

## SOCIAL INJUSTICE AND THE MOURNING OF THE EARTH: ECOLOGICAL READING OF PROPHETIC TEXTS

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**Abstract:** *In the encyclical letter Laudato Si, Pope Francis proposed an integral ecology, able to listen to the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth. This intuition is present in the ancient prophetic books of Israel where “the earth mourns” (Isa. 24:4) for the social injustice, for human inability to build a fraternal relationship. The article explores how the ecological reading of prophetic texts can become educational tools to guide Christian communities living in the Ghanaian context towards an ‘ecological conversion.’*

**Key Words:** Isa. 5:8-10; Isa. 24:1-7; Land grabbing; Ghana Ecological Crisis; Mic. 2:1-2.

### Introduction

Africa is a biblical continent. The term כְּנָעַן (*kūš*) occurs no less than 28 times in the Tanak:<sup>1</sup> Abraham (Gen. 12:10), Jacob and his family (46:6-7) found refuge on our continent; soldiers of African descent served King David (2 Sam. 18:21-32); the Queen of Sheba brought Solomon a gift of the fragrances and tastes of Africa (1 Kings 1-13), while in the psalms, African peoples recognise the lordship of YHWH (Ps. 67:32; 87:24). Perhaps because of these historical roots, and the great cultural affinity, the Old Testament is much loved in Africa. For example, in Ghana, several ethnic groups consider themselves as descendants of the lost tribe of Israel,<sup>2</sup> while restaurants and political parties, kiosks and *tro-tros* habitually use Old Testament verses for advertising purposes and as amulets.

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<sup>1</sup> “The meaning of the word is not clear. It is used for the people and land of the southern-Nile valley or Upper Egypt, extending from Syene (Ezek. 29:10) *indefinitely* to the South. In the Hebrew Scripture the word *Kūš* has been used in a dual sense: as a geographical location (cf. Isa. 5:14; 11:11; 18:4; Ezek. 29:10; Zeph. 3:10; Job 28:19; etc.) or as a collective name for people with African descend (*Cushites* – 2 Sam. 18:21; 20:4; Jer. 38:6; 46:9; etc.). It is interesting but also significant to note how the uncertainty concerning the meaning of the term, reflects in the different English versions.” N. Gatti and G. Ossom-Batsa, *Journeying with the Old Testament* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011), 164-165.

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. P. Lungen, *The lost Jews of Ghana*, *CJNEWS*, October 24, 2017 (<https://www.cjnews.com/living-jewish/lost-jews-ghana>); D. Lis, “In My Father’s House: Two Tales of Jewish Origin among the Ga-Adagme of Accra in 2015,” *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 5 (2016), 91-112.

Against this cultural backdrop, my contribution examines how love for the Old Testament can be turned into an educational tool to break the silence and address the root causes of the environmental disaster afflicting the country. We will explore prophetic texts where “the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth” are intertwined (LS, 49)<sup>3</sup> in the condemnation of social injustice (Isa. 24:4).<sup>4</sup>

Following the dialogical approach, the article is structured in three parts: exegesis of reality; exegesis of the text; and text-reality dialogue.<sup>5</sup> After offering an overview of the ecological crisis affecting Ghana, we listen to some prophetic texts with a focus on the book of Isaiah. From the dialogue between the Ghanaian reality and the text, a call to action is finally proposed for the Christian communities living in the Ghanaian context.

### **Exegesis of Reality: The Environmental Crisis in Ghana**

There is no doubt that the climate and environmental crisis have a devastating impact on Ghana, as the following warning from the Ghanaian Catholic Bishops' Conference makes clear:

If we think that at the turn of the century Ghana possessed about 90,000 hectares of forest and that this has been reduced to about 20,000 hectares, then we must realise that we are heading headlong towards environmental disaster. There is no doubt that eco-logical plunder is our number one problem, much more alarming than political or economic instability. With the destruction of the environment, our very survival is threatened.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Francesco, *Laudato Si. Lettera enciclica sulla cura della casa comune* (Città del Vaticano: LEV, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> R. Radford Ruether, “Ecology and Theology: Ecojustice at the Center of the Church’s Mission,” *Interpretation* 65, no. 4 (2011): 354-363; T. Hiebert, “Reclaiming the World: Biblical Resources for the Ecological Crisis,” *Interpretation* 65, no. 4 (2011): 341-352.

<sup>5</sup> G. Ossom-Batsa, “African Interpretation of the Bible in Communicative Perspective,” *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 2 (2007): 91-104; Nicoletta Gatti, “Toward a ‘Dialogic’ Hermeneutics. Reading Gen 4.1-16 with Akan Eyes,” *Horizon of Biblical Theology* 39, no. 1 (2017): 46-67.

<sup>6</sup> GCBC, *Ghana Bishops Speak: A Collection of Communiqués, Memoranda and Pastoral Letters of the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference* (Accra: NCS, 2006), II: 223. Cfr. N. Gatti, “From Mastering to Serving: Bible and Environment,” *Urbaniana University Journal* 71, no. 2 (2018): 155-184.

Desertification and land erosion; ‘land grabbing’<sup>7</sup> mining exploitation; pollution; lack of sanitation and effective waste collection and disposal systems; unsustainable fishing and farming... are transforming the country into a dumping ground.<sup>8</sup> Year after year, environmental disasters hit Ghana more and more severely and frequently causing death and destruction. The degradation of the environment is one of the causes of growing poverty and the massive emigration of young people.<sup>9</sup> The costs to the health and productive system are well documented.<sup>10</sup>

The situation is dramatic and requires everyone's commitment to an ecological conversion. In a country where 95.9% call themselves ‘religious’ and different forms of Christianity are practised by more than 71.2% of the population,<sup>11</sup> it is fair to ask what the contribution of the countless churches is.

Unfortunately, we are witnessing a contradiction: while the Historic Mission and some Classical Pentecostal Churches seek to integrate ‘ecological conversion’ into their pastoral programmes, many Charismatic and Prophetic churches interpret the Bible as justification for

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<sup>7</sup> R. Hall, “Land Grabbing in Africa and the New Politics of Food Future, in Future Agriculture Consortium,” 2011 (<https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/41291123/land-grabbing-in-africa-and-the-new-politics-of-food-future->).

<sup>8</sup> Martin Oteng-Ababio, Austin Ablo and Brad Wong, “Cost-Benefit Analysis of Urbanisation challenges in Accra, Ghana: Ghana Priorities,” May 5, 2020 (Copenhagen: Copenhagen Consensus Center), 26-32; Blacksmith Institute, “Agbogbloshie, Ghana: The World’s Worst Polluted Places in 2013,” *Report* 2013 ([http://worstpolluted.org/projects\\_reports/display/107](http://worstpolluted.org/projects_reports/display/107)); E. Smith-Asante, “Ghana World’s 7th Dirtiest Country,” *Graphic Online*, July 22, 2015 (<https://www.graphic.com.gh/features/features/ghana-world-s-7th-dirtiest-country.html>).

<sup>9</sup> J. Paone and J.W. Richmond, “The Migration, Environment and Climate Change Nexus in Ghana,” *Migration, Environment and Climate Change: Policy Brief Series* 3 (2017): 1-11.

<sup>10</sup> Cfr. World Health Organization, *World Health Statistic 2022: Monitoring health for the SDGs Sustainable Development Goal* (Geneve: WHO, 2022); [ps://www.who.int/news/item/20-05-2022-world-health-statistics-2022](https://www.who.int/news/item/20-05-2022-world-health-statistics-2022); World Bank, *Ghana Country Environmental Analysis* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2020); <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33726>. Environmental Protection Agency, Ghana, “Climate Change Data Hub” (<http://climatedatahub.com.gh>).

<sup>11</sup> Data from the 2021 Population & Housing Census show that 95.9% of the population define themselves as ‘religious.’ Only 4.1% are classified as ‘unaffiliated,’ which can mean agnostic, atheist, or “nothing in particular.” Christianity represents the largest religions (71.2%), followed by Islam (17.6%), and African Traditional Religions (6.2%). Among Christians 31.6% are Pentecostal/Charismatics; 17.4% belongs to Protestant churches; 12.3% to other churches (AIC, Prophetic Churches, etc.) and 10% to the Roman Catholic Church. Ghana Statistical Service, *2021 Population & Housing Census: General Report – Volume 3C: Background Characteristics* (Accra: GSS, 2022), 72.

the right to indiscriminate exploitation of resources and ‘domination’ over creation. The dominant theology is the ‘prosperity gospel,’ which educates in the worship of ‘mammon’ (cf. Luke 16:9.11.13) by making wealth the test of faith.<sup>12</sup>

A step in the right direction is the recent press release signed not only by the Christian Council of Ghana and the Ghana Catholic Bishop Conference but also by the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council and the National Association of Charismatic and Christian Churches. With unusually strong words, the religious leaders state that “For many years now, our Sovereign Country Ghana has been witnessing, under our very naked eyes, the saddest ‘environmental coup d’état’ ever unleashed upon our nation, heralding a programmed and complete ‘ecological disaster’ or destruction.” The message analysed the dramatic consequences of ‘galamsey’ activities, denounced the complicity of political and traditional leadership and offered some action points. Unfortunately, except “calling for a week of fasting and praying” and asking “religious leader to wear a red armband to show our concern for the destruction of our environment” nothing is said about the religious bodies’ responsibility; e.g. communities’ formation and ecological conversion towards more green and eco-sustainable communities.

This confusing and complex situation poses a hermeneutical challenge: what is the message of the Bible regarding the relationship between humanity and nature? Can the Bible become an educational tool to help our communities listen to the cry of the earth?

### **Exegesis of the Text**

The entry of the Bible into the environmental debate can be fixed in 1967, the year of publication of a famous article by White Jr.<sup>13</sup> Today, different interpretative approaches address the problem of the ecological reading of biblical texts.<sup>14</sup> This contribution follows in the

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Mary V. Wrenz, “Selling Salvation, Selling Success: Neoliberalism and US Prosperity Gospel,” *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 45, no. 2 (2021): 295-311; A. Heuser (ed.), *Pasture of Plenty: Tracing Religio-Scapes of Prosperity Gospel in Africa and Beyond* (Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity, 161; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015), 15-24.

<sup>13</sup> L. White Jr., “The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-1207.

<sup>14</sup> For an overview of the different hermeneutic approaches, cf. N. Gatti, “Setting the Agenda for an Inclusive Development: Biblical Texts for Ecological Crisis,” in *Religion and Sustainable Development: Ghanaian Perspectives*, ed. G. Ossom-Batsa, N. Gatti and R.D. Ammah (Città del Vaticano: Urbaniana University Press, 2018), 145-160.

footsteps of those who, by harmonising exegesis and commitment to the environment, wish to rediscover the ecological wisdom present in the biblical texts.<sup>15</sup>

*Land and Social Injustice (Isa. 5:8-10)*

The theme of the earth is central to the Tanak.<sup>16</sup> The entry into the land represents the completion of the Exodus and marks the transition from slavery to freedom. Scrolling through the biblical pages, a kind of icon of the ideal society emerges; a society of small farmers, responsible for the land received as a gift from God (Zech. 3:10).<sup>17</sup> A key concept is the vision of the Land as belonging to God and as a free gift of God to Israel. For example, in the theological vision of the book of Joshua, the ‘conquest’ of the promised land is YHWH’s deed; furthermore, it is assigned by lot (לִרְיָא; *gôrāl*) to each family (Josh. 14–16; Num. 26:55–56), so that everyone can live from their work, in dignity and freedom.

This conception is based on an archaic norm: land ownership is un-touchable.<sup>18</sup> The purpose of this sapiential principle was the maintenance of the *status quo*, an essential vector of peace among citizens, interdicting a priori all forms of jealousy and ‘seizing,’ avoiding social tensions and infighting. The eventual impoverishment or enrichment of a family was not to alter the distribution of possessions and consequently, the social balance.<sup>19</sup>

Lev. 25:23 sanctions the inalienability of land ownership categorically: the ‘property’ of the land cannot be transferred in perpetuity because as the possession of YHWH, it cannot be regarded as any

<sup>15</sup> B.W. Anderson, “‘Subdue the Earth:’ What Does it Mean?,” *Bible Review* 4 (1992): 10; R. Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovery the Community of Creation* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2010), 7. D.G. Horrel, C. Hunt and C. Southgate, “Appeals to the Bible in Ecotheology and Environmental Ethics: A Typology of Hermeneutical Stances,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 21, no. 2 (2008): 219–238.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. J. Barton, “Reading the Prophets from an Environmental Perspective,” in *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*, ed. D.G. Horrell, C. Hunt, C. Southgate and F. Stavrakopoulou (London: T&T Clark International, 2010), 46–55.

<sup>17</sup> J.N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, 1–39* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 158.

<sup>18</sup> D.N. Premnath, “Latifundialization and Isaiah 5.8–10,” in *Social-Scientific Old Testament Criticism: A Sheffield Reader*, ed. D.J. Chalcraft (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 301–313; M.J.M. Coomber, “Caught in the Crossfire? Economic Injustice and Prophetic Motivation in Eight-century Judah,” *Biblical Interpretation* 19, no. 4–5 (2011): 396–432.

<sup>19</sup> P. Bovati, *Giustizia e ingiustizia nell’Antico Testamento* (Roma: PIB, 1996), II: 222–223.

other property.<sup>20</sup> The ultimate intentionality of the law is to prevent structural conditions of poverty to arise in Israel.<sup>21</sup> The social organisation of God's people must reflect the original equality; the law protects it since only the stable and inalienable possession of the land allows all to live in dignity as brothers and sisters.<sup>22</sup>

On this legal basis, the prophets condemn landlordism as an act of injustice towards God and neighbour:

Woe for those who plot evil, who lie in bed planning mischief! No sooner is it dawn than they do it since they have the power to do so. Seizing the fields that they covet, they take over houses as well, owner and house they seize alike, the man himself as well as his inheritance (Mic. 2:1-2).<sup>23</sup>

The prophetic indictment exposes those who take advantage of their brothers' needs by appropriating ancestral land, covering the 'theft' with a mask of legality. This is not just an 'ethical' sin, but a theological one: the rich who expropriate the poor perform an anti-exodus, opposing YHWH's project of liberation. By reducing their brother to the status of stranger and slave, they nullify, in fact, the constitutive event of the exodus.

The prophet Isaiah vehemently condemns this hidden injustice:

Woe to those who add house to house and join field to field until there is nowhere left and they are the sole inhabitants of the country. Yahweh Sabaoth has sworn this in my hearing, "Many houses will be brought to ruin, great and fine ones left untenanted; for ten acres

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<sup>20</sup> Whelan employs the syntagm "non-proprietary possession", coined by J. Lockwood O'Donovan, "Christian Platonism and Non-Proprietary Community," in *Bonds of Imperfection: Christian Politics, Past and Present*, ed. Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 73-96; M.P. Whelan, "Jesus is the Jubilee: A Theological Reflection on the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace's Toward a Better Distribution of Land," *Journal of Moral Theology* 6, no. 2 (2017), 214.

<sup>21</sup> J.I. Alfaro, "The Land-Stewardship," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 8 (1978): 51-61; B.N. Conradie, *Christianity and Ecological Theology: Resource for Further Research* (Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2006), 69-83.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. J.D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* (Word Biblical Commentary, 24; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 60.

<sup>23</sup> For a comprehensive description of the Old Testament prophets towards latifundism, see the interesting *excursus* in J.L. Sicre, *Con los pobre de la tierra: La justicia social en los profetas de Israel* (Madrid: Ediciones Cristianidad, 1984), 262-270.

of vineyard will yield only one barrel, and ten bushels of seed will yield only one bushel” (Isa. 5:8-10).

The oracle structured in two parts, the accusation (v. 8) and the condemnation (vv. 9-10), is addressed to those who with skilful economic manoeuvres take possession of neighbouring land, even seizing houses built on neighbours’ property. An expansion could be considered a normal economic operation: profit demands the investment of resources to generate a greater profit, creating an unlimited chain of acquisitions and wealth.<sup>24</sup> The prophet Isaiah, however, subjects the profit-expansion connection to criticism, revealing its hidden root: the lust for possession condemned in the Decalogue (cf. Deut. 5:21).

The extreme gravity of this perverse mechanism is manifested in its consequences: “...until there is no more room, and so you are left alone to inhabit the land” (v. 8). The acquisition of fields and houses entails the eviction of the original owners with the consequent deprivation of the means of production. Moreover, in a socio-economic context in which the ownership of fields also determines civic status, the evicted become non-residents, emigrants, and refugees, subjected to economic and legal precariousness.<sup>25</sup> Those dispossessed and deprived of resources are condemned to the instability of casual labour, to living on alms and even to slavery (cf. 2 Kings 4:1).<sup>26</sup>

The sanction announced by the prophet (vv. 9-10) is the vanishing of income. To the intemperate craving for possession, YHWH responds with the failure of the harvest: wine and grain (v. 10). Some authors believe that these products, typical of Palestine, were exported in exchange for luxury goods and weapons, depriving those who produced them, peasants, farmhands, and slaves, of the means of subsistence.<sup>27</sup> The tragic paradox is described in Job 24:10-11: “They go about naked, lacking clothes, and starving while they carry the sheaves. Two little walls, their shelter at high noon; parched with thirst, they have to tread the winepress.”

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. J. Purdy, *The Meaning of Property: Freedom, Community, and the Legal Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 5, 16.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Sicre, *Con los pobre*, 219.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. C.J.H. Wright, “God or Mammon: Biblical Perspectives on Economies in Conflict,” *Mission Studies* 12, no. 1 (1995): 151-152; Sicre, *Con los pobre*, 224.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Premnath, *Latifundialization*, 312.

The project of the landowner, unlimited profit, will not only fail but will lead to the destruction of resources. When the laws of economics do not respect life, they also prove ineffective from an economic point of view. In contemporary terms, non-inclusive and unsustainable development inevitably leads to the destruction of the resources, generating violence, poverty, and death.<sup>28</sup>

In conclusion, it is clear that for Israel, the accumulation of land, joining “house to house” and “field to field” (Isa. 5:8), is a crime against the ‘other;’ perhaps this is why in Leviticus the discussion of ownership is followed by prohibitions concerning theft and deception in interpersonal relationships (cf. Lev. 19:11). The misappropriation of land is also problematic because it contradicts God’s ‘dominion’ over creation, and Israel’s calling to serve the divine plan of an inclusive and fraternal world.

#### *The Mourning of the Land (Isa. 24:1-7)*

The breaking of the covenant with God through the oppression of the brother produces a return to the chaotic nothingness of the origins:

See how Yahweh lays the earth waste, makes it a desert, buckles its surface, scatters its inhabitants, priest and people alike, master and slave, mistress and maid, seller and buyer, lender and borrower, creditor and debtor. Ravaged, ravaged the earth will be, despoiled, despoiled, for Yahweh has uttered this word. *The earth is mourning, pining away*, the pick of earth’s people are withering away. The earth is defiled by the feet of its inhabitants, for they have transgressed the laws, violated the decree, broken the everlasting covenant. That is why the curse has consumed the earth and its inhabitants pay the penalty, that is why the inhabitants of the earth have been burnt up and few people are left (Isa. 24:1-7).

With a chain of adjectives – empty, deserted, forsaken, desolate, profaned – the prophet describes “the mourning of the earth,” her state of prostration. Created by God as a fertile mother, the earth is now reduced to a desert by rampant injustice.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, p. 159.

<sup>29</sup> N.J. Charles, “A Prophetic (Fore)Word: “A Curse is Devouring Earth (Isaiah 24.6),” in *The Earth Story on the Psalms and Prophets*, ed. N.C. Habel (Sheffield – Cleveland: Sheffield Academic Press – The Pilgrim Press, 2001), 123-128.



The same concept is repeated by other prophets. Jeremiah employed the terminology of Gen. 1:2 (cf. Jer. 4:14) to express the reversal of the creative process caused by the wickedness that grips the human heart. Hosea accuses the inhabitants of the earth of violating the Decalogue: lying, murder, stealing, and adultery defile the earth and confined her in a state of mourning (4:1-3). The distortion of fundamental relationships – with God, the other, oneself and creation – has wounded humanity and the cosmos. The result is the presence of death in all the ‘wombs’ of life: earth, air and water (v. 3; Hag. 2:15-19).<sup>30</sup>

The texts express a fundamental truth: humans reduce the earth to a desert when they have the desert in their heart (FT, 9-55),<sup>31</sup> reduced to ‘a closed world,’ made barren by indifference. This reality, analysed in the encyclical letters ‘Laudato Si’ and ‘Fratelli tutti,’ was already described by Benedict XVI at the beginning of his Petrine service:

And there are so many kinds of deserts. There is the desert of poverty, the desert of hunger and thirst, the desert of abandonment, of loneliness, of destroyed love. There is the desert of God’s darkness, the emptiness of souls no longer aware of their dignity or the goal of human life. The external deserts in the world are growing because the internal deserts have become so vast. Therefore, the earth’s treasures no longer serve to build God’s garden for all to live in, but they have been made to serve the powers of exploitation and destruction. The Church as a whole and all her pastors, like Christ, must set out to lead people out of the desert, towards the place of life, towards friendship with the Son of God, towards the One who gives us life, and life in abundance.<sup>32</sup>

How can the community of the disciples of Jesus Christ living in Ghana accompany this journey to rediscover the earth as a ‘common

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<sup>30</sup> Cfr. M. Tubbs Loya, “‘Therefore the Earth Mourns.’ The Grievance of Earth in Hosea 4:1-3,” in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, ed. N.C. Habel (Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta GA, 2008), 53-62.

<sup>31</sup> Francesco, *Fratelli tutti. Encyclical Letter on Fraternity and Social Friendship* (Vatican City: LEV, 2020); cf. R. Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant: Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* (London: Sheed & Ward, 2007<sup>2</sup>), 174.

<sup>32</sup> Benedetto XVI, “Homily,” Mass, Imposition of the Pallium and Conferral of the Fisherman’s Ring for the Beginning of the Petrine Ministry of the Bishop of Rome, April 24, 2005 ([http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/it/homilies/2005/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20\\_050424\\_inizio-pontificato.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/it/homilies/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20_050424_inizio-pontificato.html)).

home,’ transforming the human community into the inclusive fraternity dreamt of by God?

### **Dialogue Text-Reality**

The prophetic texts examined offer, in my opinion, three possible calls to action towards an ‘ecological conversion:’

- a) *Care for natural resources.* The prophets identify the ideology of unlimited economic growth as the root of the ecological problem. The ‘virus’ of accumulation grows from the capitalistic belief that happiness depends on the *quantity* of material goods. The fight against ‘land grabbing,’<sup>33</sup> and the return to sustainable agriculture, organic and community-based, are necessary steps towards inclusive development.
- b) *The economy of care and economy of enough.*<sup>34</sup> The economy of enough favours a sober and essential lifestyle, because it places relationships – with God, with one's neighbour, with the creation and with oneself – above material interests. It is an economy that places the person at the centre,<sup>35</sup> that aims to satisfy the basic needs of all members of human society, without ‘discarding’ anyone, and that denounces the accumulation of goods in the hands of an ever-diminishing elite as iniquitous.<sup>36</sup>
- c) *Equity in the distribution of resources.* The principle is implicit in the distribution of land among the tribes of Israel, according to the size of the clans and families of each tribe (cf. Num. 26:52-56; Josh. 13–19). Subsequent texts, however, introduce measures to correct inequalities that occurred due to social injustice or unforeseeable factors: e.g. the right of gleaning (cf. Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 24:19-22); debt control (cf. Exod. 22:25; Lev. 25:36-37; Deut. 23:19-20; 24:6.10);

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<sup>33</sup> See, Samuel Zan Akologo and Bernard Y. Guri, eds., *Unmasking Land Grabbing in Ghana ; Restoring Livelihoods. Paving Way for Sustable Development Goals* (Accra: Charitas Ghana, 2016), 44-49.

<sup>34</sup> B. Goudzwaard and H. de Lange, *Beyond Poverty and Affluence: Toward an Economy of Care* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 42; cf. G. Giroud, *Transizione ecologica: La finanza a servizio della nuova frontiera dell'economia* (Bologna: EMI, 2015), 261-282.

<sup>35</sup> E.E. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered* (London: Avacus, 1974).

<sup>36</sup> C. René Padilla, “The Relevance of the Jubilee in Today's World (Lev 25),” *Mission Studies* 13, no. 1-2 (1996), 16; L. Boff and V. Elizondo, *Ecology and Poverty: Cry of the Earth and Cry of the Poor* (London-Maryknoll, NY: SCM - Orbis, 1995), 9-15.

storage and distribution of the triennial tithe (cf. Deut. 14:22-27; 26:12-15); sabbatical year (cf. Exod. 23:11; Lev. 25:6; Deut. 15:1-3) and jubilee year (cf. Lev. 25:8-10).<sup>37</sup>

These regulations constitute a kind of welfare network to alleviate poverty and ensure that even the poorest are granted full dignity as members of God's people. The believing community in Ghana must not only denounce the drama of land grabbing by multinational corporations and foreign powers but also create a support network for those who are victims of “the virus of a ‘sick’ economy,” indifferent to the damage inflicted on the ‘outcast’ and our common home.<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

The God who hears the cry of the poor (Deut. 15:9; Ps. 72:12) and the cry of the earth (Isa. 24:1-4) calls for ecological conversion to bring the original project of justice and peace to fulfilment. To transform the environmental crisis into *kairòs*, a moment of revelation and transformation, it is necessary for churches to regain what Brueggemann calls the “prophetic imagination” and the courage to see new options for the future based on trust in the God of life.<sup>39</sup> The renunciation of this bold vision has left even our churches disarmed in the face of the pounding ideology of unrestrained consumerism, popularised and sacralised even in Ghana by the ‘prosperity gospel’.<sup>40</sup>

The task of articulating the vision of a new economy, one of solidarity and ethics, is an urgent theological task today. We know that perhaps it will not stop the cry of the poor nor console the mourning of the earth, but we can hope that it will educate our communities to free themselves from the anthropocentric cult of domination, from the

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<sup>37</sup> Cfr. Wright, *God or Mammon*, 149-150; J.E. Hartley, *Leviticus* (Word Bible Commentary, 4; Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1992), 443; J. Mason, “Biblical Teaching, and Assisting the Poor,” *Transformation* 4, no. 2 (1987): 1-14.

<sup>38</sup> Francis, “General Audience,” Library of the Apostolic Palace, Wednesday, 26 August 2020; [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco\\_20200826\\_udienza-generale](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200826_udienza-generale).

<sup>39</sup> Cfr. W. Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 44-45.

<sup>40</sup> Nicoletta Gatti and George Ossom-Batsa, “The Prosperity Gospel and the Poor: Intercultural Reading of Job 24:1-17,” *Interkulturelle Theologie: Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* 46, no. 1 (2020): 135-157.

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loneliness of unlimited possession to give new meaning to the evangelical proclamation of the good news to the poor.

Lastly, environmental problems are so monumental and pervasive that it is difficult to maintain hope. It is the task of theological reflection to shape a new social image not only by helping to render unsustainable lifestyles unacceptable but also by helping individuals and communities to imagine entirely different possibilities, generating concrete practices of alternative living that constitute a pedagogy of hope.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Cfr. A.M. Dalton and H.C. Simmons, *Ecotheology and the Practice of Hope* (Albany: University of New York Press, 2010).