

Appendix B: African Indigenous Religious Traditions

A prayer service to be used in appendix B of Exploring the Religions of our World.

Leader: The following is a reflection by Desmond Tutu, an Anglican archbishop from South Africa who won the Nobel Peace prize in 1984 for his work to oppose apartheid. His reflection touches on the wonder and awe all human people share when they are touched by the divine.

Reader 1: All of us are by nature worshipful. We may worship God to whom we ascribe his due, his worth. That is true worship. Or, we may give a false worship to money, to status, etc. Are we not often awestruck before the grandeur of some imposing mountain range, or when we behold a glorious sunset, or a still, moonlit night with the stars winking in a dark blue sky? I have heard that scientists wax ecstatic and break into poetic utterance because of the aesthetic qualities of some scientific experiment and the truth that it will have proven. In the presence of a good and holy person most of us will be overcome with awe. Standing near Mother Teresa, or Nelson Mandela, or Mahatma Gandhi, you know you are standing on holy ground.

Reader 2: On such occasions words are often so utterly inadequate. We too have moments when we are struck speechless, as when we are stunned by the beauty of the snowcapped Mt. Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, or the majestic roar of the Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe. Our instinctive worshipfulness then comes to the fore with all these created things; how much more when we encounter the Source of it all—God, who is Beauty,

Truth and Goodness? Then we want to fall down to worship and adore the one whose glory fills the heavens and the earth. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts."

Leader: Let us pray together this Shona hymn to the "Great Spirit":

All: Great Spirit!

Piler-up of the rocks into towering mountains!

When you stamp on the stones

the dust rises and fills the land.

Hardness of the cliff,

waters of the pool that turn

into misty rain when stirred.

Creator . . . who sews the heavens together like cloth,

knit together everything here on the earth below.

You are the one who calls the branching trees into life;

you make new seeds grow out of the ground

so that they stand straight and strong.

You have filled the land with people.

Wonderful one, you live

among the sheltering rocks.

You give rain to us people.

We pray to you,

hear us, O Strong One!

When we beg you, show your mercy.

You are in the highest places

with the spirits of the great ones.

You raise the grass-covered hills

above the earth,

and you make the rivers.

Gracious one!

Leader: Now take a moment to think about a way you have experienced God's goodness, truth, or beauty today. Give thanks for that experience in your heart.