

IN SEARCH OF ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS: A HERMENEUTICS OF THE CONCEPT OF SPIRIT IN AFRICAN INDIGENOUS PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

The fact that the world is experiencing an environmental crisis is indisputable. The environmental crisis has manifested itself in various ways such as deforestation, desertification, atmospheric and marine pollution, unplanned urbanisation, over-population, and so forth. In the search for ideas and theories that can help to mitigate the environmental crisis, many western theories have been proposed to the negligence of indigenous ideas and theories. This paper argues that there is a place for serious consideration of the African indigenous idea of spirit in making environmental ethics. Through analytic and critical hermeneutics methods, the concept of spirit in African indigenous thought is deciphered and its implications explicated for mitigating the current environmental crisis. The paper finds out that there is environmental ethics that can be gleaned from African indigenous environmental thought. The paper concludes that this African-based environmental ethics can contribute to mitigating the current environmental ethics.

Keywords: Environment, Ethics, Environmental Ethics, Spirit, Africa, Traditional, Indigenous, and Philosophy.

Introduction

The paper from the onset agrees with Sullivan (2001) that: “Human belief and practice mark the earth. One can hardly think of a natural system that has not been considerably altered, for better or for worse, by human culture” (p. xi). Contemporary environmental ethics often suffers from one limitation among many others. It is predominantly rooted in western epistemological paradigms. It is painful to note that western scholars and organizations desire to impose their western paradigms on non-western societies. This paper challenges that tendency by advocating that non-western environmental knowledge is as valuable as western environmental knowledge. The paper argues that the African conception of spirit is relevant for environmental ethics and should more than ever before be incorporated into environmental ethical discourses. It should be noted right away that it is difficult to generalize about Africa. Africa is a vast continent with many countries, cultures, ethnicities, etc. Some scholars even argue that there is nothing that can be called African philosophy, rather there are African philosophies. For some, there is no African religion but African religions. It should however be noted as The Editors of The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (2018) says that despite the varieties of beliefs, there are remarkable similarities in terms of cultural beliefs and practices across the countries on the continent. For instance, all over the continent, there is a belief in a Supreme Being creator of the universe. The Encyclopedia of Religion (2019) states: “Belief in

a supreme being is universal among most of the over sixty peoples of Africa. Supreme beings carry a distinct and unique quality in African cosmology as creators with all other supreme attributes in the theocentric universe.” This is why for instance; Onyema (2004) rightly avers that by implications when the Igbo concept of God is discussed it applies equally and in general to other African brothers.

Conceptual Analysis

What is a spirit? Idonibo (1973) quoting Robin Horton says: 'Spirits are normally invisible and intangible, though they can be seen at will by diviners who have undergone the proper rites, they also materialize sometimes' (p. 68). Explaining what spirits are, Mbiti (1995) opines that they belong to the ontological mode of existence and they are between God and man, and there are two kinds of spirits, nature and ancestral spirits. Nature spirits are created by the Supreme Being (God), and ancestral spirits were once human beings on earth. This does not mean God is not a spirit. He is the supreme spirit and above all other spirits. The point of Okafor (2003) helps to clear this point: “The African man never places God in the same category with the creation. He does not believe that God is everything and everything is God. Rather he believes that God is Spirit and a personal being. God is transcendent and immanent” (p. 11).

Other concepts needing explication are African Indigenous or traditional thought. Note that the words indigenous or traditional will be used interchangeably. The word, “traditional” is used here as Sindima (2016) puts it: “elements of life and society handed from one generation to another.” (p. 24). Indigenous is what is originating from a place, especially from ancient times. Mbiti (1991) notes that African thought is a product of the long experience of observation and also reflection. African traditional philosophy is an essential aspect of indigenous knowledge/thought. Gorjestani (2004), Gundu (2010), Simpson (2004), Ukavwe (2017) and Kelbessa (2009) have spelt out the significance of indigenous knowledge for environmental conservation, etc. Tucker and Grim (2001) opine that indigenous traditions foster reverence for nature and can enhance ethical practices that conserve ecosystems. African indigenous or traditional thought is endogenous and derived from the African worldview.

Environmental ethics is here understood as Keller (2010) says to mean “moral philosophy concerning nonhuman nature” (p. 1). Using the words of Sindima (2016), ethics concerns rational reflection on human activities that foster *Unumthu* (fullness of life) and are not based on utilitarian self-interest. Srivastava (2010) defines environmental ethics as; “...the discipline that studies the moral relationship of human beings to, and also the value and moral status of the environment and its non-human contents” (p. 253). Environmental ethics affirm that it is not only human-to-human relationships that matter. Human beings have obligations to relate to non-human nature in a friendly manner, not a hostile manner. All human behaviours are informed by ethical dispositions. These dispositions are informed by ethical beliefs. Many authors such as Keller (2010), Holmes (1988), and Curry (2006) are all in concordance that for much of the western intellectual tradition nature was simply an object and that the coming of environmental ethics in the 1950s and 1960s is revolutionary in

affirming that non-humans are equally the subject of ethics.

Literature Review

There is so much literature on the areas of environmental ethics, indigenous knowledge, beliefs in spirits in Africa, and traditional thought or philosophy. It will be impossible to examine this huge body of literature. It will suffice here to just critically review some literature that deals directly with issues of beliefs in spirits in African thought or its relationship to environmental ethics, African environmental ethics/thoughts, and also literature on the environmental situation in Africa.

Iteyo (2009) examines the rational ground for belief in spirits in Africa. Adogbo (2000) looks at the spirit world of Africans and dispels the notion that all spirits in Africa are homogenous. He also describes the manifestations of spirits. Wotogbe-Weneka (2006) in providing the basic categories of African religions spells out the various categories of spirits and concludes that spirits inhabit natural objects which are considered sacred. He also reveals that spirits inhabit animals, birds, and trees which are dreaded and handled with caution.

Peterson (2004) emphasises African understanding of the human-earth relationship. It was rooted in communalism and bondedness with nature and it was non-dualist. It critiques capitalism and the commercialisation of nature and calls for ending the over-exploitation of nature through the recovery of indigenous values. Agbese (2009) looks at the environmental challenges and problems in Africa. He examines the factors responsible for environmental degradation and argues for the need to rethink Africa's weak environmental policies. The concern of Kaba (2016) in chapter two of his work is with the environment, population growth, and Africa's development in the post-world War II era. His paper examines the African food crisis and how the population growth is making it difficult for Africa to meet up. Coupled with these, environmental factors are precipitating low food productivity. Africa is challenged to rise to overcome this challenge. Maathai (2010) in her work examines the environmental challenge in Africa precipitated by capitalism and western culture. She affirms traditional African beliefs and practices and saw sacredness in the earth and other lives on the planet and she called for restoring respect, gratitude, and conservation of nature. Ikeke (2004) points out the Afrocentric paradigm that sees humans as part of nature and linked with the metaphysical and argues for the inclusion of African indigenous environmental knowledge in education in Nigeria. Burgess (2009) sees environmental degradation in the Horn of Africa as causing human insecurities. He calls on governments, and non-governmental groups to act to end it. The concern of Butts (2009) is how terrorism has caused environmental insecurity in Africa.

Ekwealo (2011) deals with defining and distinguishing African environmental ethics from western environmental philosophy. He argues that: "African environmental ethics is an applied philosophy dealing with the fundamental principles that govern the relationship between man and the environment based on African worldview" (p.4). He states some of the differences between both. While western ethics affirm dualism, in Africa dualism is deemphasized for the oneness of the cosmos in a world of complementarity and mutuality. In Africa nature and all life are sacred. Osemwegie (2011) argues for and defends eco-bio-

holism as an African worldview that sees all reality as one organic whole and sacred. There is mutual interaction among all the components. He calls for humans to live peacefully with nature. Alokwu (2011) argues for correlating African traditional ecological cosmology that sees all life as sacred and affirms bondedness with the Christian theology of *Oikothology* that sees the universe as God's household in which humans should live together peacefully with other creatures. Mbonu (2011) critiques the environmental degradation in the Nigeria Delta and the experience of pollution from oil and gas industries. She calls for using the biblical concept of Jubilee and the covenantal relationship between God, humans, and the natural world together with Etche and Ikwere's sense of the sacredness of the earth to promote earth justice, restoration and sustainability. Ikeke (2011) and Etieyibo (2011) both use the African concept of *Ubuntu* (I am because we are) to argue for humans living in respect of other human beings and the natural world. Ejizu & Awajiusuk (2011) while asserting the African cosmology of oneness of all life and the value of totemic practices argue that women need to be more involved in promoting environmental justice in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. Osuji (2011) examined environmental degradation in Africa from the lens of ecological feminism. While examining environmental challenges in the Niger Delta, Awajiusuk (2012) emphasizes the importance of African indigenous environmental values that attaches respect to other occupants on the earth outside human beings.

The innovation of this present paper is that it specifically concentrates and focuses on the concept of spirit and examines the implication in the formation of environmental ethics. The concern is not just African environmental ethics, but these African traditional ecological values and practices should be brought into the domain of global environmental ethics. It equally links these values with other indigenous values globally.

Categories of Spirits

The first of spirits and the supreme spirit is that of God, the Supreme Being. Writing on the hermeneutics of God in Igbo ontology, Mbaegbu (2012) states that: "The Igbo know many gods apart from their Supreme Being *Chineke*" (p. 280). He notes that there are major deities (*NnukwuAlusi*) such as *Ani* (earth goddess), *Igwe* (sky god), *Amadioha* (god of thunder), and *Anyanwu* (the sun god); minor deities (*ObeleAlusi*) such as water gods, forest gods, *ikenga* (god of luck), etc. Ogbukagu (2008) affirms the idea that there are both major and minor divinities in Igbo. Mbiti (1991) writes that spirits are grouped into nature spirits and human spirits.

There are various myths about who the Supreme Being is and how he created the world. For the Dinka of South Sudan, The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (2018) say, the creator God after making the world was initially close to humans, but he eventually withdrew when a woman with her lifted pestle struck the sky. The Supreme Being withdrew and since then human beings have been experiencing sickness and death. For the Asante of Ghana, God is called *Nyame* (creator). Bujo (1992) says the Bahema and Walendu in Zaire call him "Djalingilingi" (the self-sufficient one and needs nobody to support him); he is called "Imana" (source of Life) among the Banyarwanda and Burundi. Like many other African people, he is poured libation, offerings, and thanksgivings daily. The creator among the Dogon of Mali is called *Amma*. For the Yoruba people of Western Nigeria, the creator is *Olorun*.

For some scholars like Smart (2008), the God of Africans is conceived to be remote. He created the world and withdrew. Not all scholars agree with this viewpoint. Onyema (2004) writes that: "God for the Africans generally is not a remote experience" (p. 76). The Gikuyu, as Oguntola-Laguda (2007) citing Parrinder notes that they honour and serve the supreme being; and among the Ewes of Togo there is a shrine with priests in Abomey for the worship of *Mawu* (the supreme being). In Yoruba land the Supreme Being, *Olodudare* is invoked daily as people thank him for the gift of each day. In response to the question, "seji dada" (Did you rise well?), Oguntola-Laguda notes that people say, "A dupe lowo Olorun (We thank God)" (p. 18).

The attributes of God, the one supreme deity and foremost of spirits include creator, sustainer, protector, and moulder. Oguntola-Laguda (2007) states that the Yoruba people say, "Oba bi Olorunkosi-there is no king like God" (p. 21). Generally, there are no shrines, temples, sacrifices, or priests to the Supreme Being, as Oguntola-Laguda notes. This notwithstanding, God is present in the life of the people, and through the common names given to God, the people know that God is real and close to them. As Oguntola-Laguda writes names such as *Chukwuenyenwa* (God is the giver of children), *Oloruntoyin* (God is worthy of praise), *Chukwuemeka* (God has done well), and *Chukwuma* (Only God knows) are some of the names given to God to indicate his presence and works. As Bujo (1992) notes it is the supreme being who has the fullness of life, he gives strength and orders the universe, he is the saviour and protector. More attributes of God as Kanu (2015) says are active, unique, one, king, omnipotent, and judge.

The second categories of spirits are divinities. Magesa (1998) notes that spirits are called gods. They are the messengers of the Supreme Being. Among the Yoruba the divinities are called *Orisha*. As "messengers...of the most high God," Onyema (2004) writes they have various degrees of significance among Africans (p.88). While some divinities are weak, others are powerful. Divinities are from the Supreme Being. Oguntola-Laguda cites Bolaji Idowu who states: "...In Yoruba theology, the *orisa* (divinities) were brought forth by *Oludumare*, we don't know by what method they were produced, but according to oral traditions they are engendered by Him or that they emanated from Him" (p. 13). Oguntola-Laguda (2007) says they are children, ministers, or deputies of the Supreme Being. They are subject to him and exist to do his bidding. Divinities have their departments and assignments that they carry out. Oguntola-Laguda (2004) writes that among the Yoruba, *Ogun* is the god of war, *Njala* is the god of water among the Mende people, *Sango* is the god of thunder among the Yoruba, *Ndogbouoi* (mountain god among the Mende in Sierra Leone); *Sango*, *Sokunba*, *Amadioha* and *Jakuta* (in-charge of justice). There were gods concerning every area of human life such as fertility, farming, fishing, etc. There are innumerable spirits in the African world. Smart (2008) indicates that many spirits dwell invisibly in thick forests, near sources of streams, and many are active at night, some spirits are associated with plants such as the banana.

A foremost divinity in Igbo (African) culture is *Ala* (earth goddess). *Ala* is the ground of all morality and as Onyema (2004) states: "The Igbo live according to the dictates of *ala* i.e people would live as *ala* approves. *Ala*-the earth has things which people should do (*dos*) and

things, which people should never do (don'ts)” (p. 120). The role of Ala in protecting morality and the earth is crucial for environmental ethics.

We also have ancestral spirits. Ancestral spirits are considered to be guardian spirits of the moral order. Eboh (2003) writes that: “ancestors are those deceased members of the community who in their lifetime held positions of importance, such as heads of families, lineages, clans, tribes, kingdoms, and other social groups” (p. 149). Ancestral spirits are spirits of dead elders who have departed from this life. They are considered to be the living dead. It should be understood that ancestors are not deities. Not everyone who dies become an ancestor. There are conditions for becoming an ancestor. The conditions include (1) living up to ripe old age, (2) living a good moral life, (3) experiencing a good death, and (4) being given a good burial. It is believed that the ancestors as guardians of morality and do visit those who breach the moral codes of the community in their dreams and can make people sick or give them trouble. Ancestors were once human beings but they have now been divinised. The fact that ancestors are custodians of morality is well supported by many scholars such as Onyema (2004), and Mbiti (1991). Morality in the African community was lived in harmony with the ancestors. To express their relationship with their ancestors, humans pour libation to them. There are annual festivals to celebrate the ancestors. There is a mutual symbiotic relationship between humans and their ancestors.

Classically, humans are not strictly part of the spirit world. Omeregbe (2005) notes that there is a distinction between the spiritual world of spiritual beings and the corporeal world but they are not separated for they intermingle and interlink. Regarding the constituents of a human being in African traditional thought, Omeregbe (2005) writes that a human being is made up of the body, the element that is re-born into the world, and the element that lives a spiritual existence in the spiritual world.

Though there are different categories of spirits, the African spirit world is one. There is a deep interrelatedness of all things in the African universe. Humans are influenced by all the spiritual forces above them. Their existence depends on the Supreme Being, there are divinities assigned to help them, the ancestral spirits are custodians and guardians of human morality, and humans are to live in harmony with the earth and all the spirits. There is holism in the universe. Traditional Africans believe in the presence of spiritual forces in all things including “inanimate” things. Onyema (2004) notes that: “to some extent the forces of nature evoke respect even to the point of worship and cults” (p. 73). But Onyema (2004) disagrees with Parrinder who terms this phenomenon among Africans “animism” (p. 73).

The Place of Spirit and Its Implications for Environmental Ethics

As Magesa (1998) notes: “Sustaining the universe by maintaining harmony or balance between its two spheres and among all beings is the most important ethical responsibility for humanity, and it forms the basis of an individual's moral character....” (p. 73) Spirits are present in the entire earth and universe. Turaki (2012) states that: “spirit beings are believed to inhabit certain trees, rocks, or mountains, caves, rivers, lakes, forests, burial grounds, animals, human beings, the skies, the ground and other sites, craved or moulded objects, charms, amulets....” (p. 25). Idoniboye (1973) opines that: “ontology of any distinctively African world-view is

replete with 'spirits'. Spirits are the one entity that remains constant in all African belief systems” (p.83). The presence of spirits in the earth, in plants, and in animals makes the earth sacred. The earth is even considered a goddess in some communities.

What some scholars like Rolston (1988; 1994) will call intrinsic value in nature, indigenous people in Africa also perceived to be so. Before the coming of contemporary environmental philosophers and ethicists, indigenous traditions already saw and spoke of values in the earth. The intrinsic value in the earth is not based on human utility. Writing on the metaphysics of the Bantu people, Tempels states that the people believe in “vital force” and God Muntu is the source of vital force. All forces in the universe are participants in *Muntu*, vital force. Everything carries vital force and one vital force can enrich another, so for instance humans can enrich themselves from the vital force of other forces. Bujo (1992) writes that there is a hierarchy of beings and life flows from God through the ancestors to the visible world. This paper posits that the whole ecosystem is enriched with vital force. Through the food chain, every created reality should be prudently sustained by others. Enriching yourself with the vital force from others to the extent that force is endangered or extinguished is evil and harms nature. Humans should preserve the earth from which they enrich their vital force.

Commenting on Placid Tempels, Azenabor (2010) states that the hierarchy of vital force from God through the ancestors to human beings, animals, plants, minerals, and non-living things implies an ontological relationship of solidarity and inter-dependence among beings. Kersby (2003) concurs that there is an intimate and inseparable connection between humans and the metaphysical. For a world that is no longer based primarily on villages and clans but on globalized settings can this notion of inter-dependence of spirits implying solidarity still be possible? For Unah (2002) and Azenabor (2010), it will be difficult for it to midwife humans through this time of capitalism? This paper affirms that even though it may be difficult yet the value of inter-relatedness should not be discountenanced. Even capitalism and globalization are built on the idea of human community and solidarity. The values of sharing are still needed in urban settings. To use the words of Magesa (2002) solving the environmental crisis requires not only economic and political decisions but also a decent moral lifestyle that promotes equity and freedom from greed. Oduyoye (1993) writes that the African integrated and holistic view of life is ideal and is still needed, not that it has failed rather it is Africans who have abandoned it to “indulge in the fundamental human past-time of self-centeredness under the cloak of westernization” (p. 122). The paper is not advocating for an uncritical adoption of past African norms and ecological knowledge. Rather it agrees with Bande (1993) that: the “African past can be a source of inspiration and guidance in the solution to African crises” (p. 79).

A central aspect of the African spirit world is that many communities saw the earth as a goddess. As the goddess of fertility and fruitfulness, Ala ensured that the earth was fruitful and free from scarcity and hunger. *Ala*, the earth goddess was the protector of morality and the wellbeing of the earth. The environment is not to be harmed. Traditional people lived in honour and harmony with the land. It is painful to note that western forces of colonialism and globalization have degraded these values. Most of what western multinational corporations think of is profit for their shareholders. They are weak in their so-called corporate social

responsibility. In the African spiritual cosmology what is right and moral is what is in line with the dictates of God and the ancestral spirits. To use the words of Bujo (1992) the human responsibility is to live to enhance and enrich the vital force of everything in the universe. Sindima (2016) avers that humans as sacred beings are called to a life of *Umunthu* (fullness of life), the foundation of African ethics. Whatever militated against *Umunthu* was rejected, such as oppression, violence, and environmental degradation. Sindima (2016) avers that somebody who lives against *umunthu* is a *mfiti* (witch). Sindima (2016) without hesitation argues that: “environmental degradation is witchcraft. Those who pollute rivers and lakes, and destroy forests fit the category of *mfiti* for they do not care about nature or those who depend on nature for their livelihood” (p. 31). Ethics deals with the rightness and wrongness of human behaviour.

These African values speak of morality/ethics. They speak of how human beings ought to live their lives in the light of communal and ancestral ethics in line with the benevolence of the Supreme Being. There is environmental ethics in African traditional cosmology. It is recognized that words and language are important to human beings and cultures. Language for instance can be metaphoric or parabolic. There are words in language that are symbolic. There is a need not to discountenance the traditional beliefs and languages that affirmed protection for the earth. The point is well made by Onyema (2004) that in the western world a group such as Green Peace is advocating for protecting the ecosystem from degradation. They may not be doing it from a religious perspective as such but the important thing is that the earth is protected. From an African perspective, Onyema (2004) notes that the earth should be protected from a religious angle. Environmental pragmatism implies the most important thing is that the earth is protected. It is unjustified to be biased against those who advocate for environmental protection from a religious or indigenous cultural viewpoint. All that should count is that the earth is protected. Respect for Ala does inspire respect for the ecosystem and human beings for respect implies that things are not done that desecrate or pollute the land, like shedding of human blood, wanton destruction of plants and animals

One of the virtues and values that are needed in this time of environmental crisis is solidarity and sharing. Maguire (2000) writes correctly that before the arrival of Islam and Christianity African culture was already rooted in sharing, and respect for all life; and both humans, plants, and animals belong to common spiritual energy. Maguire (2000) cites Jacob Olupona who states that: “...all plants and animals and humans share the same divine energy, *ase*. They are all sacred and all related. Kinship is very important in African cultures, and the plants and the animals are kin. They are family. This calls for enormous reverence for all that lives, even if tragically we must kill some of life to live ourselves—we live on plants, fish, and animals” (p.52).

There is so much wealth and resources but very little sharing. The problem of world hunger is there. Mbuy (2007) rightly notes that the world today is troubled by individualism, egoism, greed, and selfishness; whereas African culture values sharing. The inter-relationship in the African spirit world speaks of solidarity and communion of life. Every aspect of creation carries vital force that should help foster life. Mbuy (2007) notes that life in Africa is life in a community calling for humane living, and life is also seen as sacred, the human is a “being-

with-and-for-others”; and “therefore the individual is only seen in his 'relatedness' to physical environment, to others, and the unseen world of constructive forces and beings” (p.12). Abiodun (2005) speaks of the harmonious cooperation among the gods and the partnership they share with implications for human living. Peterson (2004) rightly propounds that: “...African environmental ethic rests on the same base that supports all African traditions-that of communalism,” and life is rooted in “bondedness” with responsibility (p.169).

The African beliefs in divinities and other spirits cannot be over-emphasized considering the environmental degradation. It has serious implications for environmental ethics. Ejeh (2008) in stating the sacredness of nature as a result of the presence of spirit beings, especially through the Mother-Earth phenomenon notes this provides a foundation for ecological issues. The environmental ethics curriculum should be inclusive of indigenous environmental knowledge and insights. Emiola (2005) writes that as a result of the belief that divinities inhabited the earth before humans arrived the earth, trees, animals, and other parts of creation are seen as sacred and deserving reverence. Emiola (2005) states further and rightly that brutality to any part of creation incurred the wrath of the divinities and Olodumare. Awolalu and Dopamu (1979) state that some divinities are the personification of natural forces and wherever in nature were associated with spirit were held sacred and revered. About this, Adeola (2008) writes: “No tree is therefore cut without the necessary ritual” (p. 24). This applies to other aspects of nature. Many totemic practices helped in environmental preservation. The universe is filled with life and no being is useless. The implications of all these to use the words of Adeola (2008) are that creation is honoured and respected, all of life is sacred, the land is sacred, the earth should be judiciously used, and there should be compassion for the weak and the vulnerable. Adeola (2008) states further taking insights from the Canadian theologian Stan McKay, that humans and animals, and other creatures belong to one family and the earth is the mother of all, and domination and domineering of nature are challenged. Whitt et al (2001) rightly enunciate that indigenous perspectives all affirm nature as spiritually replete, humans are seen as kin of the non-human world, and guardianship is a moral responsibility. Nature has inherent value and the use of nature should be in prudence and humility. As noted by Ferguson (2010), among indigenous people including Africans and Native Americans there is a radical emphasis on respect for nature, perception of the divine as omnipresent and integral to human life, and there is high attention laid on ethical responsibility and personal character. Ferguson (2010) equally rightly notes that this does not mean that indigenous ways were perfect. They like other human beings had their struggles. There were aspects of indigenous ways that were hostile to human welfare and wellbeing.

For the conservation of the earth, there is a need to move away from the logic of domination that drives capitalism and globalization. The emergence and growth of environmental ethics from the 1960s is helping in this. But Africa has a contribution to make in designing the curriculum of environmental ethics and the environmental movements. The words of Curtin (2005) are worth recalling here: “Clearly, one of the great dangers of an environmental ethic is that it will reflect only those voices that are easily heard, our own. Justice, not to mention pragmatism, requires that a new environmental ethic be plural-voiced. At a deep level, it needs to reflect the world of diverse places and peoples” (p. ix).

The African cosmology of spirits may not be a cure-all or total panacea to contemporary environmental degradation, but it can help. No bit of wisdom or knowledge should be neglected in the search for solutions to the environmental crisis. Environmental ethics is made up of both ideas and practices connected to the environment. Some scholars with a modern scientific and technological mindset may not accept African beliefs as helpful to the environment and may even consider some to be mere myths and superstitions. But the fact is that many of the beliefs helped African people to negotiate their environment and protect it. These ideas and principles from African traditional thought and practice will be useless unless they are codified and turned into policies for practice. Government has to ensure environmental conservation that takes into consideration indigenous or traditional values. This is well stated in many universal documents and declarations (United Nations 1992). They have to conserve indigenous ecological values. Government should protect sacred groves, natural places, and African totems in every community. Holmes (1988) rightly notes that both government and business play important roles in the life of citizens. The government he writes should make laws moderating self-interest, business, and private use, for the good of the entire earth community.

The west is speaking today of conservation parks and wilderness. It will be wrong for African governments to be destroying the natural places they already have. The educational curriculum in courses like geography, biology, social studies, history, and philosophy should incorporate more than ever African indigenous ecological knowledge. In resolving the ecological crisis there is a need for developing what Sarfo (2017) calls an “in-depth ecological consciousness” that realises the “interconnectedness of all creation, one's mystical union with God with the eco-system; an interior solidarity with nature...” (p. viii). To put it in the words of Maathai (2010) it is a change of consciousness that will rediscover the: “love of nature that animated the minds and souls of our ancestors” (p. 103).

Conclusion

Adeola (2008) states that: “The African perception of the world as a place that is inhabited not only by humans but also by the spirits has greatly influenced the way that the whole creation is handled. Nature is sacred and indigenous people...treat it as such” (p. 27). Ontological harmony, to use the term of Agbakwuo (2013) leads to communalism, hospitality towards all life, and ethical behaviours that conserved the universe.

Africa like other continents in the world is experiencing a serious environmental crisis. In framing contemporary environmental ethics to combat the crisis in Africa, Africa should not be oblivious of her cultural knowledge and heritage. Olaniyan (2008) rightly notes that disconnection from African moral heritage is partly responsible for problems of underdevelopment in Africa. It is time to take seriously more than ever before indigenous environmental ethical beliefs and practices.

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