

"The Voice of God Is over the Waters": A Contextual Reading of Psalm 29 toward Reclaiming the Sakumo Wetlands in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Sakumo Lagoon is a wetland in Accra, Ghana, that used to be a beautiful recreational site and a habitat for fish and various species of birds. The area served as a buffer to hold overflowing rains in order to prevent flooding in the surrounding communities. It is situated along the coastal road between Accra and Tema in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana and has been declared a Ramsar site. In recent times, the site has been encroached upon by individuals, estate developers and churches. It has also been turned into a huge refuse dumping site, thus destroying aquatic life and the biosphere. The destruction of the wetlands has serious implications for sacred space concepts. This study explores Ps 29 using an African contextual lens. It demonstrates how the interventions the psalmist calls for worship toward preserving the environment. It argues that a contextual reading of Ps 29 can draw the attention of the Christian community to preserve sacred spaces and raise a consciousness of identity that leads to ecojustice.

KEYWORDS: Ecojustice, ecological restoration, recreation, contextual reading, blessings, Psalm 29.

A INTRODUCTION

This article explores Ps 29 to raise an African contextual consciousness for ecological restoration of Sakumo II Lagoon, a Ramsar site and wetland in Accra, Ghana, that used to be a beautiful recreational site and a habitat for fish and various species of birds. It demonstrates how the psalm perceives ecological restoration, arguing that a contextual reading of Ps 29 can draw attention to an all-inclusive consciousness of worship aimed at preserving sacred spaces. In other words, any plan or action toward ecological restoration that ignores the involvement of YHWH and the traditional gods will yield no result. When Ps 29 is read in the Ghanaian context, however, lessons for the sacred plurality of

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cosmological consciousness are affirmed, thereby, challenging disparaging biblical interpretations about the place of divinities and deities in the African community.

Biblical interpretation should be responsive to the worldview of a people. While respecting scriptural authority, the interpreter knows that the biblical text is a product of institutions and communities that ought to be incarnated in every context it finds itself. Such a view takes the context of the interpreter seriously and helps to illuminate biblical texts, making them more understandable and real to the interpreter, who plays a role in the creation of meaning. The context of the interpreter thus relativises the meaning of a text.

John Ottuh says, "A contextual biblical interpretation is, therefore, a biblical method of interpretation that takes the uniqueness of every context into consideration, which consists of the history, identity, aspirations, norms, values and the time of the particular contexts, knowing fully well that contexts are relative."¹ That is why, in my view, the biblical text should be approached from a perspective in which the African worldviews become a major dialogue partner with traditional exegetical methodologies.² Interpretations that come from a dynamic interaction between the (con)text of the Bible and the context of the interpreter do not imply projecting the context of the interpreter above that of the Bible. The meaning derived from the text is used to draw conclusions and lessons.³ As Mbengu Nyiawung avers, to contextualise the Bible calls for, first, a hermeneutics that "focuses on *the context of the audience*, making use of the results from other methods of exegesis and applying them to the realities of the African context." Second, it should consider biblical texts as a challenge to African theologians (especially), whose task is to seek solutions to the various problems that plague African societies." Third, it "intends to create a dialogue between the text and the African context through the process of appropriation." Lastly, it should be affirmed that "the African context seems to share the same social systems with the context of biblical texts."⁴

¹ John Arierhi Ottuh, "Contextualization of Biblical Interpretation in Africa," *International Journal of Research in Arts and Social Sciences* 7/2 (2014): 31.

² See Knut Holter, *Old Testament Research for Africa: A Critical Analysis and Annotated Bibliography of African Old Testament Dissertations* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 88.

³ H. Virkler and K. Ayayo, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 17.

⁴ Mbengu D. Nyiawung, "Contextualising Biblical Exegesis: What Is the African Biblical Hermeneutic Approach?" *HTS Theologiese Studies /Theological Studies* 69/1, Art. # 2011 (2013): 3–4. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v69i1.2011>. Emphasis original.

B SAKUMO II LAGOON AS A POLLUTED SHRINE

Sakumo II Lagoon is an international Ramsar site on the coastal area west of Tema along the Accra-Tema highway in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. It serves the Sakumono, Teshie and Nungua communities as well as other municipal areas such as Ledzokuku-Krowor and Ashaiman in the Ga East toward the sea and is a vital ecosystem for agricultural purposes, nature conservation and bird life. It covers an area of 1,364 hectares (3,500 acres) and is a serene water site for habitation, recreation and religious activities. The Ramsar site is made up of four habitats: an open lagoon, flood plains, freshwater marsh and coastal savannah grassland. The area serves as a buffer to hold thousands of gallons of rainwater each year to prevent flooding, sometimes as a kind of lake. Water through these channels empties into the lagoon. Where the lagoon cannot hold the drainage, the floods cause the destruction of properties in the environs. The rainfall pattern in the area is bimodal, with low annual rainfall averaging 800 mm distributed in less than 80 days in a year.⁵

Sakumo II Lagoon is also the feeding ground for over 70 water bird species and a breeding ground for about three marine turtle species. It serves as a nursery ground for fish species such as *Sarotherodon melanotheron*, *Ethnolasa fimbriata*, *Mugil spp.*, *Lutjanus spp.* and *Caranx spp.* The *Sarotherodon melanotheron* is the most dominant species. In addition, three crab species are found in the Sakumo lagoon and its adjacent floodplains. Bivalves, crustaceans, gastropods, insects, molluscs and polychaetes are found in the Sakumo Ramsar site, which is also home to over sixty bird species, including the African Spoonbill and the Osprey and a stopover for many migrating birds. The lagoon plays a significant role in the daily lives of the people who rely on it for fishing and transportation. It also supports vegetation cover near its banks and various agricultural activities.

Traditionally, the Sakumo lagoon is owned by the Ga people of Teshie, Sakumono and Tema. Due to the land policy in Ghana, surrounding lands that should be left as a buffer but owned by the government, families or individuals have been used for infrastructural development, therefore competing with the space of the lagoon. The Ga people believe that the lagoon is a sacred body of water and consider it a gift from the Supreme Being. The Ga people acknowledge two main lagoons as their greatest deities that protect them but the Sakumo is considered superior, hence, the appellation *Katamanso bema*. Considered also a deity by the indigenous people, the "Black Heron" (*Egretta desiaca*) found in it is considered sacred and should not be eaten. The indigenes have their own strategies for regulating the use of the lagoon, including avoiding waste and noise

⁵ Ruby Asmah, Hendrick Danquah, C. A. Biney and Charles C. Amankwah, "Trend Analysis Relating to Pollution in the Sakumo Lagoon," *African Journal of Aquatic Science* 33/1 (2008): 88.

pollution, believed to be part of the taboos of the Sakumo Lagoon deity. The traditional authorities have also collaborated with the central government to institute a ban on drumming, noise-making and fishing at certain periods of the year. However, some people do not understand why they should obey the voice of the traditional gods and cease from encroaching on and developing the land along the banks of the lagoon.

The traditional chief priest in charge of the Sakumo, Nai Wulomo, is recognised as the highest political figure and all the chiefs report to him. On festive occasions, it is the traditional priest who leads the people to perform rituals at the lagoon shrine. During these times of customary rites/rituals, the area is restricted and the lagoon is given some rest. The chief priest specifies the time for the ban on fishing in the lagoon. This rest time also affords the lagoon to yield plenty of fish. The traditional priests and worshippers believe that a proper relationship with the god of the lagoon will ensure a bumper harvest of fish and avoid flooding and disasters in the community. In contemporary times however, the authority of the gods is no longer respected. Encroachers blatantly flout the ban on fishing and other activities in and around the lagoon. The city authorities have also situated a waste dumping site close to the Sakumo and the spillage keeps entering the lagoon.

The activities of the people around the catchment area of Sakumo II Lagoon have negatively impacted the environment, thus, making it difficult for the traditions to be relevant. Urbanisation in the Greater Accra region has also led to serious land-based pollution, over-exploitation of fishery resources and destruction of birds and fish. Farming, sand winning, fishing, stone quarrying, harvesting of wood for fuel and the construction of houses by estate developers are the main threats in the catchment area. Through negative human activities, mismanagement and irresponsible exploitation, the Ramsar site has been destroyed. According to Nartey et al., "The catchment of the Sakumo lagoon is found to be an area with a high concentration of human activities, such as industrialization, arable farming, livestock rearing and disposal of solid wastes and municipal sewage."⁶ There is now air, water and noise pollution in the area due to infrastructural development and indiscriminate disposal of liquid and solid waste. It has led to the narrowing of the drainage channel, blockage and perennial flooding. The waste is rendering the gods impotent, leading to the extinction of birds and aquatic life, loss of livelihood and diseases that affect human life. Thus, a new approach is needed if ecological restoration is indeed a target.

In 2019, the Sakumono Ramsar site was designated as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention, recognising its ecological importance and the need for its conservation. The Wildlife Division

⁶ V.K. Nartey, K.A. Ekor, L.K. Doamekpor, and L.H. Bobobee, "Nutrient Load of the Sakumo Lagoon at the Sakumo Ramsar Site in Tema, Ghana," *West African Journal of Applied Ecology* 19 (2011): 93.

under the Ghana Forestry Commission has developed a strategic document for the sustainable development of Sakumo II Lagoon. The document titled, "The Wise Use Principle" covers the problems and activities related to wetlands, including institutional and organisational arrangements, legislations and policies for "sustained utilization of wetlands for the benefit of humankind in a way compatible with the maintenance of the natural properties of the ecosystem."⁷ The expected benefits of the "Wise Use Principle" are:

1. Job opportunities for Small and Medium-scale Enterprises (SMEs), e.g., craftsmen, vendors, and ecotourism.
2. Business opportunities for hospitality industries, restaurants/food joint operators.
3. Recreation for the residents and non-residents in a serene water-based environment.
4. Conservation awareness and education of students and the general public, and
5. Sakumo II wetlands maintained to perform its natural service—flood control, shoreline stabilization and breeding ground for fishes, feeding and habitats for seashore birds (migratory and non-migratory), animal grazing and agriculture.⁸

Though these five expected benefits are human-centred, only the last one is directly about nature conservation. The economic relevance of the wetland enlarges the choices for human beings, while the choices of other creations—animal and aquatic life—are of little value. The overemphasis on human development and benefit by the Wildlife Division established to protect the waterbodies and vegetation defeats the idea of stewardship of God's creation. Human interests are placed above every other created being and, as such, there is no ecojustice. Certainly, there is a need to ensure that all ideas about competing for the land and water spaces are replaced with actions that produce spiritual energy and sustain the life and health of all creation.

C WHEN YHWH IS OVER THE WATERS: PSALM 29

Psalm 29 highlights YHWH's power over nature, with a call to divine beings to ascribe glory to YHWH. The imagery primarily serves as a theophanic revelation, demonstrating YHWH's sovereignty rather than directly addressing environmental stewardship. It is a hymn that highlights the powerlessness of the gods on earth. It invites all divine beings to worship YHWH so that blessings and shalom can come to YHWH's people. Scholars have argued that Ps 29 is influenced by Canaanite religion by identifying YHWH with the ANE storm-

⁷ Ministry of Lands, Forestry and Mines, *Managing Ghana's Wetlands: A National Wetlands Conservation Strategy and Action Plan – 2007-2016* (Accra: Combent Impressions, 2008), 1.

⁸ Ministry of Lands, Forestry and Mines, *Managing Ghana's Wetlands*, 4.

god ideology or a Baal-like deity that belongs to pre-Israelite Yahwism⁹ or that it is an ancient Phoenician hymn praising Baal-Hadad, the weather god.¹⁰ Israel Knohl, however, cogently argues that Ps 29 "in its entirety was written as a paean to the God of Israel, rather than to Baal," although it demonstrates clear Canaanite motifs, topographical references and imagery.¹¹ In the words of John Goldingay, Ps 29 "tells the community how to think about the other divine beings that their neighbors acknowledge and that Israel often acknowledges."¹²

The Psalms in general do not teach history; they are written to reflect on a socio-historical idea and to express the faith of the people based on their worldview. They are prayers that ancient worshippers used to bear witness to their faith. Israel's faith created room for a divine assembly where YHWH is seated on the throne, surrounded by other divine beings. This divine assembly or council exercises governance by demonstrating YHWH's omnipotence. It helps to work out the decrees of YHWH, maintains social order, mediates YHWH's salvific will to the world of human beings and supports YHWH to implement social justice (1 Kgs 22; Isa 6:8; cf. Deut 32:8f.; Pss 19:2; 89:6; Jer 23:22; Amos 3:7).¹³ YHWH ensures that all the members of the divine council do their work well.

Psalm 29 further acknowledges YHWH's dominion over all aspects of nature. The psalm begins with YHWH's superiority over the divine beings and then to all creation, including the mighty waters, trees, wilderness and forests. It ends with a call for YHWH to give strength and peace to his people. The psalmist employs creation theological language to explore YHWH's praise. By stringing together YHWH's glory with the voice of YHWH, the poet emphasises YHWH's surpassing power and as such, there is a need to worship YHWH for strength and peace to prevail. Hence, the divine beings are to surrender their

⁹ Nissim Amzallag, *Psalm 29: A Canaanite Hymn to YHWH in the Psalter* (Leuven: Peeters, 2021), 25.

¹⁰ Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 261.

¹¹ Israel Knohl, "Psalm 29: Canaanite or Israelite? The Evidence of the Numerical Structure," in *Ve-'Ed Ya'aleh (Gen 2:6): Volume 2: Essays in Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies Presented to Edward L. Greenstein* (ed. P. Machinist et al.; Atlanta: SBL, 2021), 829.

¹² John Goldingay, *Psalms Vol 1, Psalms 1-41* (Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 617, 618.

¹³ Patrick D. Miller Jr., "Cosmology and World Order in the Old Testament: The Divine Council as Cosmic-Political Symbol," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 9/2 (1987): 57-71; H.-J. Fabry, "הַבַּל," *TDOT* 4:174-175.

honour and strength to YHWH and not simply ascribe or bestow honour and strength to themselves.¹⁴

The psalmist then calls on the *bēnē 'ēlīm*—literally, “sons of the gods” or “members of the class known as gods” to worship and praise YHWH in holy splendour (29:1). The *bēnē 'ēlīm* (“sons of gods”) also refer to angels (Gen 6:2; Ps 103:20-21), holy ones in heavenly places (Job 5:1; 15:15) or the heavenly angelic council (Exod 15:11; 2 Kgs 22:19; Pss 82:1; 86:6-8). Klaus Seybold notes that *bēnē 'ēlīm* in the opening of the psalm has two possible translations: “sons of God” and “sons of ram”,¹⁵ but preference here is given to “sons of gods.” Elsewhere in Ps 82, part of the responsibility of the sons of gods is to judge the people of the earth. In the view of Patrick Miller, the conception of the divine council, as seen also in Gen 19:1; 31:11, 1 Kgs 22:19-21, Job 1:6; 2:1 and Isa 6:1-3, shows how Israel’s religion embraced a dynamic concept of governance. Miller affirms that “the *maintenance of justice and righteousness is the foundation of the universe, the responsibility of the divine council, and the issue upon which hang both the stability of the universe and the stability and effective reality of the divine world.*”¹⁶ Miller further states that the failure to maintain moral and cosmic order and the fact that the wicked control the righteous, abusing their powers are a concern to the divine council. He adds that YHWH, who is the “guarantor of the world’s order, is also guarantor of the spheres of righteousness and justice.”¹⁷

Similarly, in the African worldview, spiritual beings are made up of the gods and ancestors who are also called the living dead or the invincible police.¹⁸ These sacred beings enforce moral law and order, expressed in a variety of taboos and customs to prevent society and the environment from falling into chaos. They derive their power and authority from the Supreme Being. Although seen as powerful, their inability to exercise control over the chaos and moral disorder is a pointer to the limitedness of the ancestors.

In Ps 29:3, the voice of YHWH “over the waters” echoes the Genesis creation story where the Spirit of the Lord was over the surface of the waters (cf. Gen 1:2). However, in this psalm, it points to judgment. YHWH also sits enthroned over the flood (29:10). YHWH’s lordship is manifested in three “spheres”: first, over waters (29:3a), echoing what goes on in the sea; second, over thunder (29:3b), that is, in terms of what goes on in the sky/heavens and third, over vegetation and geographic spaces (29:5-8), in the light of what goes

¹⁴ James M. Kennedy, “Psalm 29 as Semiotic System: A Linguistic Reading,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 9/12 (2009): 20.

¹⁵ Klaus Seybold, *Introducing the Psalms* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 31.

¹⁶ Miller Jr., “Cosmology and World Order in the Old Testament,” 68. Italics are original.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁸ John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1990), 82.

on in the land/earth. YHWH's spatial cosmic kingship has implications for the divinities as well as all people, who are to ascribe glory, including promoting shalom.¹⁹

YHWH's voice, mentioned seven times in the poem, unmakes and remakes creation. The voice of YHWH not only creates and protects but also breaks (*šobēr*) the trees and mountains (29:5) and flashes (*hošēb*) like fire (29:7), causing the land to quake. These participles, *šobēr* and *hošēb*, emphasise intensive and continuous action, that is, destroying again and again. As Miller notes, the "force of the imagery of the voice of the Lord as a mighty storm is carried from the storm upon the waters that stir them up (v. 3) to the power of the storm of God that shatters the cedar trees."²⁰ Elsewhere, YHWH's voice roars like thunder, causing withering of the pastures and providing refuge to the people (cf. Amos 1:2; Joel 3:16). Only by ascribing glory to YHWH can peace prevail.

The cedars of Lebanon are known for their great size, symbolising power and might, but they cannot stand the voice of YHWH. In the words of Charry, "the voice of God is not the power of order in creation but of the jarring disorder expressed through raw power, turning life-sustaining elements into death-dealing dangers."²¹ Sirion, which appears only here in the Hebrew Bible, is difficult to ascertain. Sirion is, however, seen as a Phoenician site. Kraus says the Phoenicians called Mount Hermon by the name Sirion.²² It is used poetically to refer to Mount Hermon (Deut 3:9). Lebanon, Sirion and Kadesh may be geographical references in Canaan and form a parallel with "all in his temple" (29:9c). Such pointers to mountains and temples echo religious sacred spaces in the African context, especially where the gods inhabit.

Kraus records how a similar concept of glorification is attributed to Marduk's voice:²³

The word that causes the heavens above to quake;
the word that makes the earth below to shake;
the word that brings the Anunnaki down to ruin ...
His word makes the heavens quake, makes the earth shakes ...
The Lord's word is a rising flash flood that beclouds the countenance;
the word of Marduk is a flood that catches hold the dam.

¹⁹ Emmylou J. Grosser, "Configuring Psalm 29 as a Poem: Cognitive Strategies and the Artful Reading Experience," *Religions* 15/1428 (2024): 6, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15121428>.

²⁰ Patrick D. Miller Jr., *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 37.

²¹ Ellen T. Charry, *Psalms 1-50: Sighs and Songs of Israel*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2015), 149.

²² Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-51: A Commentary* (trans. Hilton C. Oswald; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 349.

²³ Kraus, *Psalms 1-51*, 347.

His word, it sweeps away huge lotus trees [?];
 his word, is a storm, it saddles all things with burden [?].
 The word of Enlil storms about without an eye seeing it.

As in this ancient poem, YHWH's judgment leads to the destruction of nature and is for all to see. YHWH's thundering voice is the instrument of his judgment (cf. 1 Kgs 8:27, Isa 6:3; 66:1-2a; Hos 6:5b).²⁴ Such judgment connotes degradation of the land so that it does not grow green plants and trees (cf. Deut 3:9; Job 9:5-12; Ps 114:4, 6). The judgment over all creation calls for a humble re-orientation. YHWH's judgment over the waters should make all ascribe "glory!" to him (29:9c).

The voice of YHWH, like a storm-god, coming from a King who is enthroned, thunders, destroys, breaks and twists vegetation and not only shakes waters and deserts (29:3, 5, 7, 8, 9) but it also gives life, when all in the temple cry, "Glory" (29:9).²⁵ The temple represents the whole earth, of which the gods are included. Boyd compares Ps 29 to Haba 3 and to Pss 77 and 18 and says that the one engaged in prayer exercises patience because the voice of God that causes trembling in creation and subservience of all the chaotic powers will vindicate Israel.²⁶ It is when all ascribe glory to YHWH that the destruction can turn into strength and peace.

The psalm concludes, "may YHWH give strength to all his people; may YHWH bless his people with shalom" (29:11). This vow of praise assumes that the praise and glory envisaged is taking place. Blessings are expressions of YHWH's attention to creation, especially humankind.²⁷ Blessings function as a consequence of worship and are connected with a favourable response from a community. For Westermann, "In a wider sense, blessing is the centre of life that is visible in the fertility of the family, in farming and in raising cattle and sheep."²⁸ Such blessings lead to strength, connoting material and physical power

²⁴ Bruce Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 173–208; John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 83–84.

²⁵ See Edward L. Greenstein, "YHWH's Lightning in Psalm 29:7," *MAARAV: A Journal of the Study of the Northwest Semitic Languages and Literatures* 8 (1992): 55, 56.

²⁶ Samuel L. Boyd, "Intertextuality, Liturgy, and Prophetic Collections: A Study of the Relationship between Habakkuk 3 and Psalms 29, 77, and 18," *CBQ* 84/4 (2022): 566–587.

²⁷ Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann, *God of the Living: A Biblical Theology* (trans. Mark E. Biddle; Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011), 271.

²⁸ Claus Westermann, *Blessings in the Bible and the Life of the Church* (OBT; trans. Keith Crim; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 18.

for defence against negative forces and shalom that connotes wellbeing, safety, harmony and wholeness.

For YHWH to be clothed with honour (cf. Ps 104:1-4), the sons of God are not to keep quiet. No wonder Tate avers that, "the divine beings are divested of their status as deities and reduced in rank to that of servants of YHWH."²⁹ When members of the divine court join in the praise of YHWH, they will see how YHWH gives strength to his people and blesses people with peace. That is to say, the gods will acknowledge the special place of humanity in the eyes of God. The glory and strength ascribed to YHWH are thereby translated to ecological blessings for God's people.

D FROM POLLUTION AND PRESENCE

YHWH's presence over the waters requires ecological consciousness, which is linked to ecojustice. Norman Habel offers six guiding principles of ecojustice: the principle of (1) intrinsic worth, (2) interconnectedness, (3) voice, (4) purpose, (5) mutual custodianship and (6) resistance. The first, which is the principle of interconnectedness, is about how the Earth is seen as a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival. That is to say, there should be an investigation into how the text becomes a product of human interest and affirms relationships. The second is the principle of voice in which the Earth is seen as a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice. Hence, a textual analysis should lead to a new ecological consciousness. The third is the principle of purpose, whereby the universe, Earth and all its components are part of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has a place in the overall goal of that design. Norman Habel is thus advocating for a "hermeneutics of suspicion, identification and retrieval."³⁰ Similarly, Nicoletta Gatti argues that the theological concept of rest should guide the economies of care of nature.³¹ In that sense, attention should be placed on addressing false assumptions and promoting responsible care as well as designing pragmatic ecological ethics that engender attitudes and actions that are protective of the environment.

Focusing on the first principle of the interconnectedness of all and mutual dependence for life and survival means that the consciousness of a dynamic

²⁹ Marvin E Tate, "Psalms," in *(Wisdom) Writings, Mercer Commentary on the Bible* (eds. Watson E. Mills and Richard F. Wilson; Marcon: Mercer University Press, 2001), 82.

³⁰ Norman C. Habel, "Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics," in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics* (eds. Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger; Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 2, 3.

³¹ Nicoletti Gatti, "Setting the Agenda for an Inclusive Development: Biblical Texts for Ecological Crisis," in *Religion and Sustainable Development: Ghanaian Perspective* (eds. George Ossom-Batsa, Nicoletti Gatti, and Rabiātu Deinyo Ammah; Vatican: Urbaniana University Press, 2018), 150.

cosmic design toward ecological recovery is not the work of human beings alone. Such interrelatedness should highlight the suppressed traditions of individual interests and resist the dominant patriarchal anthropocentric orientation.³² It is not only humans who are called to worship YHWH so that there is restoration of the waters, but also the gods and all creation. Not only should humanity recognise the "gods," but it should also affirm its place in the effort to avert ecological destruction.

A radical monotheistic religion that recognises other deities in the presence of YHWH is necessary when discussing environmental care. The cosmic forces play a part in YHWH's universe. Through the lens of an all-inclusive creation effort, therefore, strength and blessings abound for the people of YHWH. Worship is thus relational, participatory and designed to mediate strength and divine peace to the people (Ps 29:9-11; cf. 68:35). Perhaps, it is when all take good care of creation and join voices to ascribe glory to YHWH that blessings come. The voice of YHWH is so powerful and ought to be feared. As Weiser notes,

[The] terror trembling with fear and rapture shouting with joy are blended with each other and reflect an essential feature of the biblical belief in God, that paradoxical tension between the fear of God and the joy of God, taking the God of catastrophes just as seriously as the God who stoops down to man to bestow upon him his blessing.³³

Human beings are beckoned to hear how YHWH's voice "breaks" all creation, leading to an ecological crisis. The groaning and crying of the Earth due to YHWH's voice should be a concern to the gods who share a part of nature. This new awareness demands all forms of life—human, vegetation, aquatic and spiritual—to be in a dynamic, interdependent and complex relationship, to make worship the key solution to the ecological crisis. Human beings cannot, therefore, blame the gods for negligence of the protection of the waters when the cause is from us.

The significance of keeping in touch with the spiritual world is not far-fetched for Ghanaians and, more generally, Africans. Traditionally, Africans believe that the gods have a relationship with YHWH, hence, the Akan saying, *Abosom ye Nyame mba* (literally, "The gods are YHWH's sons"). Moreover, Ps 29 affirms that YHWH and the gods keep interacting with one another. They are in a relationship and humanity and the gods should similarly join hands to praise YHWH. James Mays bemoans the tendency in contemporary times to exploit and explain everything in terms of technology and economics and reduce

³² Norman C. Habel, "Guiding Ecojustice Principles," *Spiritual Horizons* 11/11 (2016): 92. See also Norman C. Habel, ed. *Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2000).

³³ Weiser, *The Psalms*, 263.

everything to our reason and needs, hence, dimming the poetic and mythological vision in Ps 29. Such an attitude has resulted in our lives being cramped by horizons of our own making.³⁴ Overlooking the place of the "sons of God" in the African worldview and interpretations will affect an appropriate contextualisation of Scripture.

The divine council reminds us that the universe is no simplistic reality or without complex governance. In such a dynamic cosmology, the gods are not in control of the waters. When the voice of YHWH, repeated seven times in the poem, is over the waters and YHWH sits enthroned over it, the gods are not to be worshipped. The gods are to join humanity to worship YHWH. Michael S. Northcott advocates for an eco-centric approach to environmental ethics that promotes the flourishing of the ecosystem, "through an emphasis on the total integrity of the land and on the moral significance of ecosystems considered as total communities of interdependent life including both humans and non-humans."³⁵

The place of the chief priest, Nai Wolumo, in bringing together all traditional priests, chiefs, elders, and community members to promote peace and wellbeing is significant. Sacrificial rites to the Sakumo deity are organised to embrace all people. Interestingly, the Wolumo and traditional leaders have used the government to enforce the participation of all people in the Ga traditional land in the observation the taboos. Although there is some resistance from some, there is co-operation and general respect of the laws. In cases where the taboos are not respected, young people from the traditional authorities rise up to advocate for compliance.

Africans believe in a cosmology made up of the living, the living dead (Ancestors), the Earth, the deities and the highest Deity, God. The belief is that spiritual beings are everywhere and present in the life of the living. They interact with human beings, sometimes through prophetic utterances, dreams and visions to direct the path of the living toward promoting health and well-being and overcoming all negative vicissitudes of life. Musa Dube notes that, "The most crucial aspect in this cosmology is the need to maintain healthy relationships. Failure to maintain healthy relationships constitutes 'sin' that requires rituals of healing and reconciliation."³⁶ Hence, the African sense of community should form a strong foundation for the ideas of ecojustice and environmental

³⁴ James Luther Mays, *Psalms* (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 138–139.

³⁵ Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 105, 106.

³⁶ Musa Dube, "Gender and the Bible in African Christianity," in *Anthology of African Christianity* (eds. Isabel Apawo Phiri and Dietrich Werner, Chammah Kaunda and Kennedy Owino; Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2016), 148.

restoration, taking into account communion, unity and participation. Such an idea of community should inform how the ecological crisis can be addressed.

An environmental ethic in Africa should thus focus more on the holistic claims of an African community so that the prescriptive claims to the advantage of only human beings are reconsidered. An environmental ethic should create a space for the gods, calling them to play their roles in the community. The waterbodies, including Sakumo II Lagoon, also need rest, which connotes self-replenishing tendencies. Hence, an understanding of the intrinsic value of nature, how and why nature functions the way it does, including the life sciences, should be a concern for all creation – spiritual and physical. Prioritising human praise at the expense of the “sons of God” will create a cosmos that runs in parallel. The blessings accruing to human beings should not make other aspects of creation less important.

E AFRICAN CONSCIOUSNESS FOR ECOJUSTICE

An environmental crisis is not only the result of human, economic, political and social factors. It also occurs as a result of spiritual judgment. Restoring such a crisis requires an inclusive consciousness in the spiritual practices of all humans and non-human beings dependent on ecosystems. Africans should endeavour to preserve and maintain the world through rituals and reverence for YHWH, bringing on board other aspects of nature considered sacred. The traditions usually dubbed “worship of nature” should rather be seen as an expression of respect for YHWH. If it is YHWH whose voice destroys the land, waters and environment, then the god cannot be responsible for the shalom human beings seek to enjoy. Nature conservation in Africa, thus, should involve a consciousness of spirituality that aims at the reverence of YHWH. Hence, Africans should not shy away from working hand in hand with the gods in seeking eco-justice.

The traditional forms of African ecological knowledge passed from generation to generation through informal and formal symbolic and ethical education and inculcated from generation to generation through stories, proverbs and songs should not leave out spirituality when seeking peace, prosperity and productivity. The Wulomo and all who manage the shrines should cause the “sons of God” to join others in ascribing glory to YHWH. There is no doubt that the traditional gods always respond to the kingship of YHWH. The gods are not ends in themselves. The traditional leaders who work with the keepers of religious sites, such as Sakumo II Lagoon, as well as government agencies that manage these places, should understand the roles of all participants in the African community. Since the place of the gods is ultimately to ascribe glory to YHWH, African Christians should not act as if they are coming against the gods to destroy their habitat.

Human beings cannot bring about ecological restoration as if they have all the power to do so in themselves. Not believing in YHWH or the gods does not mean doing what is contrary to the well-being of waterbodies. Human beings can work toward ecojustice in true worship for YHWH, the Creator, who gives strength to his people and blesses his people with shalom. The concept of shalom is about the fullness of life – restoration, restitution, wellbeing and justice. The dynamic tension between the voice of YHWH breaking and destroying nature and the favour of YHWH bringing strength and shalom is relaxed when YHWH's kingship is acknowledged. Perhaps the tension then is heightened when human beings destroy the environment. Prayers to YHWH should aim at attracting blessings rather than influencing the voice of YHWH to resound and thunder over the waters, crush the trees, bring flashes of fire that shake the wilderness to make it bare and make the hind to calve. Human destruction and inaction to ascribe glory to YHWH would disturb the constant cycle of existence and affect the corporate existence of the community. It is no longer the non-adherence to prohibitive orders of the gods or engaging in acts that attract the wrath of the gods on humanity that matters.

F CONCLUSION

Psalm 29 reveals a summons to the divine beings and all people to ascribe glory to YHWH in the light of YHWH's enthronement, power, majesty and control of all creation. This is because YHWH's voice causes an ecological crisis which only worship can avert. The ideological connection between worship and ecojustice cannot be underestimated. The psalmist highlights the religious culture of Israel's time, where the gods are identified with parts of the natural world. A new ecological consciousness, as seen in Ps 29, is the element of an all-inclusive worship and the principle of purpose is where humanity calls on the gods to join in worshipping YHWH in holy splendour.

This essay has also highlighted how ecological restoration rests on all creation. Sakumo II Lagoon is a wetland that used to be a beautiful recreational site and habitat for fish and various species of birds. The lagoon is also considered sacred by the Ga people. However, disregard for nature and the authority of the gods has led to wanton destruction of the site. The people thus should not ignore the call of Wulomo to engage in rest that would maintain and sustain Sakumo II Lagoon. Ghanaians are also to call on spiritual beings to join hands in ascribing glory to YHWH so that there will be shalom. Such a call gleaned from the psalm outlines interventions toward preserving the environment. This contextual reading of Ps 29, thus, enjoins the Christian community not to destroy the environment because of its unbelief in the gods but to affirm sacred spaces and raise a consciousness of communal identity that leads to ecojustice. It is the glory given to the Lord by all, including the gods, that eventually ends in blessings and shalom.

Restoring the present crisis requires an inclusive participation in spiritual practices, which should inform the traditional forms of African ecological knowledge passed from generation to generation. If YHWH plays a role in unmaking creation, then people need to recognise YHWH when seeking to restore creation. Human beings are not the only ones responsible for the destruction of the environment, but they have a part to play in the restoration of the Earth. Ecological restoration and human blessings of strength and shalom require true worship. Such recognition should be at the heart of the African community and eco-theological reflections. A core belief in the place of the gods will have more resonance for African Christian traditions when concerns for social justice are formulated as practical and intellectual responses to socio-ecological challenges.

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