest hills in the area. Luba is poised for expansion. Indigenous lands in Luba are breathtaking rolling green knolls of active agricultural farms that are planted in rich, red, soil.

In the Kampala/Entebbe area, on Monday, November 7, 2022, the young children at Pastors G's and C's school performed, with great exuberance, traditional dances and skits for the American BTE team. The children's sweet, innocent, cheerful faces were beaming with joy. Students presented their BTE school garden, which is a continuing and significant source of fresh vegetables.

Pastors G and C presented American BTE ministry team members to a local high school in the Kampala/Entebbe area on November 8, 2022. Intense teenage energy was on full display as students sang songs, recited poems and narratives, and danced various traditional dances. Their countenances and spirits are radiant; their gifts and potential are limitless. The American team shared BTE concepts, and then they toured the school with students who happily showed their school vegetable gardens, small farm animals, poultry farm, artwork, music class, dance class, computer club, cooking club, sports teams, and Bible club. These young people are equipped to be future leaders of Uganda and the world.

Both the elementary school and high school are in need of solar energy, clean cooking stoves, and updated toilets. The American BTE ministry team is researching organizations that build such facilities.

New Developments

New developments related to the current project sites in Uganda and Zambia are mentioned in the research application section above. A Back to Eden (BTE) project site is emerging in Ogun State, Nigeria; local needs are being assessed. In 2022, BTE partners sponsored two skills workshops for female entrepreneurs that were hosted by local pastors.

Additionally, in the summer of 2022, the American BTE team partnered with American and Ghanaian college professors to develop a study abroad program. One of the Ghanaian professors holds a PhD in environmental studies and has a wealth of knowledge on ancient indigenous African wisdom regarding ecologically sustainable farming practices that heal the land. He has agreed to provide guidance as BTE agricultural projects develop. Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, the 2022 summer study abroad program was conducted via Zoom. BTE concepts on environmental stewardship and ecological entrepreneurship were taught as part of the curriculum. Students were encouraged to follow successful African entrepreneurs like Zimbabwean-born billionaire, businessman, and philanthropist Strive Masiyiwa, who mentors entrepreneurs via his social media platforms.³ In the final projects, American and Ghanaian students identified a local environmental problem and created an entrepreneurial solution. The goal is for the 2023 summer study abroad program to be in Ghana.

³ Njoku Caleb, *The Secretes of Building and Sustaining a Successful Business in Africa: The Mystery behind Business Success in Africa*, comp. Neolithscope, ed. Zephaphine Publications (N.p.: Zephaphine Publication, 2018) 253-255, Kindle.

Finally, the 2022 American BTE ministry team site visits to Uganda and Zambia ignited writing a personal Back to Eden Journey. The team included Africans in the American diaspora, some first-generation, and others descendants of formerly enslaved Africans on American soil. Personal aspects of the journey were particularly poignant. It was a spiritual journey through which the Holy Spirit restored wholeness in generational lines. In January 2023, a BTE USA farm was purchased near Atlanta, Georgia, for which strategies are being developed.

Conclusion

The book of Genesis chapters 1-2 reveal God's original plan for humanity and creation. The word "gene" makes up the first four letters of the word "Genesis," which denotes the beginning, the original gene of humanity and creation. It implies the beginning, the birth, the original seed, the DNA, the blueprint, or God's original design for the human race and created universe.

The program is Jakes Divinity School Doctor of Ministry in Spirit-filled Global Leadership in the African Diaspora. Peter speaks to the elect in the diaspora (from two Greek words *dia*, meaning "across," and *spora* or *sperma*, meaning "seed"⁴ (1 Pet. 1:1 NKJV). Jakes refers to God's Word as "seed, semen."⁵ Diaspora is a sowing or scattering of seed, sperm, semen, gene, throughout the world. A seed or gene carries the DNA of an

⁴ Bible Hub, "1290. diaspora," n.p.

⁵ Jakes, "Gleanings on Pneumatology," n.p.

organism. “The DNA from any two people is 99.9% identical The differing 0.1% contains variations that influence our uniqueness.”⁶

God makes Adam (male/female) in His image, after His likeness, and places them in community with Himself, each other, and in an ecological paradise. Humanity originates in Adam. DNA reveals that Adam’s common human blueprint remains 99.9% the same today. Throughout history, humanity has scattered across the globe, and has been replanted in foreign soil, in some cases, for thousands of years. Nevertheless, the genetic composition that God placed in Adam remains fundamentally unchanged by 0.1%. This is why discrimination or bigotry towards anyone or any group of people is sin. Peter challenges believers to conduct themselves like the “Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work” (1 Pet. 1:17 NKJV).

Spora is the word used for the incorruptible seed in 1 Peter 1:23 (NKJV).⁷ A final enduring word and conclusive abiding seed to be planted into the hearts of mankind, so that thereby they may go Back to Eden, is 1 Peter 1:22-25 (NKJV):

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because

*“All flesh is as grass,
And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass.
The grass withers,
And its flower falls away,
But the word of the LORD endures forever.”*

Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

⁶ Bates, “Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA),” n.p.

⁷ Bible Hub, “4701. spora,” n.p.

Peter reminds “that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Pet. 1:18-19 NKJV). DNA is in the blood. Jesus literally spilled His DNA, His seed, to redeem humanity. The incorruptible seed is the DNA of Jesus. Jesus is the Seed, the incarnate Word of God. He is the living active Word of God through whom the universe was created (John 1:1-3). The power of the Word spoke creation into existence.

The ecological universe is sacred because the Holy God created it in the beginning. The original Adam sinned, thereby corrupting both humanity and creation. Therefore, the Father sacrificed His son not just to restore humanity but also to redeem creation. The incorruptible seed, Jesus, redeems all of creation.

Thus, those born of the incorruptible seed have an ecological mandate to esteem both humanity and creation highly, like the Father does. Obeying the truth in the Spirit requires being environmental curators of creation. Creation is waiting for the sons, daughters, heirs, and stewards of the Kingdom of God to return to their originally intended purpose as ecological stewards of creation, as caretakers of mother earth.

According to science, the earliest humans were uncovered in Africa, meaning that humanity likely originated in Africa. God formed Adam from the dust of the ground in Eden (Gen. 2:7 NKJV), possibly African soil. No matter where human seeds have been scattered around the globe, or how long those seeds were replanted in foreign ground, that original gene is probably from African soil.

Back to Eden, a practical ecotheology and entrepreneurial endeavor, is a call for descendants of the first Adam, who have been born again through the second Adam, Jesus, the incorruptible seed, to return to Eden. The blood of Jesus paves the road Back to

Eden. God created Adam, the original gene, the human prototype. Through this one original DNA came all of humanity. Likewise, through one, Jesus' DNA, humanity, and creation are redeemed.

BTE is also an invitation to return to the physical Eden, Africa, to reconnect with the land from which God possibly formed the original seed of humanity. Return to Africa as servants of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to minister reconciliation and to repair the breach. Return to Eden as environmental stewards and ecological entrepreneurs. In detailing interconnected global climate change issues that contribute to devastating environmental problems in Africa, which, if not corrected, have catastrophic implications for the entire planet, Nakate says, "We are all African."⁸

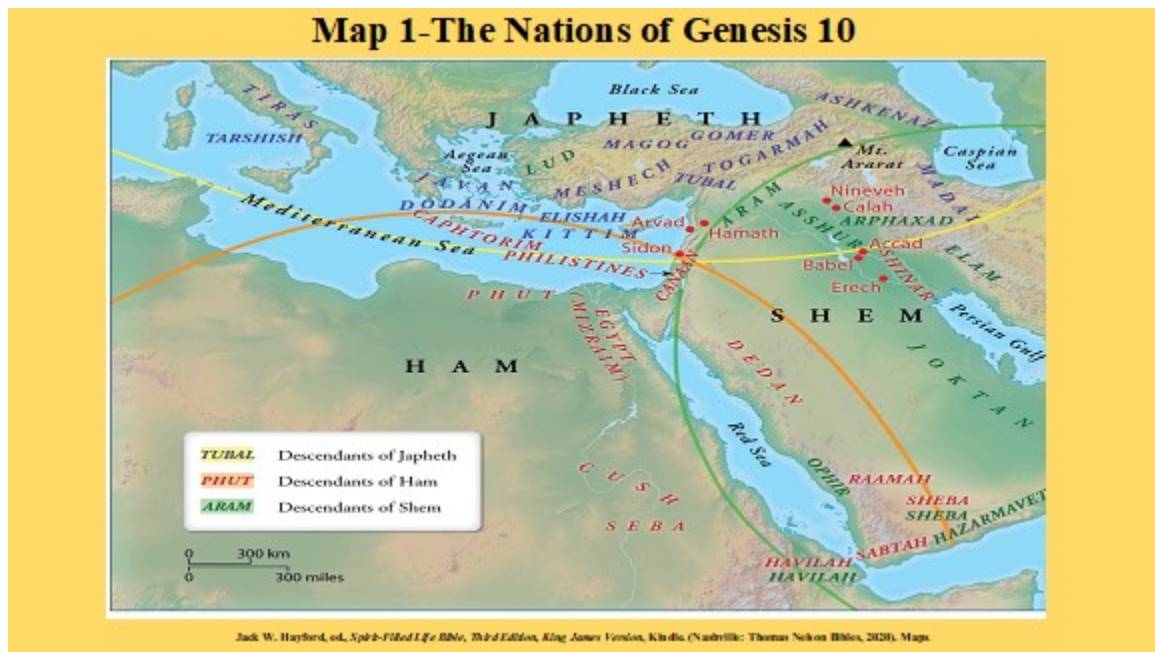
It is time to go Back to Eden!

⁸ Nakate, *A Bigger Picture*, 81-96.

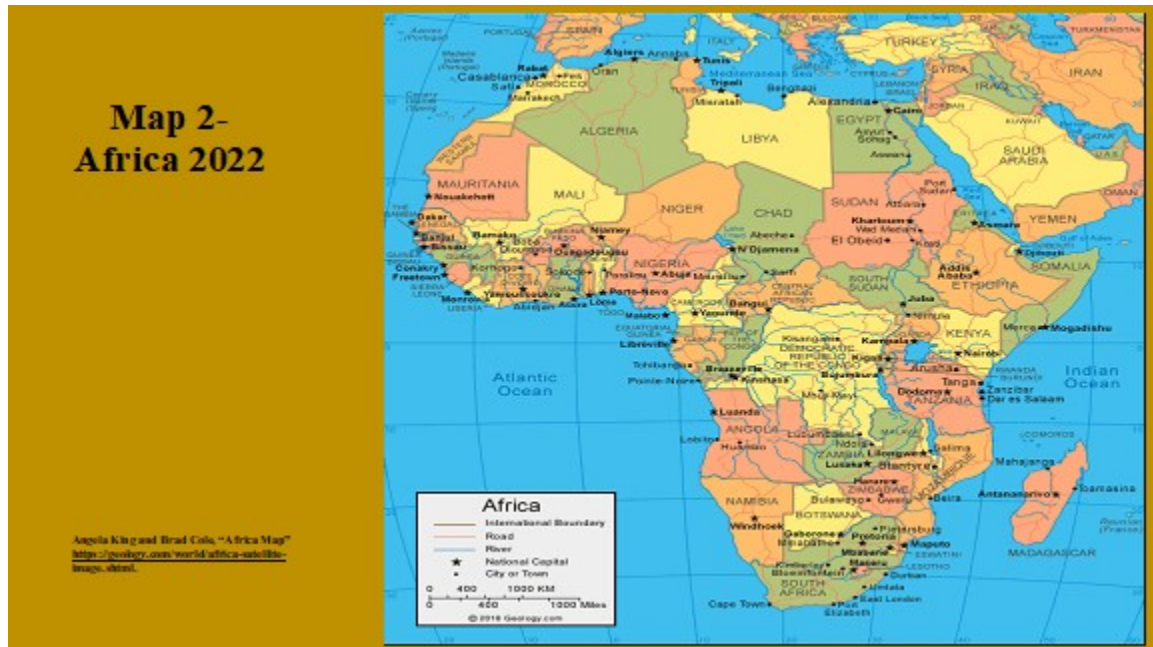
APPENDIX A:
MAPS AND IMAGES

Maps

Map 1



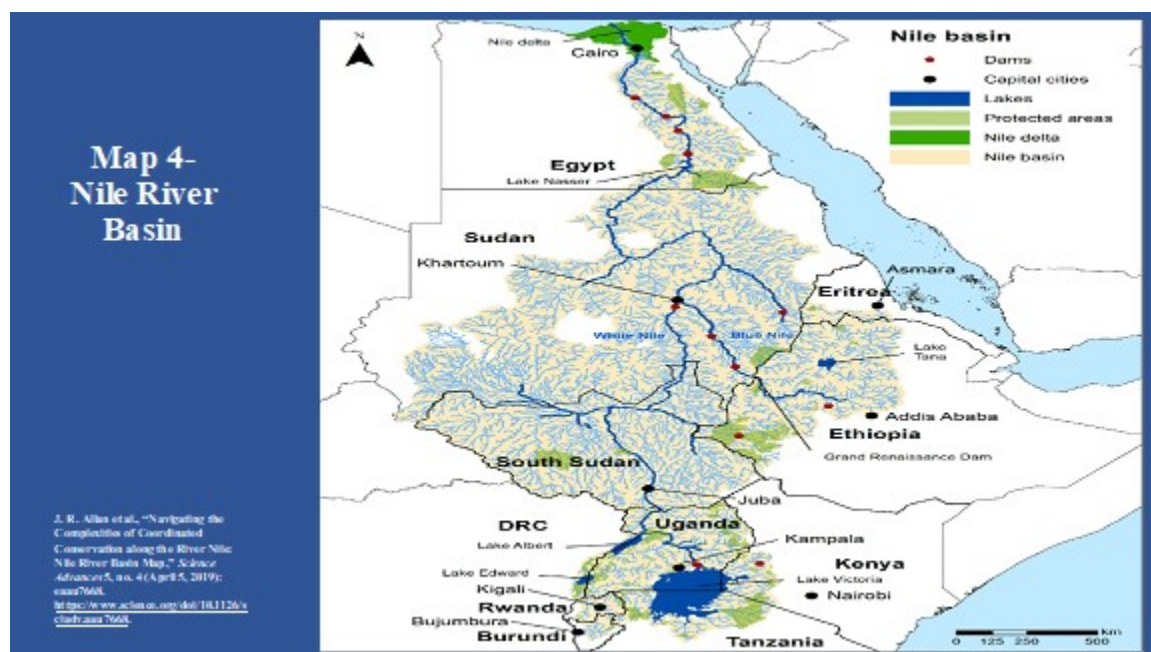
Map 2



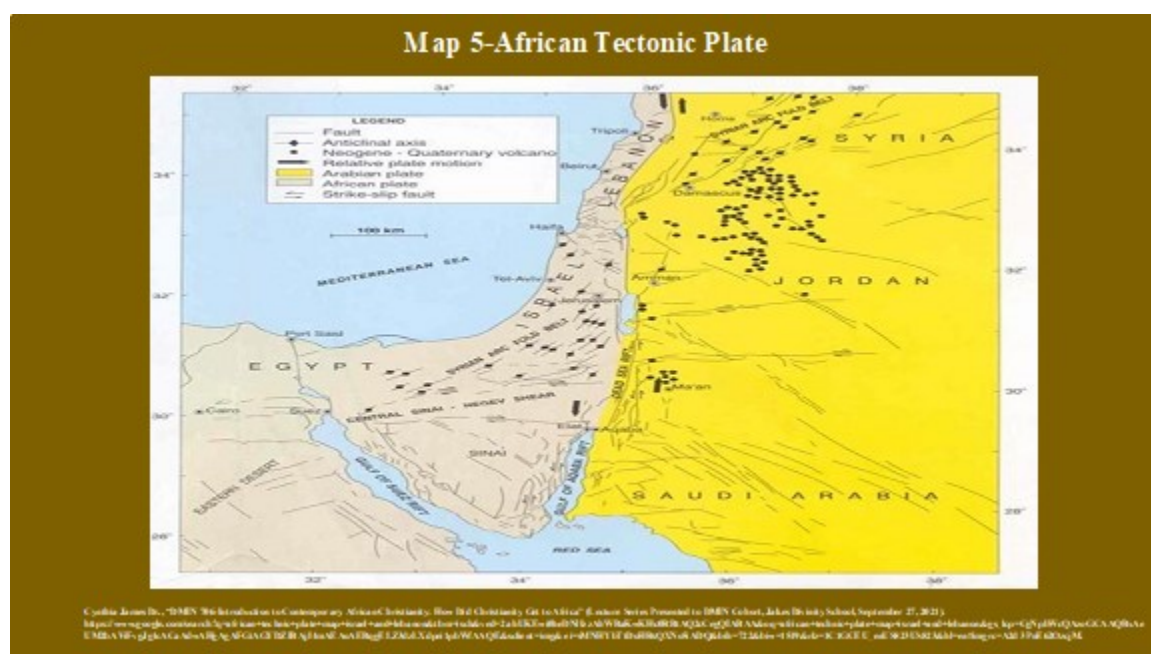
Map 3



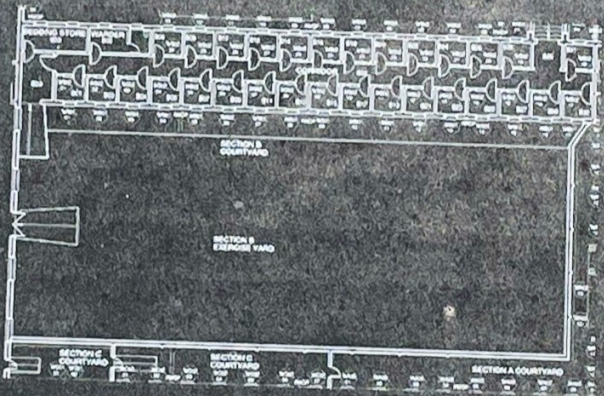
Map 4



Map 5



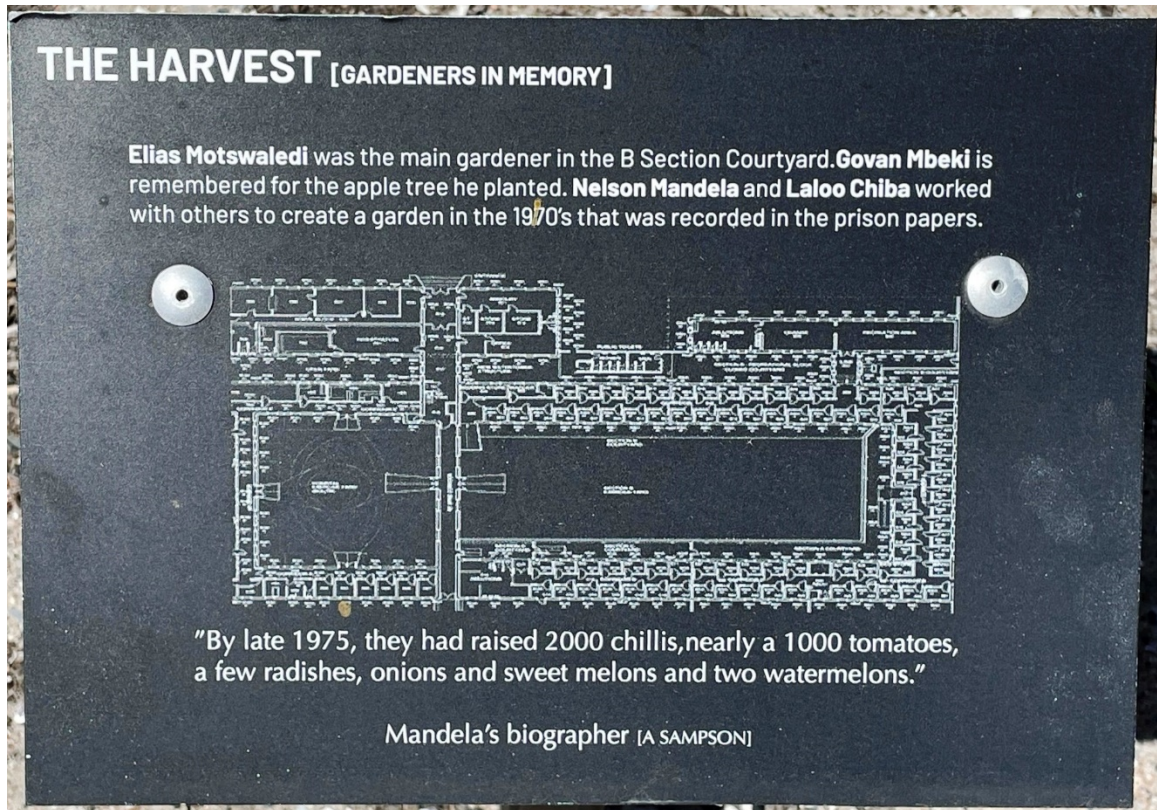
WE CREATED THIS COURTYARD



"This courtyard did not exist when we arrived here. We created it. This court was for tennis, volley ball and tennikoit. The garden had grapes, peaches, vegetables and flowers. It was planted by Elias Motswaledi."

Wilton Mkwai

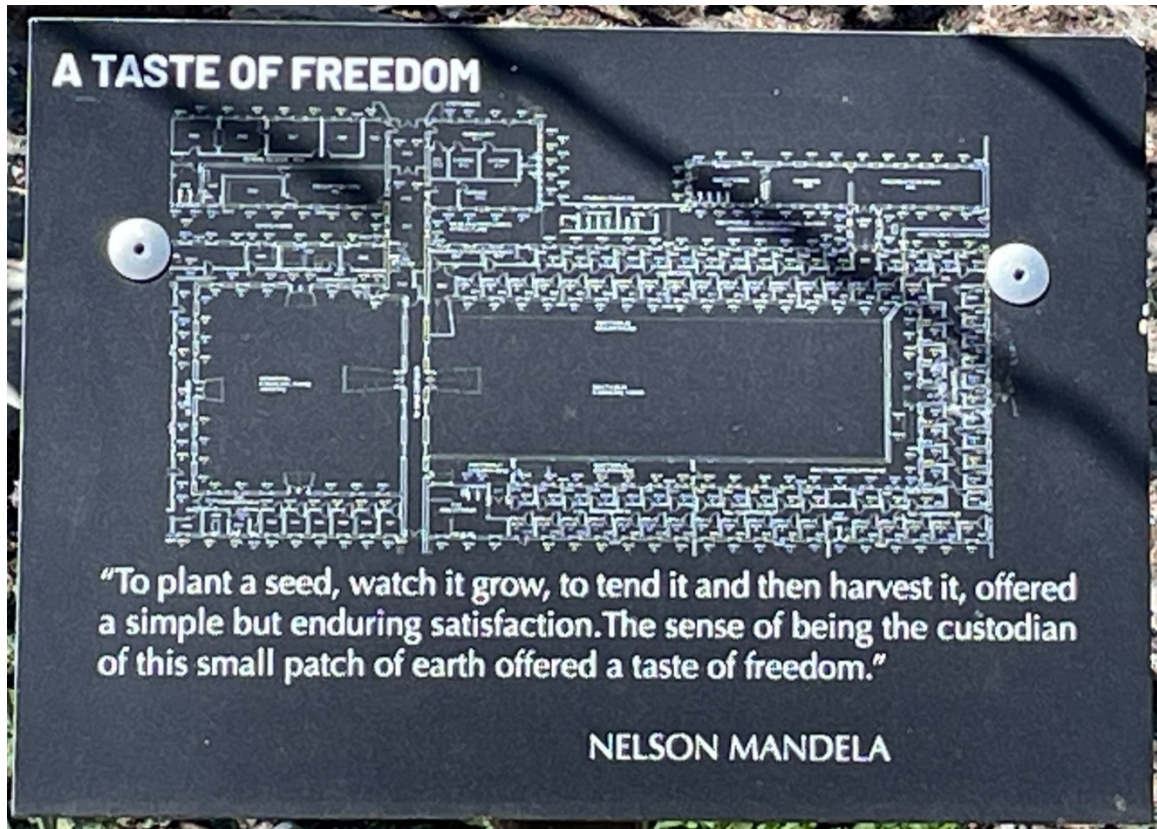
The Harvest



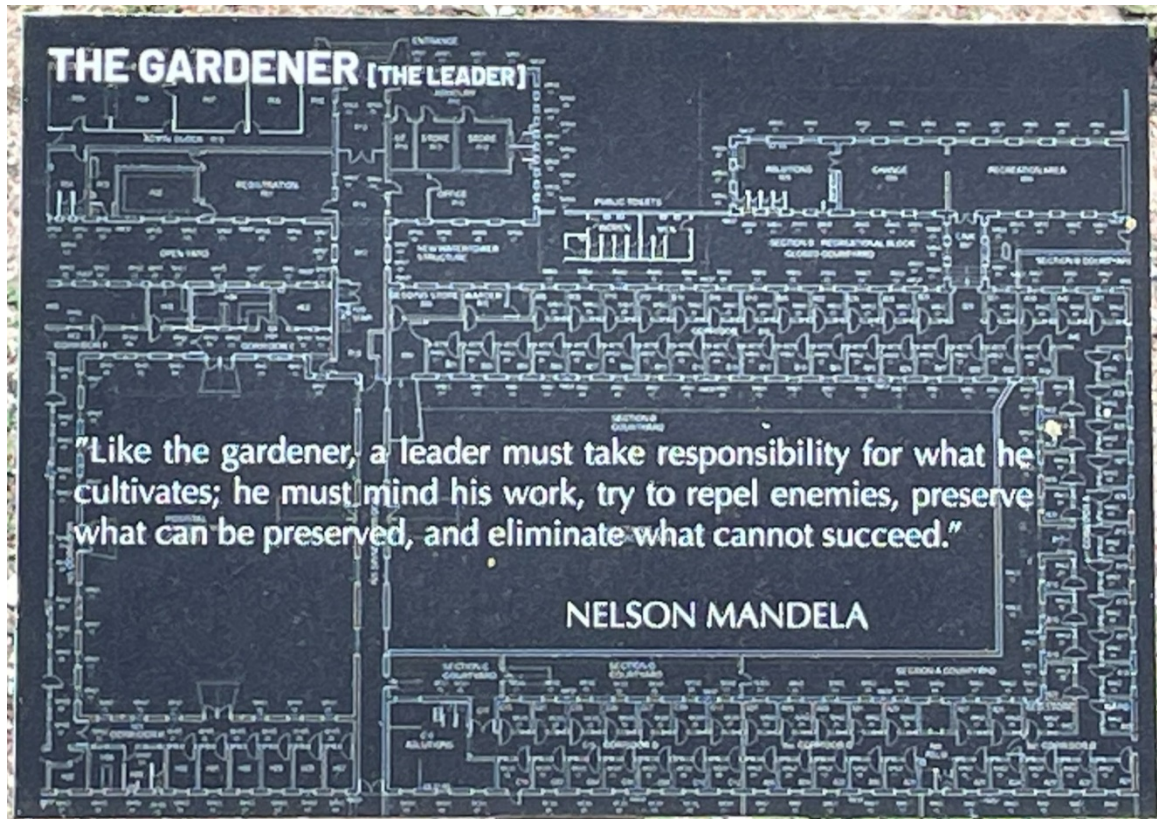
Grapevines



A Taste of Freedom



The Gardener



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