MISSION AS SERVICE TO LIFE. REFLECTIONS FROM AN AFRICAN WORLDVIEW

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Abstract: This article discusses mission as service to life. The author developing from the African worldview whose centrality is life, argues that the question of life permeates the history of salvation and is at the heart of the Christian mission as Jesus Christ the Perfect Revealer of God indicates (John 10:10). The author concludes that life thus unites both the African worldview and the Christian mission; consequently mission becomes God’s life-giving activities directed to the world and the church’s mandate of service to life under His guiding power. Such understanding gives new meaning to church activity in Africa and unites all her understandings for this one purpose that all may come to life to the full. It suggests that all that anti-life is to be fought and rejected while all that is pro-life and leads all to acquire life in its fullness must be promoted and cultivated.

The discovery that mission is central to the church’s being and the subsequent conciliar definition of the church as being missionary by nature (cf. AG 2) is certainly one of the greatest achievements of contemporary theology. Mission has had various meanings in history: from being the propagation of faith to expansion of the kingdom of God, from conversion of the heathen to plantation enclave, from reaching out to herald’s service, from mission to mission to Missio Dei. So theologicaally, mission can be described as the salvation activities of the Triune God throughout the world geared toward the realisation of God’s kingdom and the world wide church’s divine mandate to be ready to serve this God who is aiming his saving activities toward this world. This mission aims at establishing God’s Kingdom whose content is salvation. Salvation, which is the kernel of mission, is a theologically rich concept. Whichever case, it may be, one will not escape the fact that life is at the base of the salvific activities of God who is Himself the living God who acts outside Himself to give being and life and to protect and preserve it. Thus Michael Schmaus observes aptly that life and death (the opposite of life) are the primary motifs and motives at work in the entire history of salvation.

Of course in our day, the technocratization of life has somehow tended to diminish its sacredness, yet it commands great value for each individual person. That is why death, which threatens to exterminate it, remains one of the greatest menaces of human beings of every age and colour. Before it they tremble. They turn into dwarfs before the giant death. It can only be turned into a dwarf by God the living one who guarantees life beyond cruel death (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:54-56). In presenting the elements of an emergec ecumenical missionary paradigm, David Bosch gives eleven elements, namely: mission as church with others, mission as Missio Dei, Mission as mediating salvation, mission as quest for justice, mission as evangelism, mission as contextualization, mission as liberation, mission as inculturation, mission as common witness, mission as ministry of the people of God, mission as action in hope. The aim of this paper is to present an added element to the knowledge of mission. I will argue, assisted by the African worldview that mission is fundamentally service to life. Such understanding of mission will generate a new model of missionary praxis that will be more appealing to the Africans and make Christianity more acceptable to them. I will first expose the African worldview underlining that life is its basic form. I will then attempt to demonstrate that it is life that unites the African worldview and the Christian mission and finally indicate what nuance this brings to the missionary praxis.

The African Worldview

A worldview is a people’s way of seeing and relating to the world. It is “the way a certain people regard life, man and woman, the relationship between the world above, the world below and this world of the people. A worldview gives the philosophy of each people.” It is the people’s image of the world, their way of seeing things on the philosophical, ethical, religious, political, cultural and educational level. Waliggo has argued that “However much people in black Africa differ

5 J.M. Waliggo, Analyzing the Cultural Sphere for the Integral Evangelization, Manuscript, 8.
in many cultural aspects, they possess a strong similarity in the basic worldview.” The renowned African theologian Charles Nyamiti has given four major characteristics of the African worldview. First this comprises an existential, concrete and effective approach. Reality is seen and judged especially from its dynamic aspects closely related to life. The farther a being is from these elements, the more unreal and valueless it is conceived to be. Hence the emphasis on fecundity and life, being and power or life force identification. God is above all forces, he is life itself, he originates it, controls it and protects it. Second, solidarity (community), totality and participation. This indicates a cosmos-theandric vision of the universe where the world of the spirits, human beings and nature are seen as united in vital or organic communion among themselves. Third, the sacred. In the African worldview there is a deep sense of sacredness possessed in various degree the Supreme Being, the spirits, the ancestors. Fourth, anthroponcentrism. This means that society and religion are centred on the human person whose welfare they are to promote. The human being is the centre of the world.

_Life as central and basic to the African worldview_

In the African worldview, life is the basic and central reality? It is the most profound axis of the African worldview, its pivot point. It is understood as the goal of all human striving. Oborji Francis in his analysis of African religion comes to the conclusion that the central motivation in this religion is the quest for life and its preservation.7 Life itself is a reality that is difficult to define and a definition acceptable to all has not been given until now. Yet it is a reality spoken about often, experienced and loved by all. For the purpose of this work, the following will be the working definition of life: Life is an immanent activity of a living organism with a capacity for self-movement, self-construction, self-conservation, and self-regulation, self-repair


with power for adaptation. Life is essential to living beings; it is an activity that cannot be interrupted without putting in crisis or actually destroying the living organism. Nyamiti informs us that life also is basic in defining the person in the African worldview. Life is the basic personal element without which no other characteristics are possible. It is the ground and underlying factor of all other personal characteristics.10 It is, thus, no wonder that the Baganda call life the greatest of wealth (Obulama busi bagage) and God who possesses it in its fullness and has the full capacity to originate it, give it, increase and control it with out assistance is referred to as the richest (Katonda sitwikirira). Yet as Walter Kaiser notes, even the best definition of the rich reality that life is, will simply be impoverishing it.11

In any case, in the African worldview life is not considered in an abstract way. It is concretely conceived and lived in human community and the world of nature and spirits. Fullness of life is understood as maturity comprising fecundity, practical wisdom, sanctity, rights and responsibility as well as liberty from any type of subjugation.12 Being the basic of the African worldview life determines what is judged as good and right, what is evil and wrong. It defines the basic duty of each person and the basic relationships. Indeed what is ontologically and morally good and juridically just is that which maintains and increases life as received from God the life giver, the creator, source and controller of all life and other forces.

Thus good or evil are determined in relation to life. So Wallis writes “Whatever promotes life, transmits life, manifests life, enriches life, saves life, protects life, ensures life, heals life, is good and must be longed for by all. Whatever does the opposite is evil and must be avoided by all.”13 Life is lived by the individual but in community. This affirms the principle of solidarity and participation. The family, the clan and tribe are all places for enhancing life, promoting it and protecting it. Life is sacred and has a basic religious dimension in the sense that it is given by a Supreme Being who can delegate the roles of protecting it to the spirits and ancestors. Life has to deal also with the natural world, the plants, the animals, and the soil. Good relationships must be cultivated with the spiritual world and the created

world just as the actual world of the living. Anything that disturbs that relationship harms and hurts life and so is considered evil.15

The basic duty is to communicate life, sustain and protect it from all dangers that threaten to exterminate it. Each individual, each leader, from the family, clan, tribe to king has this basic duty, failure to do it is both a crime against humanity and a sin against God the giver of life who wishes all to act in service of life. Anything that gives, manifests, enriches, saves, protects, ensures, heals and safeguards life and leads to development, fullness in all its aspects is appreciated and loved. Similarly anything that removes and fights against all that threatens life, stunts, undermines, weakens, disturbs, diminishes and exterminates life is held in high esteem.16 On the contrary what diminishes life, militates against it, and exterminates it is feared and abhorred. That is why barrenness, suicide, murder and brutalisation of life are totally detested in the African worldview.

At this point one may ask why we find in many traditions a considerable waste of life in terms of human sacrifices and tribal war expeditions in which much life was/is lost. Is that not contradictory to what we are claiming in the African worldview? The complaint is genuine. What must be understood in the first place is that sacrifices were made in service to life, to ask for it, protect it, increase it and ward of death which could come from either the anger of minor deities who threatened some evil on an individual, a family, clan or whole tribe or kingdom. At this point sacrifices, including human sacrifices, could be ordered although they were in many societies very rare.17 Tribal wars were a result of many forces, the basic of which was threatening life either through lack of enough space, food, and other basic necessities or a neighbouring enemy country or tribe. Generally there was a search for a peaceful solution in order to avoid destroying life. Even where in kingdoms, despotic kings eventually appeared and claimed power over life and death of their own subjects, they were often resisted if they failed to act in service of life. Normally people appealed to the deity and to the Supreme Being for arbitration and finally justice. In Buganda, for example, it is believed that no one who kills an innocent person will ever be happy in his/her life, and in the

understood in relation to life. It is that which delivers from all forms of oppression and natural forces that diminish and threaten life including any forms of slavery, poverty, disease, ignorance that are obstacles to blossoming of life. Liberation is still conceived in the capacity to increase life and offer circumstances, goods, and materials be they physical or spiritual for sustaining life, protecting it, augmenting it and defending it. Liberty is found to be essential to the reality of life and is understood as emancipation from socio-economic oppression and natural evils. It is also consciousness of self-giving to others and of being accepted by them, self-determination and power for self-actualization and construction as a subject that is protagonist of his destiny as he lives it in the community.

Life: The reality that unites the African worldview and the Christian mission

As we have already noted life is central to the African worldview. But a sober examination of the Bible reveals that life is, in fact, at the centre of Mission. Mission is God’s love to the world. It is an action of God who defines himself as Love. It is a love that is full of purpose, that is, to communicate life to its fullness. At creation we see this living and loving God, calling things from non-existence to existence. After calling light into existence and having set heaven and earth and waters in their right places on the first and second days (Genesis 1:1-6) as if to set a stage for life, came the powerful divine command that earth and waters produce life and so it was (Genesis 1:234). Finally appeared human life as a culmination of God’s creative act to take charge of what he had created. The basic command, with the divine blessings is to unfold in fruitfulness and abundant life (Genesis 1:25-31). From the beginning of the bible, there is therefore a great appreciation of life in all its forms. The attitudes we find in the pages of the bible indicate that the human being hopefully and entirely pursues life as a sacred gift of God, one that the mystery and liberty of God brings forth.

Life is a theme that occurs abundantly in the Old Testament. ‘It is not merely that life is the initial presupposition of all goods and all striving. The possession of life is through out the Old Testament an intrinsic good, which cannot be relativised. It is indeed the supreme good.’

God is invoked as the living God (Jeremiah 3:16; Psalm 42), who endures forever, saves, delivers and performs sign. He is the one who is the one Who I am (Exodus 3:14). One of his great qualities is giving life in abundance and intervening on every front to sustain life, to protect it, and lead it to its destiny through divine providence. God gives human life special protection (Genesis 9:5; Exodus 20:5). His visit and presence to Zion will lead to the ideal moment, men and women growing to old age and sitting in the company of the young playing (Zechariah 8:3-5). Life is itself precious, especially human life that appears as the crowning point of creation. The human being is ready to sacrifice everything to preserve life (Job 2:4; Psalm 27:13).

The pursuit for wisdom has life or length of life as its goal. Life is always fragile and is threatened by death; the psalmist thus prays that God makes him know the shortness of life that he can become wise (Psalm 90:12). He should not fall into the foolishness of the godless who do not think of life beyond the grave, for indeed God created the human beings to be immortal (Wisdom 2:23). Though this fact is a later discovery, it shows how gradually Israel recognized that there is life beyond the grave and this very fact determined the way human beings were to conduct themselves. The motif was life eternal.

In the New Testament, the theme of life becomes even more accentuated with the revelation in Jesus Christ. The gospel is the gospel of life. In Jesus Christ who is the Gospel for the World, God defines Himself as love and manifests his purpose through this very Son when he affirms in John 10:10, ‘I have come that they may have life and have it to the full’. Jesus Christ, the perfect revealer of the Father, the very sacrament of God’s love, defines himself as the life, the giver of life giving water (John 4:15-17), the bread of life (John 6), and one who served life within his earthly ministry, fighting all forces that attacked and diminished or even exterminated life through his exorcisms, miracles and healings, and taught his disciples to be servants in service of life.

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20 This truth is well treated by John Paul II in the document, Evangelii Gnt, 25th May 1985 in AAS 76 (1985) 409-522.
He teaches us that life is at the centre of Christian mission and service to it is, in fact, the fundamental task of it all. Jesus Christ as the concretization of God's love and the truly sent one of the Father preaches life (Matthew 6:25). For him saving life is more important than intransigent observance of the law of the Sabbath (Mark 3:4). He makes it clear that God is of the living and not of the dead (Mark 12:27). Jesus Christ cures and restores life as if he could not tolerate the presence of death and Mary argues rightly that if Jesus had been present his brother would not have died (John 11:32). In response to this situation Jesus calls Lazarus to life and also makes the fundamental affirmation: 'I am the resurrection, anyone who believes in me, even though that person dies, will, live and whoever lives and believes in me will never die' (John 11:25). He becomes, therefore, the guarantor of life both here and beyond death. This brings us to another important point. In this person God has sent to be the sacrament of his life giving love among us is life itself. St John clearly affirms that Christ the Eternal Word possessed life from all eternity (John 1:4). He is the Word of life and Master of all life (John 5:26). He among other things is life itself. I am the life... (John 14:6), he tells us. After the resurrection, the early Christian community understood better that Jesus Christ is the Lord of life who gives life since he has the life giving Spirit (1 Corinthians 15:3; Acts 3:13). The church's mission is to announce this life boldly to the people (Acts 5:20).

In the whole Bible, therefore, a clear theme of life appears. Service to life becomes the fundamental task of the individual and the community after recognising that life comes from contact with God. God among other things is presented as a shepherd who takes care of the flock and takes pains that it grows, the wounded are taken care of, the sick are healed, the weak are strengthened, the healthy are maintained (Ezekiel 34). Jesus Christ does not hesitate to declare Himself the shepherd at the Father's heart to give life for the sheep (John 10).

His earthly mission indicates that service to the kingdom was fundamental but certainly central to it is the service to life, for God's kingdom is simply not of limitless objects, it is a reality where God's love holds sway, giving life in abundance. That is what Jesus came for, lived for and died for (cf. Luke 4:16-22; John 10:10). It is the mission that he has left to his church, both as means and agent of life-giving activity both in the natural and supernatural order (John 20:20-23; Luke 24:44; Mark 16:20; Matthew 28:16-20).

The fundamental attitude that generates life, promotes it and safeguards and defends it is compassion. God through the bible is known as a compassionate God. The very first and special form of love is what the bible calls compassion. God is love. Exodus 34:6 gives us the description of Yahweh: 'Yahweh, Yahweh, God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in faithful love and constancy.' God in many cases confronted with the situation of human suffering and misery, he is described as compassionate when he takes action on their behalf. He is described as feeling compassion for the suffering human being.

The New Testament describes Jesus Christ that way when he is faced with an ugly situation of human need. He feels compassion for them. The word compassion translates the Hebrew word rahman meaning mercy. The Hebrew root is taken from 'the womb of a woman'. It refers to that feeling by the mother when a child is in danger. The love that goes beyond reason and emotion and becomes completely gratuitous, with no reciprocity implied or expected. This is the concept applied to Jesus Christ in the situation of human suffering. The Greek equivalent is σπλανγχνισμός implying the physical feeling of mercy. It is also the term used in the story of the unforgiving servant, the prodigal son and the Good Samaritan. In this parable of the Samaritan compassion indicated the complete willingness to use all possible means, time, strength and life for saving at the crucial moment. Thus compassionate love is that unconditional feeling by which one is moved to help and assist the other person and promote his/her well being. It is geared at restoring life and increasing it. It is therefore not surprising that the only one commandment Jesus Christ left to his disciples is Love (John 15:12-13), which in turn will be the criterion for the final judgement (Matthew 25:31-46).

This exploration makes us see that at the base both of the Christian mission and the African worldview is the reality of life. It serves as the common denominator to both. When, therefore, one presents mission as service to life, one will be better appreciated and understood without contradicting the revealed truth. That very choice will lead a missionary to discover what range of activities, even those considered secular, fit in the reality of mission. Seen in the African worldview it will give added areas of involvement without fear of overstepping.
Mission broadened by the African worldview of centrality of life

As noted above, life permeates the concerns of both mission and the African worldview. From the African viewpoint mission can be defined as God’s life-giving activities directed to the world and the church’s mandate of commitment of service to life under His guiding power. Understood that way, new ways of living mission emerge, and a whole series of activities, which at first sight seem profane and outside mission are discovered to belong to it.

Let me begin with some of the activities which are evidently part of the Christian mission and show how in the light of mission as service to life model, receive new flavour. In the first place, mission as service to life in the light of the African worldview will mean that proclamation is central to the mission. For the African, life comes from contact with God who is its source; this contact is through various ways, mostly through ancestors. What is important is to know the underlying reason, life cannot come, blossom and increase in abundance if one is cut off from God its source and the ancestors He has constituted as its mediators. Christian faith teaches that God now speaks to all human beings in his own Son Jesus Christ (cf. Hebrews 1:1-2).

This Jesus Christ is made known through many ways and this is proclamation (cf. Romans 10:14-15). Thus proclamation, which makes the individual come to know and have contact with the God of life, will become very central and meaningful in doing mission in Africa. It must be done in such a way that all the concepts and symbols found in each language and culture that make the people have access to God are fully utilized. It will also mean that ancestors are to be given a place in the Christina tradition; they are not contradictory to it. They simply enrich it. It is just enough to recognize their role and Christianise it. Catechesis which is geared at deepening the word of God in order to create a mature individual Christian and community will focus on bringing up a person with a developed capacity and sense of responsibility towards service to life in all its dimensions.

The other important point to note is that mission will take on a new dimension as a life-giving liturgical celebration. All sacraments are life-giving signs and they should be presented as effective signs in service of life. The Eucharist, for example, will have greater significance if it is viewed in the light of life. In the Eucharist, those who celebrate it have contact with Jesus Christ the Lord of life. He, in this celebration, instructs them on the art of serving life, transmitting it, preserving it, protecting, increasing it and defending it especially through his divine word, but also through the communion that comes from the celebration and the fundamental attitude that makes life blossom, that is compassion. For in fact “the renewal in the Eucharist of the covenant between the Lord and man draws the faithful and sets them afame with Christ’s love”.29 He too nourishes and strengthens their life by feeding them with his own body and blood, thus communicating to them both the divine life and the grace to be able to serve life with utmost commitment strengthened by his very life. Indeed “from the liturgy and particularly the Eucharist grace is poured forth upon us as from a fountain”.30 In celebrating the Eucharist they also have the surety of protection from other dangerous evils and principalities that wish to diminish both their life and that of the community.

The third point to note is that mission in service to life will be directed at the human person who according to the African worldview is the centre of the world and all are in service of him. In this way, all activities will be geared at enhancing this human subject to have fullness of life and be the protagonist of the journey to increase life and protect it.

Mission as service to life will mean that each Christian, since everyone who genuinely holds that name should be a missionary, must put himself or herself at the service of life. This means that each individual Christian and every given Christian community is called to the service of life. In the first place, to enhance all that increases life, promotes it, sustains and makes it blossom now and in the life to come (where according to the African worldview in vicinity of God the very source of life, they will acquire the fullness of life beyond the reach of death). This imposes on each individual, on the community and especially community leaders to invent means and ways of how to increase life, transmit it, improve it and defend it better, through better feeding, better housing, and clothing, with other basic needs that make life blossom. This demands hard work, planning, and intelligent sustainable development. There is also a need to develop proper relationships, to the Supernatural world, to the world of human beings and to the world of nature. It will mean seeking better ways of organizing the society so that it can always be better suited to achieve its purpose of increasing life, defending it, and improving it. At this level

29. Vatican Council II, Sacrae Constantes, in AAS 56 (1964) 97-134. (Hereafter to be referred to as SC); SC 10.
30. SC 10.
one will discover that politics, which is the art of organising society for the realization of the common good, is simply part of church mission.

Furthermore, each individual and each Christian community must devise means of developing and acquiring tools of detecting enemies of life and the ways to avoid them, deal with them or extinguish them. This calls for the duty to educate all at all levels in formal and informal ways to gain such capacity. Education thus in its formal and informal dimensions will never be considered at the periphery of church mission, nor can it be considered *propaganda evangelica*, nor indirect evangelisation. It is not uncommon to hear some highly placed Christians in the church noting that education is simply an appendix of Christian mission, for the first duty of mission is preaching the word of God. Education simply belongs to the heart of church mission according to the African worldview. For in fact, the more a society has the capacity to educate its own and give it tools to enhance life and detect enemies against life, the nearer it tends towards a more desired society. It is such education and formation that will engender that lost consciousness of the sacredness and inviolability of life and save the continent of the scandalous wars that have at the hands of human beings caused and continue causing much loss of life. This will also help to halt the problem of refugees, internally displaced people and migrants, but also assist with new enthusiasm those trapped in such conditions.

In the African worldview, those who have invented and created new wisdom that enhances life and promotes it are always admired and respected. This of course will give church food for thought on the many dedicated men and women who work day and night to generate new knowledge for the betterment of life. It is surprising that many of them are not given much attention and what are presented to her members, as those for emulation are those who have excelled in faith and morals. This is all right but in the African worldview it is simply not enough. Medicine people, technicians, good administrators (because they have a evolved a system of governance that enhances life) were all held in high regard, as long as in their work they developed that which enhanced and promoted life. Many loved to name their children after them when they had crossed the threshold of this life. It is, therefore, important that the church in doing mission encourages, motivates and supports those members in the community that have demonstrated a special capacity to develop and invent tools for faster production and work. They should even organise shows and put gifts for one, for example, in Uganda who can devise a machine for pressing Banana wine. We have in Uganda a group of engineers called Katwe but not many pay attention to them. They have devised many tools suited for the Ugandan development, but they are simply despised, even by some highly placed church members. This is lamentable. Traditional medicine people are often despised and maltreated against, and their work is often branded witchcraft and superstition. Yet some of them possess knowledge of plant trees and herbs that are very medicined and could easily complement western medicine. I remember one time one of my nephews, a lad of 11 years, got a terrible *herpes zoster* that hit him on the stomach. He was taken to Kitovu hospital and given western medicine but to no avail, he cried through the night with incredible pain. Our grandmother came to know of his sickness and prepared for him a traditional herb mixed in cow gee, it was applied on him and made immediate effect. The boy got cured in two days. Yet some simply called her a witch for having treated a disease that western medicine could not deal with so fast.

The task of the Christian and the Christian community seen in the light of mission as service to life would be to eliminate that which is inimical to life, that which menaces it, and finally exterminates it. Here we are in the area of evil, for evil is that which threatens life, diminishes it, stunts it and eventually destroys. Mission thus as service to life means fighting evil. Evil in the African worldview is thus experienced as something very real and tangible, manifesting itself in many forms as it strikes against life: pain, sickness, demon-possession, personal sin, immorality, selfishness, bareness, and all other threats against the life as it is lived by the individual and the community. The first form of evil to deal with is sin in both its personal and structural form. This is because according to the African worldview, life comes from contact with God and the supernatural world. Sin understood as an injury of the relationship first and foremost between God and the individual person and the community, it blocks the very access to the font of life. It is thus the very first one to fight. Thus the church and any worker of evangelisation will not hesitate to fight his own sin and that within the community in order to always assure the life-giving communication between God and the people. This as has been testified to and preached by Jesus Christ, comes through conversion and repentance. This, in fact, Jesus made the first demand from all as he began his activity of inaugurating the kingdom of God whose content is salvation and ultimately life itself (Mark 1:14-15). Nyamit argues that
this harmatological perspective should be the point of departure from which any theologising should be orientated in order to fight effectively against any form of oppression. 31

Once that form of evil that blocks communication has been dealt with (of course this is an ongoing battle), then comes the fight against the evil that directly destroys life completely. This includes death, through murder, abortion, wars, suicides, terrorism, witchcraft and sorcery. Fighting against these evils that cause direct loss of life belongs to the church’s very mission and that of every Christian. The next evil to be fought are those evils that obstruct life, things like disease, famine, violence, the political social-economic structures that lead to pauperisation of whole people 32 and lead them to anthropological poverty diminishing their life and even reducing it to the level of that of animals and even lower as Mveng notes. 33 A commitment to life must influence every worker of evangelisation. Every Christian community and the church at large must deal with such evils including the capacity of taking appropriate decisions and more effective means of dealing with, for example diseases like AIDS which is diminishing the continent, other than mere adherence to hypothetical principles that deal not with the concrete person but with the hypothetical individual. This also will call for taking into account the ministry of healing in the church, which healing must be holistic, touching the individual on the physical, psychological, moral, and spiritual level.

The other form of evil to attack is that which makes the natural world in which the human being lives dangerous. Here we are in the camp of ecological crisis, environmental degradation and destruction of ecosystems, pollution, misuse of nature, extravagance with and depleting of irreplaceable resources, cruelty to animals, irresponsible extinction of plant life through burning or uncontrolled feeding of domestic animals on growing vegetation, over development, deforestation, extinctions of species and cultures, hazardous technological products and desacralization. These and many others, which make the environment dangerous for the growth of life, must be fought. Indeed today the need for a clean and healthy environment and the duty to protect it is felt strongly. Thus the Earth summit in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, called for sustainable development by which economic growth and protection of the environment go together. 34 John Paul II, in his World day of peace statement 1990 focused on the environment, laments the lack of respect for nature and the destruction of the environment. He called on the Christians to realize their responsibility within creation and their duty towards nature and the Creator as an essential part of their faith. 35 Yet it is not surprising that many workers of evangelization pay little or no attention at all to the ecological and environmental dimension as an essential part of their mission. Thus assisted by the African worldview, and a rich Christian theology of creation, a good, healthy and clean environment will be sought where life can flourish and blossom.

There is still another point to consider. This is in the area of society, in its culture, running and organization. Society even from its smallest cell, that is, the family is intended to be a cradle of life, where it springs, grows and blossoms. There are customs, practices and attitudes that become anti-life as society goes on. Here we can mention some. In some African cultures one can still find human sacrifice. This is direct attack on life and it must be fought. Infanticide is also existent in some areas especially in relation to the children who are handicapped or have some physical deformity, the twins in some cultures are feared and so killed or abandoned in the forest to die there, albinos and other physically disadvantaged people who are mistreated. There is a spirit of revenge in some cultures, which leads to murder and eliminating whole families. There are also cases of fatalism where many Africans tend to explain all their misfortunes, namely poverty, ignorance, oppression and exploitation as God given, it is their fate and nothing can be done about it. Such fatalism puts life in danger and even diminishes it. It is thus an evil to be fought. In some cultures one can find mutilations which may include circumcision of women, selling of younger girls to older men for money, oppression of widows and grabbing their property from them because they have no right to inheritance, ethnic superiority and inferiority which lead to ethnic wars that have lead to much loss of life, the belligerent cultures that praise and groom warriors while mocking peace lovers and

31 Nyanitit, Stutia Missionarit, 243.
tions. Thus participation in the democratic process and developing an authentic theology of democracy is not foreign to church mission.39

Finally, one will consider the question of the cross, self-sacrifice and martyrdom in the whole project of mission. The centrality of life in the African worldview might give one the impression that one has to cling to life and cannot give it up or even risk it for the good of another or the community. To quieten down such fears, it is beneficial to note that service to life demands absolute commitment even to the point of giving up oneself life. Here it must be noted that in the African worldview death is not the end of life but the gateway to another life. It is a passage to world of ancestors, where in fullness of life one enjoys both peace and acquires supernatural power to mediate life and see evils against life that the living cannot see. The Baganda, for example, had a song that people used to sing in times of distress. It runs: ‘Nabubwa wa, sitindisa w consisting of two parts, translated as ‘Nabubwa wa, mwanjira’ and ‘Nabubwa wa, mwanjira’ (where will I rest, I will rest in magombe, where there is no cultivation of sweet potatoes, egg plants and beans). The Baganda disliked things like potatoes, egg plants and beans and so in this song they express the desire to rest in Magombe where there is no growth of such things and where they will find rest from the hard work that tormented them in this life. To die oboga from the word oboga (meaning to change) meant not ending life but changing of state.39 Thus service to life carried a commitment that would lead to self-sacrifice, risking of life and offering one own life, life in defend the life of the child, the beloved one, the members of the family, of the clan, tribe and the kingdom. All who offered their life that way were admired as heroes. But more still is the conviction that one who died in defence of life joined immediately the company of the ancestors. When it comes to the Christian revelation it even becomes clearer, for Christ having suffered for us through the cross defeated death and having risen from the dead, is our guarantor of eternal life after death (1 Corinthians 15:20). Thus life spent in the service to life, even if sometimes it means great suffering and even martyrdom, is not life wasted. It is to blossom into abundant life in the life to come. Of course in a small paper like this one may not exhaust what mission as service to life may imply. What we have given is simply a few


indication of what richness can flow from such a model. It is to be noted that this model makes missionary praxis life oriented, and the church and Christians all pro-life agents, life in all its dimensions. It is a model that makes the church an authentic agent of integral liberation and development. It is thus not surprising that liberation will be giving life as Gustavo Gutiérrez affirms.\(^{46}\) She will be a preacher of justice, peace and love in the measure in which they foster and enhance life. The church becomes the champion of the voiceless, the marginalized and the poor, not out of mere pity but because it is her duty to serve life and fight against all that dehumanises life, threatens it and diminishes it. It is her duty to help those whose life is in crisis because of their difficult position. The church becomes a prophet that denounces with courage the structures of sin and all ideologies that are anti-life. This she does because she is herself enlivened and vivified by the Triune God. He out of love and compassion acts to give life, sustain it, protect it and lead it to its fulfillment at the end of time when his love will hold sway over history and life will be experienced in its fullness in abundance beyond the reach of death. This is the hope of human beings. It is not a vain hope because it is based on the promise that comes from one who is the living and creator God, recognised as such both by the Africans and the Christians.

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