

# Eschatology in Africa

## *The Imperative of a Transformative Social Praxis*

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The strong Akamba (and African) interest in a futurist Eschatology may partially be an unconscious attempt to find a spiritual homeland beginning here and now in this life, but not knowing how to find it they revert to a largely mythical future which may be no more than a shallow veneer of escapism.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Eschatology remains a fascinating theological concept and theologians continue to devote a significant amount of time and labour to understand it, because it is important for thinking about the future.<sup>2</sup> While many Christians might not bother about the theological subtleties of the debate, they remain interested, because eschatological discourse concerns the destiny of

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1. John S. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background: A Study of the Encounter between New Testament Theology and African Traditional Concepts*, Oxford 1971, 125.

2. This essay is a revised version of the lecture given by the author on the occasion of him being awarded an honorary doctorate by the Faculty of Theology at Lund University in 2018. I want to thank the Faculty of Theology at Lund University for the honour they have bestowed on me and also Professor Samuel Byrskog, Angela Byrskog, Professor Fredrik Lindstöm, Professor Mika Vähäkangas, and Professor Auli Vähäkangas for their hospitality and assistance during my stay in Lund. Further, I want to thank Martina Prosén and Mika Vähäkangas for many years of collaboration and for reading and commenting on this essay, and Martin Nykvist for his editorial insights that have strengthened this essay.

the created order. Themes associated with eschatology, such as death, the return of Christ, judgment, rewards, heaven, and hell, fascinate and frustrate people, because we have only a limited imagination of the “other world.” Studies of eschatology link it to apocalyptic literature. Eschatology has generated millennialisms that have been escapist. Millennialism has become deadly when people were coerced to end their lives in the belief that the end time had arrived. Terms related to eschatology, such as apocalypse and Armageddon, mirror a catastrophic end of the world as we know it, even if eschatology promises a transformation into a better world.

In this essay, I present a limited discussion of eschatology in dialogue with John S. Mbiti’s *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background*. In his major study of the subject, Mbiti lamented the fact that the African Inland Mission (AIM), who carried out missionary activity and planted churches in the Akamba area of Kenya, ignored local ideas and articulated an eschatological vision that largely ignored local beliefs. The AIM used its teachings and music to promote ideas of a coming world, where Christians will be with Jesus and non-Christians would be condemned to eternal damnation.

I will discuss briefly Mbiti’s views in *New Testament Eschatology* and recent developments in eschatological thought that offer alternative visions of the end times to emphasize the notion of otherness in eschatological discourse. I will discuss eschatology and otherness in the writings of Cameroonian theologian and philosopher Fabien Eboussi Boulaga (1934–2018) and the Swedish theologian Jakob Wirén. In the last section of the essay, I argue that the right attitude to eschatology is to engage in a transformative social praxis. I argue that Matt. 25:31–46 suggests a richer eschatological orientation that is grounded in a transformative praxis today. Furthermore, I argue that practices that take otherness seriously, including all life forms and the environment, grounds eschatological thought in its rightful place, because eschatology is an orientation towards the destiny of a planet and a universe that humans share with others.<sup>3</sup>

My goal is two-fold: first, to continue a conversation started by Mbiti on eschatology in the African context and second, to affirm Boulaga’s claim that Jesus’ speech on the *parousia* “is also a judgment [which] pronounces, expresses a set of transformations, a complexus of effects to be produced in the area of behavior and attitudes, and institutions.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, I hope

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3. Margaret A. Farley & Serene Jones (eds), *Liberating Eschatology: Essays in Honor of Letty M. Russell*, Louisville, KY 1999. See Jakob Wirén, *Hope and Otherness: Christian Eschatology and Interreligious Hospitality*, Leiden 2018; Jerry L. Walls (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, Oxford 2008; John C. McDowell & Scott A. Kirkland, *Eschatology*, Grand Rapids, MI 2018.

4. Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, *Christianity Without Fetishes: An African Critique and Recapture of Christianity*, Maryknoll, NY 1984, 105.

to reaffirm that eschatology is central to the Christian proclamation because it calls for a praxis that reaffirms Jürgen Moltmann's claim that "Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present."<sup>5</sup> To accomplish that, I discuss briefly practices that could restore our common habitat and make it possible for the ecclesial community to carry out its obligations to feed the hungry as part of a lifestyle oriented towards the future.<sup>6</sup>

### Mbiti on New Testament Eschatology

Mbiti's *New Testament Eschatology* was a revision of his doctoral dissertation *Christian Eschatology in Relation to the Evangelization of Tribal Africa*, presented at Cambridge University in 1963.<sup>7</sup> In what remains the most substantial discussion of biblical eschatology in the African context, Mbiti discussed the encounter between Christian views on eschatology and Akamba beliefs; a patrilineal descent and exogamous people organized into clans, then gates, houses, and family units in Kenya. Mbiti argued that Christianity is "intensely eschatological," and that the AIM preached an eschatology that focussed on the end times. The AIM missionaries ignored Akamba beliefs on life, death, "the departed, the spirits, and the hereinafter."<sup>8</sup> Mbiti outlined Akamba beliefs and the teachings of the interdenominational AIM that worked among the Akamba, a deeply religious people whose religious world changed significantly when Johann Ludwig Krapf (1810–1881) arrived as a missionary. Other missionaries arrived in the area after the construction of the Mombasa–Kampala railroad.<sup>9</sup> Mbiti's excursions included a discussion of the materialistic and sacramental language on eschatology in the New Testament.

Mbiti's analysis of time in Akamba thought – in which he argued that the Akamba discuss time mostly with reference to past events, current events, and those that will happen soon – was a captivating part of the book. The things that have not taken place are part of a long future. Time for the Akamba is two-dimensional, constituted by a distant past and an active

5. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, New York 1975, 16.

6. Ted Peters argues: "The future actualizes a potential that is already present, just as a cherry tree actualizes the potential that is already in the stone or seed we plant in the ground." Ted Peters, *God – The World's Future: Systematic Theology for a Postmodern Era*, Minneapolis, MN 1992, 308.

7. John S. Mbiti, *Christian Eschatology in Relation to the Evangelization of Tribal Africa*, Cambridge University PhD thesis, 1963.

8. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology*, 2. In this essay, I will not discuss the background of the Akamba people since so much has changed among the Akamba and in Kenya in general since Mbiti's study was published.

9. Roland Oliver, *The Missionary Factor in East Africa*, London 1952, 6.

present. Emphasizing the past gives the Akamba a backward orientation to history from which they derive ideas about creation: origins of humanity, cultures, and the formation of societies.<sup>10</sup> These beliefs are part of Akamba mythology. These claims require new critical analysis today, especially because Mbiti claimed that “human life follows also another rhythm which knows neither end nor radical alteration [...] birth, initiation, marriage, procreation, old age, death and entry into the company of the departed.”<sup>11</sup> People who die move into the past and will be removed from the living after five generations. Therefore, Africans pour libations to keep the memory of the dead with them for a long time. He argued that the Akamba lack a concept of the end of the world and eschatology similar to the New Testament background.

Mbiti distinguished between end time views in Jewish apocalyptic literature and Christian eschatology, arguing that the incarnation of Christ opened a future dimension and made eschatology a Christological event.<sup>12</sup> Apocalyptic literature at the time described a former age as a challenging one because of the many sorrows people faced, but the literature anticipated an age that would usher in the reign of God. The Christological phenomenon also ushers in a new age.<sup>13</sup> According to Mbiti, scholars ranging from Charles Harold Dodd (1884–1973) to Oscar Cullmann (1902–1999) failed to emphasize the end as the consummation of all things.<sup>14</sup> Mbiti returned to time, again stating that “time is an intensely Christological phenomenon. Any departure from it is bound to do injustice to New Testament Eschatology.”<sup>15</sup> The incarnation of Jesus connected two significant time periods: the one before the coming of Christ and the period after the resurrection, which inaugurated the expectation of Christ’s return. With Jesus then at the centre of New Testament eschatology, God’s promises to humankind would finally be fulfilled. Paul preached a futuristic eschatology which “takes on cosmic

10. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology*, 23–24.

11. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology*, 29.

12. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology*, 32.

13. See also Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, New York 1960, 92. Cited in Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology*, 52.

14. See Ernst von Dobschütz, *The Eschatology of the Gospels*, London 1910; Charles Harold Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, London 1953; Charles Harold Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments*, London 1936; Charles Harold Dodd, “The Mind of Paul: A Psychological Approach”, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 17 (1933), 91–105; Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology*, 34–35; Thomas Walter Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus*, London 1975; Charles Harold Dodd, *The Coming of Christ: Four Broadcast Addresses for the Season of Advent*, Cambridge 1951; Norman Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, Philadelphia, PA 1963; Rudolf Bultmann, *History and Eschatology*, Edinburgh 1957; T. Francis Glasson, *The Second Advent: The Origin of the New Testament Doctrine*, London 1945, 151–156; John A.T. Robinson, *Jesus and His Coming*, New York 1957.

15. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology*, 38.

scope embracing the entire creation in the purpose of God's redemption." New Testament eschatology has a duality about it because Jesus is the beginning of a new age that will be consummated in the future when he makes all things new. He was "the completion of the new creation; the omega" and had given the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of the eschatological promise.<sup>16</sup>

### **Eschatology in the Teachings of the African Inland Mission**

The AIM's futuristic eschatology emphasized "the personal, visible and pre-millennial return of the Lord Jesus Christ; the literal resurrection of the body; the eternal blessedness of the saved, and the eternal punishment of the lost."<sup>17</sup> The teachings, practices, and music of the AIM demonstrated a rigid eschatological orientation which Christians would know was at hand because of signs such as famines, wars (and rumours of wars), the preaching of the Gospel to all parts of the world, and the return of the Jews to Palestine. Mbiti argued that the AIM used local terms which promoted a futuristic eschatology, such as *Yesu nukauka*, which means "Jesus will come" (far or remote future tense), *Yesu nukuka*, which means "Jesus will come" (using the immediate or near future tense), and *Yesu akauka (akooka)*, which means "Jesus will come" (indefinite future or indefinite near future).

Additionally, the prevailing views of eschatology emphasized its material dimensions through its emphasis on rewards, cities, country, eating and drinking, tears, pain, and that life was to be lived in concrete places like heaven or hell. The heavenly life made possible by Jesus was also discussed in the broad context of church life. Eschatological hope in the AIM was lived through baptism and the Eucharist. But Akamba and other African sacrifices lacked symbols, like baptism, which is a sign that a person has accepted God's judgment and received forgiveness of sins. Baptism signifies death to the old self and acceptance of new life through the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus linked the cross and eschatology when he introduced the Eucharist in an eschatological setting. The AIM promoted eschatology through its curriculum of the catechumen and out of the 211 AIM hymns, 90 were translated versions of American and English eschatological hymns. Mbiti criticized the futurist approach because it was escapist. Therefore missionary teachings to the Ukambani hindered a sacramental understanding of eschatology.<sup>18</sup>

Further, Mbiti argued that Akamba views of the spiritual world emphasized several modes of being: God the creator and sustainer of life, *Aimu*,

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16. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology*, 43–45.

17. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology*, 51.

18. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology*, 88, 125–126.

the living dead, humanity, animals, plants, and other objects that do not have life. Expressions of cultural and moral values respect all these modes of being. Death in the Akamba community is seen as a call to join your ancestors. Death is described as a river that carries things away. It is the ultimate homegoing. Death is a summons, an emptying out of the soul, eternal sleep, withering away, passing away, answering the call, and rejecting people (those still alive). Death is a loss to living relatives. People also describe death as a miscarriage, the end, coming to the end of one's breath, to depart, leave, and forsake all things, to collapse in ruins, and to become God's property.<sup>19</sup> Death transposes these elements from the physical to the spiritual and one joins the ancestors and continues to care for those who remain on earth.

Despite these compelling images of death as a departure into the future, Mbiti emphasized that Akamba time lacked a teleology and its eschatology could best be described as a "deteriology," because at death God does not recreate what has started to deteriorate.<sup>20</sup> Readers today might find that puzzling because death rituals in African communities emphasize that the dead person is on a journey to the land of the ancestors. Mbiti pointed out that Christ is the gateway to the spirit world which one enters through the waters of baptism and where one anticipates a substantive life with God in the future. The Holy Spirit is a witness to this teleological orientation made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus. The AIM taught that faith in Jesus offered security for believers and that Christians had no reason to consult witches and diviners.

According to Mbiti, the AIM used biblical texts about these issues in an uncritical manner. For example, the idea of demons was not known among the Ukambani, and New Testament terms did not correspond to Akamba terms, such as *Aimu*, spirits. Missionaries should have emphasized faith in Jesus instead of condemning spirits and demons because the sacraments assure Christians that they already have a taste of the life they will live in the next world. The gateway to that world is participation in the sacraments of the church. Akamba traditional beliefs lacked the Eucharist and their gifts to the ancestors lacked the force of the Eucharist, which unites Christians with all the saints.<sup>21</sup>

Readers today would question why the Akamba do not experience a oneness with the ancestors, since Mbiti argued that Akamba beliefs about the living dead could be appropriated for good by the church. Why was it necessary to "transpose the tribal spirit world into a Christian one"? These are

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19. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology*, 121–129.

20. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology*, 139.

21. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology*, 155.

challenging questions, but I should note that Mbiti was correct in claiming that the Christian message did not penetrate the spirit world of the Akamba: “It will for a long time remain on the surface, incapable of providing a radical and all-embracing meaning to the total *Weltanschauung* of the people.” Reading the text today, one appreciates its detailed analysis of Akamba beliefs and the comparisons, but it is not clear why Mbiti thought the world of the spirits in Akamba thought was dangerous, even if one appreciated his Christocentric approach to eschatology.<sup>22</sup>

### The Resurrection as Corporate Eschatology

Although people die as individuals, corporate eschatology addresses the uniting of all believers at the end times when they meet Christ. Mbiti pointed out that in Akamba beliefs, the dead also live in the next life and the folktale myths of the Akamba document these beliefs. However, Mbiti argued that Africans lost their gift of immortality and had nothing to replace it with. Myths point to the *tene* period and are not future looking. The AIM’s futuristic eschatology emphasized a literal resurrection of the body, the gathering of the saved, and damnation for unbelievers.<sup>23</sup> The AIM taught eschatology in its hymns that comforted people on the grounds that believers who die before the *parousia* will reunite with all believers when Jesus returns to take the saints home.

Corporate resurrection includes all creation. Irenaeus (c. 140–c. 202) was the first person who described the complete restoration of the created order when he argued in *Adversus omnes haereses* that “this created order must be restored to its first condition and be made subject to the righteous without hindrance.”<sup>24</sup> Augustine (354–430), in *De civitate Dei* XX–XXII, gave a definitive theological perspective. The final goal of resurrection is a new existence in the presence of God when all things will be put under the control of God. It is then that believers relinquish individuality, get new names, and enjoy a face-to-face relationship with God. Those who reject Christ will be excluded and punished with eternal damnation.<sup>25</sup>

Mbiti concluded his argument by noting that the New Testament does not, as people generally assume, restrict its teaching to a three-dimensional view of time. The Akamba on their part stress a two-dimensional view of time. Neither of them are absolute positions and this calls for a greater appreciation of the Christological perspective of New Testament eschatology

22. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology*, 155.

23. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology*, 159.

24. Henry Bettenson, *The Early Christian Fathers: A Selection from the Writings of the Fathers from St. Clement of Rome to St. Athanasius*, Oxford 1969, 99.

25. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology*, 176, 179.

that is realized now but will be consummated when Jesus returns for the church. What is realized now would be consummated in the future, since a Christological approach to eschatology overcomes temporal limitations.<sup>26</sup> But the backward-looking Akamba concept of time lacked the teleology of Christian eschatology and the newness it brings. Mbiti noted parallel beliefs in African and Hebrew cultures, which can lead to a fruitful comparative study, but he emphasized that the New Testament offers a distinct worldview with no parallels in African cultures. Though rich in symbols, the Akamba did not see symbols as mostly carriers of theological meaning. Mbiti argued that the sacraments are areas where Africans could make a theological breakthrough. Ceremonies and initiation rites which humanize children offer areas where New Testament eschatology could be meaningful to Africans. African thought emphasizes the spirit world and these insights from the African worldview could be used to build a broad view of the “communion of saints” and establish a connection between the living and the dead. However, Mbiti maintained a Christocentric view and argued that the resurrection has no parallels in African thought, because it points to a consummation of faith in Christ as an eschatological event when God will bring all things into the presence of God.

Mbiti expressed hope for a *Theologia Africana* that would be grounded in biblical theology and ecumenism and would engage African religion and philosophy as well as reflect a theology of the living church in Africa. As a prolepsis to what would come (or already was), Mbiti warned that “prayer and piety alone will not do the task which rightly belongs to the realm of theology.”<sup>27</sup> What was important for such theology was its Christological import, because theology stands or falls with its relationship to Christology.

### Reception of Mbiti's Thesis

The reception of Mbiti's work ignored his rich eschatological reading of the practice of the AIM and criticized his discussion of time. In an earlier reading, I engaged in this criticism, but when returning to the text, I recognize that, theologically, this was an original programmatic text that laid out how the AIM missed opportunities to articulate an eschatological vision.<sup>28</sup> Valentin-Yves Mudimbe located Mbiti's work in the category of African scholarship that challenged and rejected western anthropological approaches to African *weltanschauungen*. Dismas A. Masolo argued that

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26. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology*, 182.

27. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology*, 190.

28. See Elias Bongmba, “Eschatology: Levinasian Hints in a Preface”, in Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, Gary A. Phillips & David Jobling (eds), *Levinas and Biblical Studies*, Atlanta, GA 2003, 75–90.

Mbiti's thesis "limited the omnicomprehensivity and omniextensivity, which, to our understanding, go beyond any temporal limitation."<sup>29</sup> Kwame Gyekye, in a review of Mbiti's *African Religions and Philosophy*, argued that the Akan people also conceive of God as an infinite being, and the very idea of infinity includes the perception of the future as actual time.<sup>30</sup>

Jesse N.K. Mugambi, arguing from a cosmological perspective, has pointed out that Africans understand the idea of an integrated visible and invisible universe and that Christian eschatology from this viewpoint is irrelevant.<sup>31</sup> Kwame Bediako (1945–2008) argued that Mbiti's work did not stress time as much as present a Christological orientation of time and eschatology which should not be subjected to temporal limitations.<sup>32</sup> Robert S. Heaney has undertaken a substantive theological analysis of Mbiti and argues that he challenged missionary eschatology that emphasized an individualized view of the future and a premillennial return of Christ that did not reflect the Christology of the New Testament.<sup>33</sup> A. Scott Moreau argued that Mbiti's work was "western produced" and that Mbiti's western training distanced him from traditional thought, an idea many students of Mbiti would question since Moreau also claims that one of the strengths of the work was Mbiti's ability to make readers have a glimpse of African thought patterns.<sup>34</sup> But one must question the idea that articulating African thought in an academic setting necessarily takes it out of context as Moreau indicates. While there are differences between African and Western thought, to claim that they are so distinct that any attempt to see points of convergence is wrong constitutes, in my view, a category mistake.

### Changing Perspectives on Eschatology

Mbiti's work on eschatology avoided dispensational eschatological views which promoted millennialism. Central to those discussions was emphasis on premillennialism, which advanced the view that Christ would come before the establishment of the thousand-year reign. Postmillennial views promoted the view that Christ would return after the thousand-year rule and amillennialism was the position that there would be no thousand-year

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29. Dismas A. Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, Bloomington, IN 1994, III.

30. Kwame Gyekye, "[Review of] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*", *Second Order: An African Journal of Philosophy* 4:1 (1975), 86–94.

31. Jesse N.K. Mugambi, *African Christian Theology: An Introduction*, Nairobi 1989, 143.

32. Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa*, Carlisle 1992, 306–307, 327–328.

33. Robert S. Heaney, *From Historical to Critical Post-Colonial Theology: The Contribution of John S. Mbiti and Jesse N.K. Mugambi*, Eugene, OR 2015, 63.

34. A. Scott Moreau, "A Critique of John Mbiti's Understanding of the African Concept of Time", *East Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 5:2 (1986), 40.

reign, but the world goes straight to the judgment at the end of time. Later studies of eschatology have shifted from a programmatic project emphasizing millennialism to highlight divine action that moves history forward to a fulfillment. Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* revolutionized eschatological thought in arguing that eschatology could no longer be relegated to teachings about the last day, but should become central to Christian proclamation because it is a "doctrine of Christian hope." Hope is grounded in Christ and should be stated in "contradiction to our present experience of suffering, evil, and death." Thus the church is called to live with hope for our world. Moltmann's shift in the eschatological analysis focussed on lived experience in anticipation of the work of the God of hope whose revelation constantly enacts the future and, in that way, creates history.<sup>35</sup>

Evangelical theologian Stanley J. Grenz emphasized a Trinitarian theology and talked of the eschatological orientation as an anticipation of the future that is being shaped and transformed by breakthroughs in science and technology.<sup>36</sup> Grenz also argued that such a view of eschatology makes the ecclesial community agents of reconciliation because all human beings bear the *imago Dei* and must not be treated as less than others but should be prioritized in the quest for social justice. Grenz's theology addresses an *oikumene*, God's household that still inhabits the earth, which is besieged by environmental challenges.<sup>37</sup> Speculations about the new heaven is replaced with an emphasis on the connectivity of God's people in the body of Christ, the church, where conformation to the image of Christ makes one part of the eschatological community.<sup>38</sup> The Christian community is moving towards fulfillment of the *imago Dei* and believers are invited to live in ways that expand the love of God.<sup>39</sup> Eschatology, then, is not an escape into a world where the streets are paved with gold.<sup>40</sup>

## Eschatology and the Question of the Religious Other

Reading Mbiti today one is struck by the fact that Akamba beliefs and conceptions of the future are inconsequential, especially since Mbiti

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35. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 16, 19.

36. Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, Nashville, TN 1994, 743.

37. Stanley J. Grenz, "A Theology for the Future", *American Baptist Quarterly* 4 (1985), 257–267.

38. Stanley J. Grenz, "The Community of God: A Vision of the Church in the Postmodern Age", *Crux* 28:2 (1992), 24–25; Stanley J. Grenz, "Jesus as the *imago Dei*: Image-of-God Christology and the Non-Linear Linearity of Theology", *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47 (2004), 623.

39. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 224.

40. Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century*, Downers Grove, IL 1993, 137–148.

remains one of the most eloquent champions of indigenous religions. His later critical studies of indigenous religions and their teachings about God tell a different story from his text on eschatology, where Mbiti ignored or dismissed perspectives of the religious other. Jakob Wirén discusses hope, otherness, and interreligious hospitality as central ideas of eschatology from a theology of religions. Wirén articulates a critical appreciation of otherness and hospitality to engage in “inter-hope dialogue.”<sup>41</sup> He returns to *Lumen gentium*, which indicated that others who desire God might attain salvation even if they do not know Christ.<sup>42</sup> Scholars therefore ought to articulate an eschatological vision that recognizes a religious other using language that makes room for a religious other who should not be assimilated into one’s own position.<sup>43</sup>

Wirén argues that feminist thought and postcolonial theory have unveiled the politics of eschatological discourse, creating space for a religious other who also carries the *imago Dei*. The illuminating perspectives of Moltmann, Joseph Ratzinger, Mujtaba Musavi Lari (1925–2013), Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928–2014), and Karl Rahner (1904–1984) all emphasize the special place Christians and Jews have in the divine economy and therefore lacks the inclusivity needed for a broad eschatological vision. Wirén then argues that linguistic hospitality invites theologians to exhibit eschatological openness devoid of totalizing the other.<sup>44</sup> No religious tradition has a complete understanding of the end time.<sup>45</sup> One should not Christianize the religion of the other with Christ who returns as judge.

### Eschatology as the Transgression of Limits

Eschatology then must be inclusive yet transgress traditional religious limits and the boundaries we have set. Fabien Eboussi Boulaga has argued that the eschatological principle examines “the form and content of what Jesus proclaims.”<sup>46</sup> Jesus frequently spoke about the *parousia*, indicating that it was near and urging listeners to watch for it. According to Boulaga, Jesus’ words was a judgment which introduced transformations that affect the behaviour of individuals and institutions. The final judgment of Christ is

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41. Wirén, *Hope and Otherness*, 1. Wirén begins with an excellent survey of some of the main positions on interreligious dialogue and theology of religions.

42. See *Lumen gentium: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, § 16.

43. Wirén, *Hope and Otherness*, 33–34.

44. Wirén, *Hope and Otherness*, 234, 241.

45. See for example Douglas J. Davies, *Death, Ritual, and Belief: The Rhetoric of Funerary Rites*, London 1997, 19; Werner G. Jeanrond, *Call and Response: The Challenge of Christian Life*, New York 1995, 50

46. Boulaga, *Christianity Without Fetishes*, 105.

an eruption of Christ in history that announces the end of the world as humanity has made it:

Human beings have erected their world by the opposition and struggle between man and woman, master and slave, rich and powerful, instructed and ignorant, saint and sinner. The proclamation and practice of the end unveil the provisional character of the hierarchies, institutions, and values, which sin – the overestimation or fear of oneself and of what *is* – transforms into ultimate, final realities.<sup>47</sup>

Eschatological activity is “deconstruction and deconditioning” that relativizes prevailing ideologies and existing institutions and their implicit interests. Eschatology blurs the differences between life and death, brings the transcendent close to us, and removes divisions, turning things upside down so that “prostitutes go before the ‘just’ into the kingdom.” Boulaga offers a deeper understanding of the love of God as mediated in Christ, who broke all social roles to create the eschatological community. This vision calls on the ecclesial community to live their eschatological expectation in social relations with others. The coming age must not be used to send ambassadors of Christ (missionaries) to different parts of the world to convert others to join the great meeting with Jesus: “At the bottom, the eschatological principle signifies that there are no more intermediaries. God is present right here, referring men and women to the divine mystery by referring them to their proper reality.” Promoting the common humanity that all people share is the best proclamation of the eschatological God. The children of God are called to the work of liberation in the name of the God who “dies now in the clash of civilizations, in the violence of history that has never declared the glory of God to everyone the way the heavens do, with their seasons and astral revolutions.” Boulaga includes all gods, arguing that “the divinities are among the elements that differentiate one group from another – where God, when all is said and done is the principle of exclusion and is transformed, in conflict or competition, into a principle of intolerance and elimination.”<sup>48</sup> This is an indictment of a false religiosity that promotes God and an eschatology that ignores present human and ecological conditions.

Why would one throw away the gods in a discourse of the eschaton? Boulaga argues: “Human destiny has been fixed once and for all, and the gods are either accomplices or impotent witnesses of this fact, this fatality.” The portrait of human destiny by Boulaga emphasizes a divine role in it and

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47. Boulaga, *Christianity Without Fetishes*, 105.

48. Boulaga, *Christianity Without Fetishes*, 106–107, 109.

Jesus calls people to a community that knows differences but practices no divisions and discriminations. Faith involves accepting the “creative autonomy of the human being as a gift, as real sharing in the Spirit who works in [...] the world and renews its face, a real sharing in the force of illumination that creates the shoreless universe.” The parenthood of God must be known from the premise that “the eschatological God is mediated by the humanity of human beings in act and exercise.” Boulaga invites all to “an original way of being-in-the-world, of being in society, of creating community.” These are not exclusive communities waiting to be whisked away “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.”<sup>49</sup> While such a community is always local, it is not exclusive, but should manifest an openness, “a self-implementing negation of its closing.” This task is possible because the conversion experience establishes the basis for that kind of society where the self is limited to the “true conditions of action in the world.”<sup>50</sup>

Therefore one must treat his or her neighbour as the manifestation of the “God-who-is End in the affairs of every day.” The reign of God is a new creation and humans should strive to deliver themselves from the flesh and the world in order to rediscover the original self. The eschatological community is one of brothers, sisters, and friends. God’s gratuity eschews all discriminations because eschatological life is an inversion of relationships and power that is deployed for unconditional service and love. Self-limitation of the community is its radical openness. While Jesus did not abandon his Jewish roots and resources, he also demonstrated that a thriving community in the eschatological sense is one that is open to others.<sup>51</sup> Conversion is conversion to service and calls for a reworking of the community from within to transform old relationships and turn them into the “emancipation of all destiny.”<sup>52</sup> Boulaga’s model of eschatology rejects all forms of discrimination, remains open to others, and is grounded in transformative service that ushers in the eschatological spirit. It is a model that avoids speculation on themes we do not fully understand, but grounds eschatology in everyday life-in-the-community.

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49. This is a line from the well-known Christian hymn “It Could Happen in a Moment.”

50. Boulaga, *Christianity Without Fetishes*, 108–111.

51. According to Boulaga, “the new community must surmount, in its own interior, the divisions and discrimination that are tearing Israel apart. It must base itself on some principle other than convergence of might. It must realize a society of brothers and sisters and friends, where authority is service without compensation.” Boulaga, *Christianity Without Fetishes*, 116.

52. Boulaga, *Christianity Without Fetishes*, III, 114, 116–117.

## Eschatology: From Prediction to Praxis

The focus on eschatology and otherness calls for a departure from the predictive nature of eschatology, which speculates on the time when Christ will return to take the church to be with him, to be followed by judgment, rewards, punishment, and the transformation into a new world, to an engagement in action that makes the coming of a new creation possible. In the famous eschatological discourse in Matt. 25:31–46, Jesus offered suggestions on how one could move from prediction to praxis. The discussion about what will take place when the Son of Man returns at the end time is preceded by two parables about the kingdom of God. In the first parable, ten virgins anticipating the return of the bridegroom are grouped into two: five of them were prepared and had oil for their lamps and were ready to meet the bridegroom if he comes at night, and the other five did not have oil and when the bridegroom arrived it was too late, because they could not get oil in time for the wedding party.

In the second parable, Jesus talks about a man who gave his servants some money to manage. The first two traded with the money and gained a hundred full, the third did not do anything, but more importantly kept the money and returned it to the master, saying he knew the master was a hard man. The master rewarded the other two, but took the money away from the one who failed to trade and gave it to the one who had ten talents. The text adds that the lazy servant is thrown out into the darkness, where he will weep and grind his teeth. The first parable is about preparedness and suggests that the followers of Jesus should be prepared for the return of Christ. The second takes the argument further, one should not only be prepared, but should be faithful in everything they have responsibility over. It is at the end of these two parables that Jesus discusses what will happen when he returns. Jesus announces that when he comes in glory, accompanied by his angels, he will sit on the throne and all nations will gather before him and he will judge the nations.

I will not get into the technical details of the text or the apocalyptic interpretations of it. I want to briefly highlight a praxis-oriented view of eschatology.<sup>53</sup> Matt. 25:31–46 has unresolvable questions as to who Jesus is addressing. Jesus pointed out that he would come; all nations of the world would gather and there would be a judgment after which some will enter into the reign of God and others would be excluded. There is no indication that they will be punished or rewarded based on whether they have believed in Jesus. They will be judged based on what they have done, not to Jesus, but to other people. Those who enter the reign of God with Christ do so

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53. David C. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, Cambridge 1996, 2.

because they gave food to the hungry and water to the thirsty, welcomed strangers, provided clothing to those in need, looked after the sick, and visited those who were in prison, but some did not do these things.

These kinds of services were key in the theology of the social gospel.<sup>54</sup> Ulrich Luz is correct in asserting that this text indicates that “the outcome of the judgment is dependent on love of those who suffer rather than on commitment to Jesus.”<sup>55</sup> The implications to me for an eschatology for Africa today is for the ecclesial community to adopt an eschatological orientation grounded in a praxis that makes the world a better place. This implies a praxis that goes beyond soup kitchens, and instead works to alleviate the conditions that make soup kitchens a necessity. Eschatology is an invitation to maintain an active intersubjective engagement with the other and exude the presence of God in daily life.

### **Eschatological Hope and the Challenge of Feeding the Hungry**

Jesus directly linked admission into the reign of God with providing food for those who are hungry. The challenge of feeding the hungry today is real, even when we live in one of the most prosperous times that humankind has known. In response to a world in need, African churches need to work toward an eschatological vision that takes seriously the severe food crisis the continent faces. The Cameroonian theologian Jean-Marc Éla (1936–2008) said many years ago that “the granary is empty.” He charged: “Our churches today expose us to the dangers of atheism each time we celebrate the Eucharist in areas where no one is working to create conditions that would allow hungry people to feed themselves.” Éla mapped both the colonial and postcolonial conditions which had promoted hunger even in a context when Africa was redefining evangelism and church growth and the poor were accepting the Word of God and working to alter the structures that conflict with the plan of God. It is in this context that Éla called for a “ministry of the granary,” because “today the question of food must again become the center of daily life—starting from an African culture that is based on granaries, and dynamics of the revelation as it is read in Genesis through Matthew.” Éla’s question “how can we speak of the Lord of life, knowing full well that famine is the messenger of death?” remains valid today. When Éla tried to speak the Word of God, an elderly man interrupted him and said, “once upon a time God talked to people, but now he has fallen silent, and he has left us prey to hunger, sickness, and death.”<sup>56</sup>

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54. Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, New York 1917.

55. Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, Cambridge 1995, 129.

56. Jean-Marc Éla, *My Faith as an African*, Maryknoll, NY 1988, 87–88, 92–94.

What does *diakonia* look like in such a context? Since Éla published his book, the challenges have grown, and something must be done to feed the hungry across the continent who continue to go hungry because of violence, greed, the crisis of environmental degradation, and political and economic neglect from the political elites. African theologians and scholars of religion have addressed environmental issues and Christian earth keeping ministries for a long time.<sup>57</sup> Ernst M. Conradie has argued that in the Southern African region, scholars have addressed environmental concerns in four ways. First, some scholars have called for Christians to practice stewardship and conserve natural resources. To do this, scholars have called for a disciplined and balanced approach to development in all areas, and they encourage an approach to development that seriously considers wildlife and all-natural species and promotes biodiversity to curb environmental destruction. Conradie points to a history of environmental degradation during apartheid and uncontrolled urban development.<sup>58</sup> This approach has reminded human beings of the important role they can play as stewards of creation, because biblical teaching supports a responsible use and management of the created order.<sup>59</sup>

The second approach to restoring the environment calls on Africans to restore ancestral land which has been handed down to this generation as a sacred trust. The idea of restoration speaks to problems caused by deforestation, desertification, and the erosion of soil and water resources through human activities that have not included a sustainable focus to maintain the fragile ecosystem. The challenge given to the Christian community here is to work hard to restore and manage the ecosystem that our generation has received as a gift from ancestors to use and keep for future generations. This perspective emphasizes the sacredness of the environment, a perspective that is supported by African traditional religious beliefs and symbolic

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57. Ernst M. Conradie, "Approaches to Religion and the Environment in Africa", in Elias Kifon Bongmba (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Christianity in Africa*, London 2016, 438–454. See also Ernst M. Conradie, "Christianity and the Environment in (South) Africa: Four Dominant Approaches", in Len Hansen (ed.), *Christian in Public: Aims, Methodologies, and Issues in Public Theology*, Stellenbosch 2007, 227–250. I am indebted to Conradie for most of the literature cited in this section.

58. Conradie, "Approaches to Religion", 439. See also Jacklyn Cock & Eddie Koch (eds), *Going Green: People, Politics and the Environment in South Africa*, Oxford 1991; Mamphela Ramphele & Chris McDowell (eds), *Restoring the Land: Environment and Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, London 1991.

59. For perspectives on sustainable development, see David N. Field, "The Ethics of Sustainable Development", in Louise Kretzschmar & Len Hulley (eds), *Questions about Life and Morality: Christian Ethics in South Africa Today*, Pretoria 1998, 219–229; David N. Field, "Snakes in an African Eden: Towards a Theological Ethic for Ecotourism and Conservation", *Scriptura* 69 (1999), 163–180; David N. Field, "Stewards of Shalom: Toward a Trinitarian Ecological Ethic", *Quarterly Review* 22 (2002), 383–396.

worldviews.<sup>60</sup> The goal for many who take this approach is to restore balance in the ecosystem, which must be used conservatively and with concern for all life forms, since all life is sacred and the ecosystem itself is filled with the presence of God.<sup>61</sup>

Third, the call for sustainable development is no longer a liberal idea that is aimed at stalling economic development. It is an invitation and a mandate to act in ways that will build the ecosystem and save it from the pillaging and destruction that has put every inhabitant of this planet at risk. Sustainable development is no longer only a buzzword but an eschatological vision that reminds humans that we are responsible for the management of the ecosystem. The African church cannot be neutral in this conversation because of the realities of desertification, ecological decline, and an increasing shortage of food due to climate change.<sup>62</sup>

The final approach calls for religious communities to work for environmental justice. Conradie argues promoting environmental justice calls on faith communities and nations to take actions that would improve the working conditions in factories and mines: eliminate toxic waste, provide safe drinking water, promote basic hygiene, equip hospitals with medicines and supplies that will treat diseases, maintain excellent sanitation in villages, towns, and cities, work to stop deforestation, and protect the most vulnerable citizens by addressing the imbalance of neoliberal economic policies.<sup>63</sup>

Speaking about earth care in his first encyclical, *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis invited everyone, regardless of creed, class, or culture, with these words:

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60. Yaw Adu-Gyamfi, "Indigenous Beliefs and Practices in Ecosystem Conservation: Response of the Church", *Scriptura* 107 (2011), 145–155; Robert Owusu Agyarko, "Inculturation Theologies – Is the God Who Saved Us the Same as the One Who Created Us?", in Ernst M. Conradie (ed.), *Creation and Salvation: 2. A Companion on Recent Theological Movements*, Berlin 2012, 316–321; Tsehai Berhane-Selassie, "Ecology and Ethiopian Orthodox Theology", in David G. Hallman (ed.), *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*, Geneva 1994, 155–173; Leonidas Kalugila, "Old Testament Insights and the Kagera Region, Tanzania", in Jesse N.K. Mugambi & Mika Vähäkangas (eds), *Christian Theology and Environmental Responsibility*, Nairobi 2001, 82–95; Marthinus L. Daneel, *African Earthkeepers: 2. Environmental Mission and Liberation in Christian Perspective*, Pretoria 1999; Marthinus L. Daneel, "Earthkeeping Churches at the African Grass Roots", in Dieter T. Hessel & Rosemary Radford Ruether (eds), *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, Cambridge, MA 2000, 531–552; Steve De Gruchy, "Some Preliminary Theological Reflections on the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)", *Bulletin for Contextual Theology in Africa* 8:2–3 (2002), 64–68.

61. Eugene Wangiri, "Urumve Spirituality and the Environment", in Mary N. Getui & Emmanuel Obeng (eds), *Theology of Reconstruction: Exploratory Essays*, Nairobi 1999, 71–89.

62. Eunice Kamaara, "Justice for Sustainable Development: An African Christian Theological Perspective on the Global Environment", *Bulletin for Contextual Theology in Africa* 8:2–3 (2002), 54–58; J.J. Kritzing, "The Ecological Crisis: Mission, Development and Ecology", *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Missiology* 19 (1991), 4–19.

63. Conradie, "Approaches to Religion", 443.

“Let us pray that everyone can receive its message and grow in responsibility toward the common home that God has entrusted to us.”<sup>64</sup> *Laudato si’* unequivocally focusses on the environment and builds on and develops Francis’ concern about climate change and environmental degradation. Before *Laudato si’*, Francis called for an ecological conversion to make ourselves those who will protect the created order of God. On 21 May 2014, he said: “Creation is not a property, which we can rule over at will; or, even less, is the property of only a few: Creation is a gift, it is a wonderful gift that God has given us, so we can care for it, and we use it for the benefit of all, always with great respect and gratitude.”<sup>65</sup> Christians are called to the vocation of protection: protecting our lives, each other, and this earth, which is home to all. Francis also pleaded:

Please, I would like to ask all those who have positions of responsibility in economic, political and social life, and all men and women of goodwill: let us be “protectors” of creation, protectors of God’s plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and the environment. Let us not allow omens of destruction and death to accompany the advance of this world! But to be protectors, we also have to keep watch over ourselves! Let us not forget that hatred and envy and pride defile our lives!<sup>66</sup>

*Laudato si’* is a bold statement which defines where we are with what Francis calls our common home.<sup>67</sup>

Francis articulates the gospel of creation, grounds the current ecological crisis in human causes, deepens our global perspective of the ecological crisis with the term “integral ecology” to present an encompassing view of ecology that includes all inhabitants of the common home we share, suggests actions that can be taken, and offers perspectives on ecological education and

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64. Pope Francis, “Angelus”, 14 June 2015, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2015/documents/papa-francesco\\_angelus\\_20150614.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2015/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20150614.html), accessed 2018-11-01. *Laudato si’* was actually the second encyclical issued during his papacy, the first one, *Lumen Fidei*, was drafted by Benedict XVI.

65. “Francis: Caring for the Earth a Thank-You Note to God”, *National Catholic Reporter*, 22 May 2014, <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/francis-caring-earth-thank-you-note-god>, accessed 2018-11-01.

66. Pope Francis, “Homily”, 19 March 2013, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130319\\_omelia-inizio-pontificato.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130319_omelia-inizio-pontificato.html), accessed 2018-11-01.

67. I have drawn some of these comments from online discussions of the encyclical. See for example Jimmy Akin, “Pope Francis’s Environmental Encyclical: 13 Things to Know and Share”, *Catholic Answers*, 18 June 2015, <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/pope-franciss-environmental-encyclical-13-things-to-know-and-share>, accessed 2018-11-01.

spirituality. The 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference made clear what the stakes are, especially for those who live in the so-called Global South, who, while calling on global justice in the question of environmental destruction, must not wait, but assume their responsibility.

Restoration of the created order must address the needs of the many in Africa who according to the Gospel of Matthew must be fed. The ecclesial community needs to pay close attention to developments in science and see science not as the opposite side of faith, but as a partner in developing the resources we need to sustain our habitat, livelihood, and work in restoring creation. Moltmann has argued that the cosmic dimension of eschatology reminds us of our responsibility in re-establishing order. A Christological and cosmic approach to eschatology calls for an openness to otherness in several dimensions. First, I think it requires a multidisciplinary approach to the understanding of our future orientation. In *Science and Wisdom*, Moltmann invites scholars to recognize the interrelationship that exists between the disciplines and to discontinue the hard distinctions that we have created between the humanities and the sciences. A holistic theology ought to inquire about “the future of the whole – its salvation or its doom.” As human beings, we are not against nature as an object which we must seek to understand, although we indeed must use all resources to understand, appreciate, and protect nature.<sup>68</sup> Therefore we are invited to continue searching for knowledge from all disciplines to improve not only our understanding of nature but increase our wisdom about how to respect nature and preserve it.

The destruction of nature and the environment is a critical eschatological concern because in the end, we must ask if we are partners in this project. According to Moltmann, “redemption is nothing but the restitution of the original, godly creation. [...] If we see redemption this way [...] we have a protological understanding of eschatology.”<sup>69</sup> Therefore an eschatological posture invites responsibility for the created order. We live at a time when the question of what is happening to our planet is the subject of much debate, and we have a leader of the United States who does not believe in climate change and the environmental challenges we face. Religious communities cannot afford the luxury of doubting that we have done damage to the ecosystem and cannot simply continue the destruction and expect some dramatic rescue. That is not the message of the eschatological discourse in Matthew.

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68. Jürgen Moltmann, *Science and Wisdom*, Minneapolis, MN 2003, 6, 15.

69. Moltmann, *Science and Wisdom*, 34.

Regarding food production, I have argued that African faith communities must continue to lend their voices of support to scientific developments that enable a new type of crops, which can do well under challenging climatic conditions. Faith communities must increasingly pay attention to new developments in biotechnology that could open the doors to new techniques of production and high yielding seeds that could bolster food production to ensure food security in the African context. The debate has raged for a while now about technological developments that have given us genetically modified organism (GMO) seeds. Like many Africans, I know that we have to come up with different ways in which we could multiply five loaves of bread and two fish to feed the thousands, in addition to fasting and praying. If we are going to meet our eschatological quarter in feeding the hungry, we need a serious intervention that will use all the tools that science can offer to make sure that with limited land and space, we can still meet our food needs. It is not a lack of faith to say that we cannot merely pray our way through this. We must be open to new technologies that can help us contain environmental degradation, but also help us develop safe crops that we must grow to feed the inhabitants of our common home.

This is an old argument, but I bring it here in light of the eschatological imperative to establish intersubjective and sharing relationships with our neighbours. It would be wrong to imply that churches are not doing something about hunger in our world. One of the marks of the Christian tradition in the twentieth century has been relief work around the world. Some of the major organizations that have been instrumental in addressing poverty include Christian services like Bread for the World, World Vision, and Heifer International. These organizations have assisted people in low-income countries and worked side by side with people in different communities around the world to combat the scourge of hunger by making sure that no child goes hungry. Studies by Richard S. Maposa indicate that the United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe promoted agriculture as an essential part of its outreach in the country.<sup>70</sup>

Since Africans embraced the green revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, the world has seen a population explosion and an environmental crisis that today calls for more creative ways of fulfilling the scriptural mandate to feed the hungry. The international community has debated GMO for over three decades and in 2001 the United Nations Development Programme lent its support to GMO, since it would reduce the malnutrition that affects millions of people.<sup>71</sup> This report did not shy away from the controversies and

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70. Richard S. Maposa, "The African Church and Development", in Elias Kifon Bongmba (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Christianity in Africa*, London 2016, 424–437.

71. *Human Development Report 2001: Making New Technologies Work for Human*

concerns about the toxicity of these products and the harm they can cause the environment. Recently, the multinational corporation Monsanto was hit with a hefty fine because a worker who used their product developed cancer. One cannot dismiss these concerns. They should and must be taken seriously. Like the medicines we depend on, we must continue to support critical research that would improve these products, which hold so much promise in alleviating the food shortage we face.

The influential publication *Pambazuka* has raised severe concerns about the advocacy of GMO, arguing that it is too early for international organizations to be championing a new dawn and proposing a new quick fix for the African nations. *Pambazuka's* warning is clear and should also be placed on the table:

Rather than proposing techno-fixes to problems of agricultural development in Africa, donors could better assist in the development of rural infrastructures such as roads and water supplies, and education to empower the younger generation in the study of useful science. African farmers, along with peasants around the world, are seeking respect for their right to decide on what to plant and how to plant it, as well as what to eat and how.<sup>72</sup>

This suggestion should be taken seriously, but I think this should not stop an investigation into a different variety of seeds that could give high yielding food products or survive under challenging climates. Opposition to Monsanto continues in Africa and should be an invitation to critical research that involves African universities.<sup>73</sup> Other voices in the debate have pointed out that GMOs are safe, especially the Water Efficient Maize that has received funding from agencies and foundations with a long track record in Africa, such as The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Howard G. Buffet Foundation, and the United States Agency for International Development.<sup>74</sup>

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*Development*, New York 2001, 48.

72. Nnimmo Bassey, "Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa – A Blunt Philanthropic Arrow", *Pambazuka News*, 27 September 2007, <https://www.pambazuka.org/governance/alliance-green-revolution-africa-%E2%80%93-blunt-philanthropic-arrow>, accessed 2018-11-01.

73. Lorraine Chow, "5 Million Nigerians Oppose Monsanto's Plans to Introduce GMO Cotton and Corn", *EcoWatch*, 29 March 2016, <https://www.ecowatch.com/5-million-nigerians-oppose-monsantos-plans-to-introduce-gmo-cotton-and-1882200020.html>, accessed 2018-11-01. I thank my colleague at *Religious Studies Review*, Maya Rein, for calling my attention to this account.

74. My remarks here are taken from a keynote lecture I delivered at the University of Zambia and Justo Mwale University in 2016.

An eschatological vision that contributes to food sustainability can lend support to new ways of growing food, and we must all work with the technology to make sure that what is developed does not destroy the ecosystem and kill us. Current estimates put the population of the world in 2025 at over 8,5 billion with more than 80 percent of the people living in the Global South. In anticipation of the eschaton, Christians today, like those in the early church, cannot quarrel about who is getting service but must be the deacons who will use technology to restore the environment and increase productivity to promote an intersubjective engagement that prioritizes justice and security for all. We can reduce conflicts in our age and stop seeing them as signs of the end. The real sign to expect is the cultivation of an eschatological realism that recognizes the neighbour who needs food and shelter and takes care of him. That is how we do our part in making all things new. ▲

#### SUMMARY

In this article, I have looked at eschatology from an African perspective, as a way of continuing the dialogue which was started by John S. Mbiti. Mbiti's concern was to correct the miseducation he observed in the Akamba community when the missionaries planted an eschatological vision which ignored local traditions and focussed on heaven and hell and ignored liturgical practices and local perspectives on death and dying. I have argued that while some of the concepts of time and history which Mbiti articulated in his study might have overstated the reality of an African understanding of time and futurity, Mbiti also pointed out that the Christian tradition spent much time on other aspects of eschatology that did not make sense to the locals. While Mbiti's 1971 thesis might have been exclusionary because of its investment in the Christian tradition, Mbiti also was one of the most articulate defenders of African indigenous religious traditions and cultures. I have, moreover, raised questions about aspects of contemporary eschatology, arguing that at the core of the anticipation of a new order, the ecclesial community in Africa needs to shift its emphasis from speculations about the nature of heaven and who is going there to living in a manner that already expects eschatological fulfillment.