



RESEARCH ARTICLE

THEOLOGICAL AMBIGUITIES: A CHALLENGE TO A CONSTRUCTIVE ECOTHEOLOGY IN AFRICA

*Andrew Ratanya Mukaria

Det teologiske Menighetsfakultet Gydas vei 4. Postboks 5144 Majorstuen 0302 Oslo

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 18th March, 2013
Received in revised form
17th April, 2013
Accepted 21st April, 2013
Published online 12th May, 2013

Key words:

Theology,
Ecotheology,
African Theology,
African Religion and Culture,
Anglican Church in Kenya,
African Inland Church in Kenya.

ABSTRACT

This paper is written following an evaluation of the church role towards ecological crisis that is happening at the Mau forest complex in Kenya. The place of the church in Kenya, and Africa is central, and the church theology still plays a normative role. Mau forest complex is a very important ecological feature in Kenya, and a major catchment area. As much as this very vital ecological feature and a major catchment area is experiencing degradation, churches in Kenya have remained aloof silent, and if anything is happening, it is not something tangible in comparison to the actions taken by the churches in Kenya towards other socio-economic and political issues in Kenya. It is within this understanding therefore that this paper is written to evaluate the reason behind this silence.

Copyright, IJCR, 2013, Academic Journals. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

The paper is written following the question, "how is the Anglican Church in Kenya (ACK), Eldoret and African Inland Church (aic), Eldoret responding to the crisis of the Mau forests complex as it faces the ecological degradation"? The Mau forest complex, one of largest catchment area in Kenya is facing the greatest crisis of degradation through human activities. The paper is an ecotheological paper, written to explore the role church is playing and/or played towards this crisis. The paper engages some data that were collected empirically through interviews from the two above named churches, and analyses them using Santmire ambiguity theory (Santmire 1985:9). The paper does not represent the methods applied, rather it presents the views of the informants and it does not reviews the informants true identity, since the names have been changed for the purpose of study. But the information that is contained hereby is true verbatim of the informants views. The starting point of this analysis is the data derived from the study of the phenomenon. Santmire presents to us the ambiguity theory. The theory is built upon two motifs which he thinks influences so much how Christians responds to ecological issue. These motifs are the *spiritual* and the *ecological* motifs (Santmire 1985:11). The spiritual motif according to Santmire expresses a 'religious worldview that, if not outright hostile to the natural world, is at the very least unconcerned with its state of existence.' The motif is "predicated on a vision of the human spirit rising above nature in order to ascend to supra-mundane communion with God." The motif originated from the root metaphor, *the metaphor of ascent*. The ecological motif on the other hand expresses, "the human spirit rootedness in the world of nature and on the desire of self-consciously embodied selves to celebrate God's presence in, with, and under the whole biophysical order..." (Santmire 1985:11). The motif originates from these two metaphors, *metaphor of fecundity* and *the metaphor of migration to good land*. The ambiguity therefore that Santmire suggests has been expressed in two quite different trends. One is the notion of the human spirit rising above the mundane level of life in order to commune with

God, and the other is to envisage human life as much more embedded in the natural world, and finding God's presence very much within the biosphere. So in other words, one motif is not leaned towards ecological direction, and the other motif is more ecological friendly. While analysing with Santmire. I begin with the ambiguity theory which is defined by two motifs, spiritual and ecological. Spiritual motif originates from the metaphor of ascent. Ecological motif on the other hand will be discussed as the conflicting side of spiritual motif which leads to the ambiguity. The motif originates from metaphors of fecundity and migration to the good land metaphor.

Spiritual motif and Ecological motif

Using Santmire theory I take a closer look, how the believers of the Anglican Church, Eldoret and African Inland Church have approached the ecological issues read within the ambiguous understandings of the dynamics of the spiritual motif or ecological motif. These two motifs as they were introduced have been considered as the key factors that determine the way people respond to the environmental issues. This concept characterizes various approaches, and our attitude towards a practical action to ecology, or leading to failure to act at all. These may be also be the main factors that have influenced Christians in Anglican Church, Eldoret and African Inland Church, Eldoret towards their approach to the Mau forest complex as it faces degradation crisis. For example, where a believer feels that the destruction of this world equals to salvation or does not affect their personal salvation, such an individual will tend to be leaned towards a spiritual motif instead of an ecological one. On the other hand an individual who feels that God is eminently visible through the natural world, and sometimes how they treat nature is imperative to their closer relationship with God, such an individual will be leaning more towards the ecological motive. This is the ambiguity that is laid within the church, the theological unity or differences notwithstanding.

Spiritual Motif

The spiritual motif according to Santmire originates from the metaphor of ascent. Using the archetypal image of an "overwhelming mountain, "Santmire asserts the metaphor of ascent as the metaphor

that is most inherently *anti-ecological*. The goal in this metaphor is to rise above the earthly world toward the ethereal, supernatural realm of pure spirit. It is when the metaphor of ascent is continuously manifested in Western theology that it forms the “spiritual motif.”

Metaphor of Ascent

In discussing this metaphor further, I have created some themes which cannot be directly associated with Santmire, but which have emerged from Santmire view of the Spiritual motif in the light of the informant's views. Most of the members of the two case studied churches, their religious theological differences notwithstanding fell in this category. This is where they attributed their spirituality as the key feature in their life, a direction different from the ecological perspective or what the earth contains. I divided the informants view into two category following Santmire understanding of the metaphor of ascent. The two categories are: - “*the escapist eschatology and divine will/will of God spirituality*.” It is within these two categories that the views of the informants are discussed within the understanding of Santmire metaphor of ascent.

Escapist Eschatology

Escapist eschatology is a notion that minimizes attention on the present ‘life’ (earthly), and its afflictions in favour of a rather singular focus on the world to come. It holds the view that believers are indeed strangers and foreigners in the earth, living as those just passing through, with eyes fixed on the eternal city God has prepared for them, then believers may be justified to pay little attention to a homeland that does not belong to them (that is the present homeland-earth). This paper hereby attempts to put the views of the informants who fall under this category, with an escapist nature, away from the responsibility to care for the creation in the light of eschatological redemption. Informant Rono stated that, This is never my day to day painstaking concept, but being put in a situation where I am presented with a choice between the present world and the world to come, I will absolutely choose the world to come. Yes! It sounds ridiculous, because the present world is worthy, because it provides me with all my present needs, but as a believer the future, that is the everlasting life is the most noble and most instrumental thing, that I should spent all my life yearning, and hoping for. This is the same reason why Abraham left his ancestor land, having faith in God to a world unknown, that God had promised. Like Abraham therefore, we must prepare ourselves to leave this land, because we are sojourners. But before we leave this land, we must be good stewards. (Rono, interview on 9th January 2011).

The spiritual notion held by many Christian has created escapist kind of spirituality, which is uncaring and reluctant towards environmental issues. It is a “so what” kind of notion. Informant Kiprop stated that, ...the earthly matters are not important, the earth will pass away, our bodies are evil and sinful only the spirit is good, we should not seek the earthly kingdom, but heavenly one. (Kiprop, interview on 10th January 2011). The above quote from Rono and Kiprop portrays the reality of what Santmire referred to as the ‘ascent of soul above the earth’. This therefore saws that Santmire theory is not just a far-fetched thing out there, but a real challenge not only of the Western Christianity, but the Christianity, even at grassroots level, even though in a Southern context shaping their attitude and action on how they should approach the ecological challenges. Some of the informants in these two case studied churches ACK, and AIC defined the Christianity in the context as “that of withdrawal from earthly matters, in other words it is better to say it is heavenly bound type of Christianity.” To quote the informant Kiprop as one of the informants, he spoke in the support of the subject above, of the soul ascending above the earth matter in order to attain salvation and the below subject of the ‘migration’ to a good land. Our personal salvation has dominated our mind, and this view has led to ‘us’ being arrogant and individualistic, a factor that we human being think only about ourselves, and attach no value to the non-human world. This is because we have been taught what matters is our ‘personal’ salvation,

that will see us leave a better life in heaven that will come since this world and that is in it will one day pass away. (Kiprop, interview on 10th January 2011).

The above quote holds the notion that our very salvation is attainable by escaping from this world, and going to another world. This idea builds a concept, that to be saved is to be not in deep touch with material world, the so called ‘earthly’ matters. Informant Kiplimo states that...” The church teachings are bound towards our individual salvation(s), and not the earth and any other matter, for this world will pass away.” (Kiplimo, interview on 10th January 2011). The ‘*parousia*’ is also a concept that was aired by informants which within my view falls under this category of “spiritual motif” of ambiguity theory. Parousia is a central teaching within Christian religion; it is a teaching that holds that Jesus will come back, to judge the world and establish the kingdom of God. This notion has made many to view that this world is not worthy a world to welcome Christ son of God, therefore as one sign of his coming the world and its resources should have been exhausted. Kiplimo stated that, ...the church teaches that since Christ is coming soon, so these are the signs of the time. This view has built a bad connotation that human beings have no responsibility to what is happening; rather they should assist by exhausting the earth's resources to speed the coming of Christ. (Kiplimo, interview on 10th January 2011). The view therefore builds an ideal that the destruction of the world by all means is imperative to our own personal salvation, because Christ coming is purposely meant for the humanity...his bride the church. If Christ is coming to get us, and if God is in control," they say, "why should we worry at all about the state of the environment?" This view is more common than you might think, and it is sadly unbiblical. First, while God has certainly promised to help and aid His people, this providential care will not protect us from the results of human sin and negligence, now will it be a one sided affair, it will be the salvation that is “Christo-centred” saving the entire world including nature. For God through Christ become naturally a ‘man’ to save the whole cosmos.

Divine Will/Will of God spirituality...

Divine will or will of God spirituality, depending on which school of thought one ascribes to is a concept that God has a plan for the humanity and therefore what happens to human being is according to his divine plan. It is something that is in contrast to the human will, or cannot be ascribed to human-made laws and principles. The ‘divine will’ spirituality, easily referred to in Kenya as ‘*Mapenzi ya Mungu*’,¹ is a spirituality that leaves humans at the mercy of the destiny, with no place for self-effort. We are plain slaves, bound and stuck until God finds time to look at our ‘sufferings’ from his long list of ‘priority’ of saving others who are ‘higher’ placed in suffering hierarchy than us. Hope in this case too seems to vanish into thin air when humanities are plagued by such a thought. This kind of spirituality, I may refer to it as presenting “anti-ecological spirituality concept”. The beholders of the view stated that, what is happening in the world is part of the divine framework, which is happening as defined by the ‘divine will’. To see what informant Kuria stated as seen here. Nothing happens in this world beside what God had planned. The events that are happening in the world, wars, crimes and global warming are all signs that we have wronged God, and by that we should repent. God cannot be mocked, we are responsible of our own doing and his judgement is upon us. We cannot change anything from God's will. (Kuria, interview on 9th January 2011). Informant Ouko stated that, “God is a master planner; he plans all events and seasons in this world. Christians should watch and pray, for the signs of the time are visible that Christ is coming soon”. (Ouko, interview on 10th January 2011). Another informant attributed the environmental degradation to the divine order, where God is in control, and human beings have nothing

¹ This is a Swahili word, meaning ‘God will/God's wish’ ...It is a term loosely used in Kenyan context especially where human being are expressing impossibility on the issue they cannot change. Especially when someone dies or any natural catastrophe that is beyond human magnitude, you will hear people say...that was “*mapenzi ya Mungu*” (God will).

they can do/do much, and what they can do is seeking God to act within his divine will to avert the degradation. The informant who stated this view was Mugambi. The informants stated that, There must be a divine power behind all what is happening in the world today. I believe that behind every event, God is in control. Nothing happens in this world by chance. The only way the church can help in this prevailing disaster is through leading people to repentance. (Mugambi, interview on 12th January 2011). A personal salvation concept...that the suffering of the earth is imperative to human suffering and visa-versa), this is the only way that can change what was meant for evil to good. Another informant with this notion was informant Jeptich who stated that. All the earth and what is therein belongs to the Lord," (Psalm 24:1, 1 Cor. 10:26). Human beings have only been placed in the central position to take care of the creation and all other beings as it is written in the book of Genesis. 2:15, and to continue the good works of the Lord, of keeping nature good and sustaining it for generations to come, but in reality, it means that God is the rightful owner and we therefore have no greater say in what happens in the world, though we ought to act responsibility. (Jeptich, interview on 9th January 2011).

Ecological Motif

The Ecological motif revolves and/or is built upon the metaphor of fecundity and migration to good land. Like the Spiritual motif above, these metaphors will also be discussed within the views of the informants of the two studied churches.

Fecundity

To Santmire the metaphor fecundity infuses one's awareness with life's beauty, wonder, and awe, causing one not to seek to rise above or leave the land, but rather, to commune with it in new ways. Fecundity is a metaphor that can also be in great touch with African tradition religion and Philosophy. In most African communities, "African religiousness is not a matter of adherence to a doctrine but is concerned with supporting *fecundity* and *sustaining* the community." (African Religion, in the Encyclopedia Britannica's guide to Black History). African religions emphasize maintaining a harmonious relationship with the divine powers, and their rituals attempt to harness cosmic powers and channel them for good. Ritual is the means by which a person negotiates responsible relationships with other members of the community, with the ancestors, with the spiritual forces of nature, and with the god/s. In this case therefore there are two things which are presented here that propagate African religiousness within an African perspective, fecundity and sustainability, which is geared towards Ancestors, Spiritual forces of nature and god/s. Fecundity is therefore a very important concept when studying and doing ecotheology within an African context. This is because there is a conceived '*African religiousness*' within any African Christian, even if they profess Christian beliefs otherness. African religiousness has an aspect of close relationship between spirituality, and environment/nature. Mbiti says that, It is in this complex of religiosity that the preaching of the gospel makes sense; it is this preparedness that has undergirded the spreading of the gospel like wildfire among African societies which had hitherto followed and practiced traditional religion. Consequently, people are discovering that the biblical faith is not harmful to their religious sensibilities. This is, obviously, a general statement, one which needs detailed elaboration. But in practical terms, there is a Christian Yes to African religiosity. It may be, and needs to be, a qualified and critical Yes. But it is nevertheless a working Yes and one that demands theological understanding. A close geographical correlation exists between the location of African religion and the rapid expansion of the Christian faith. This is not an empty coincidence. It is the southern two-thirds of Africa (including Madagascar) which we can rightly call Christian Africa, as the northern one-third is Muslim Africa. (Mbiti 1980: 817-820). This metaphor therefore when looked within the understanding of the concept of *continuity and discontinuity* as it is advocated by Kwame Bediako, (Bediako 1999), it provides both an ontological and an epistemological continuity with African beliefs and ecological

understanding. Through the above discussion I don't purport that African traditional religion/s is the ideal religion/s in approaching the ecotheology challenges being experienced in Africa. This is because, African religiosities also as some limitations just like Christianity, with anthropocentrism in both religion presenting an ambiguity which has no direct approach to the ecological matters.

Migration to Good Land

Within the ecological motif there is also a metaphor of migration to good land. The metaphor sounds like an 'escapist' metaphor, but to Santmire it is not. This is where he explains that the metaphor of migration to a good land is always rooted in an individual's or community's identity with a particular land experience. Santmire uses the Hebrew people and God's promise to them of deliverance as a primary expression of this metaphor. Out of this example, he stresses this metaphor's theological importance: "In this context . . . to be removed from the land is finally to have no identity whatsoever: to be no one." (Santmire 1985:11). In this metaphor, one's life in general and spiritual life in particular, is always necessarily rooted in a primary experience of the nonhuman world, and with the land being the key factor. Thus, unlike the metaphor of ascent, in this metaphor, one's spiritual experience will be "located not apart from nature, but in the midst of nature, surrounded by the creatures of the earth." (Santmire 1985:11). However, inherently ecological this metaphor may seem, Santmire does point out that what is crucial is the ethical relationship to the land one chooses to embrace, for, as we know, there are many, and dilemma is if one chooses 'spiritual land' at the expense of the 'earthly land'. Most of the informants from the two churches falls under the above two metaphors. Even though the informants were not asked their religiousness connectivity with the Mau forest complex, their understanding of the Mau forest complex was defined as home, life, kinship inheritance and their support system, implicitly or explicitly. Fecundity language was in display; this is in relationship to ancestor, nature and god/s despite their Christian religiousness the language was so audible, with a sense of "associating" with the forest, their close relationship, and embedded roots (migration to the good) concept... that the forest belongs to them and they own it. To quote informant Chemnangoi, Mau forest complex is the largest we have around. I have known the forest since when I was a small child, my parents and grandparents all lived in this area, it is the forest we call home. The deforestation of the forest amount to death warrant and it leads to the extinction of our *ancestral* lands in the Mau forest complex. We shall in effect lose our only home and our birth right. (Chemnangoi, interview on 11th January 2011). The quote above presents not only a fecundity attachment, but also the understanding of the forest belonging to the informants (sense of ownership) even though not direct ownership. But the very fact that the forest is part of their community, with ancestral link-ship makes the informants feel that she owns the forest. Another informants with similar opinion is Rono, he states that.

...I am a habitat of Rift-Valley province, I have known Mau forest complex since when I was a child, and this is the place we used to visit whenever we felt like. For me, this is not a forest, but a place I call home....(Rono, interview on 9th January 2011). This notion of Mau as home was something which was aired by a number of informants who were from the region. It is a view that exhibits loudly the voice of "migration to a good land" metaphor as it was defined by a Santmire. Just like the way Israelites felt they owned the land of promise, so are informant's relationship with the Mau forest complex. Mau within the fecundity thought was also defined as life; informant Kuria said that, Mau forest complex is a forest which is so dear to my life. I was born and brought up near Mau forest complex. My parents and great-grand parents have lived in the area of the Mau forest complex since time in memorial. (Kuria, interview on 9th January 2011). Sharing a similar view was Kiplimo, Mau forest complex is our life. The forest has supported generation; it is part of our society wealth since when we were a hurting, herding community, and now when it comes to the community being a farming community, the forest is still our bedrock, with all rivers, springs and also assurance

for enough rain and rich soil. (Kiplimo interview on 10th January 2011). These views and other similar views as they were stated, shows that the fecundity and migration metaphor to the good land metaphor is/was so real with the informants. Santmire ambiguity theory becomes a reality were you met that as most informants held a spiritual motifs, they also in equal measure held the ecological motifs, hence a conflict that might have limited them to act as good stewards of the Mau forest as envisaged in Christian teachings, because this concept represents a split notion of theology of nature.

Ambiguity Portrayed

Ambiguity in this case can be understood in many ways, ambiguity as contained in Christian traditions (western to be specific), “promising and not promising”. Ambiguity as it is built upon based on different church traditions as they were presented in Kenya/Africa by different missionary tradition (an issue not discussed in Santmire thinking). Lastly, an ambiguity built upon the “folk” theology or rather being an African Christian. The first two kind of ambiguity can be institutionalized, but the last part of ambiguity is individual.

Mission Traditions Ambiguity

As I have stated above my purpose here is to look at some of the informants responses which might be leaning upon the two motifs, which are spiritual and ecological. The ambiguity referred to is “within the Christian wider context”. It is an ambiguity that was displayed by the two churches within their wider theological context. The ambiguity in this case might not be an ambiguity as it was purported by Santmire, “within the uniformity of the Christians traditional of the West...as the one creating this ambiguity.” Rather this ambiguity might be a ‘contextual ambiguity’, found within the diversity of differences in the ‘denominations’ (if I may use the term) rather than the confessions. I have preferred the term denomination over confession because in essence the two churches confession is ‘almost’ similar. What ‘confession’ does the AIC belong in difference to ACK? AIC is a church that has its originality from AIM.² AIM was a ‘group’ of various missionaries, who were more evangelical in their confession from Europe. Later on, the church embraced African religious views as part of their doctrinal standing and structural expression. The ACK on the other hand was as a result of English missionaries/Anglican missionaries from United Kingdom or Europe who established a church with a closer contact with Anglo-Saxon way of life, than that of Africa.

However, the question here is whether these are the true marks of the differences? Not really, their differences are far more than this. The differences are structural....rather than deep theology. The differences are the way the gospel is conveyed, whether in conceptual language, Liturgical, whether the means of communications are in statements or stories, whether it is a theological arguments to the matter or testimonies, not systematic arguments but simple songs with simple applicable meanings, whether it is hermeneutics analysis or healings. Whether conveying ‘lived, practical theology or not’ by this I mean western theologies and churches associated with ‘Western Christianity’ have been seen more as dealing with abstracts, and not the realities of the lived experience at the grassroots. The differences between these two churches can therefore be seen as not only theoretical, but also practical part of applying their teachings and theology. Informant Rotich views might be a practical example of this above raised issue. The Anglican Church of Kenya has integrated the environmental issue within the liturgy; some prayers are actually so specific to the environment issues both social and physical, but my greatest worry is that nothing of this which has been implemented thoroughly at the grassroots. (Rotich, interview on 11th January 2011). A view that is different from AIC that is non-liturgical in all matters of it worship, not only in ecological applications. Christianity came to Africa in many forms, and the various churches tend to operate within

the sub-cultures of their own, original ‘mother’ churches. Most (if not all) of the churches have been very reluctant to change, just operating as they were moulded to function in the Latin, Anglo-Saxon, and Germanic West. They have been slow to seek explicit continuity with some of African traditions, where they can find more support from more stable elements in African society, cultural. So therefore these Christians tenets have always been in conflicts not only with the African traditional values, but also with the own-self. This has therefore ‘limited’ the hope that a stable homogeneous church structure that is running in African for Africa can really be a reality. The church therefore, as African society is facing challenges, from socio-economic, political, spiritual to environmental run a serious risk of particularism and irrelevance in so far as they are unable or unwilling to recognize the values embedded in the society of their mission and also the rapid changes that are happening in these societies. This ambiguity discussed here is therefore that of conflicting theologies, if not conflicting applications of theologies, and in this case Christian theology. This ambiguity is portrayed by these two churches solely based on their differences in theological traditions, a theology which is defined by their ‘traditions’, and something already known by some informants that there is an existence of ambiguity that does not create uniformity in tackling some social matters. This is where informant Rotich stated that,

...the mainline protestant speaks one voice, Catholics another, while Pentecostals speak the other. These differing views of Christian theological understanding in Kenya might be the major limitations to the reason why Christians have not had a common voice on some many issues that needs to be addressed in the society...And as the custodians of the earth and all other created beings... (Rotich, interview on 11th January 2011). The majority of the informants in this case displayed an idea that the role of the Christian Church in colonial Africa was negative. However, the most preoccupying position within the informant, thinking about the church in postcolonial era was that of the extremists. According to them none of the imported religions can better serve Africa and Africans, for they are in total contradiction with the African cosmogony. Notwithstanding the relevance of those critical views, one of the weaknesses of Christian missionaries’ critics was their categorisation of Christians based on their western link among Christian churches operating in Africa. The informants were able to identify these conflicting trends within the churches, thus presenting Christian ambiguity in Africa as a uniform body of men and women operating under the umbrella of a unique and coherent doctrine. Informant Oliech said, How can we respond to this issue as a unified body of Christ if in real sense we don’t communicate a similar spiritual language over various issues that affect us? We all confesse that Christ is our Lord and Saviour, but our approaches and applications to faith matters are so different. This is the challenge we face in challenging many social issues. If you remember well, you know how president Moi used our differences during his one party rule to his advantage. (Oliech, interviewed on 12th January 2011). The best hope therefore of an environmental focused christianity in Africa lies within an establishment of a Christian thoughts, that are not divided and possess powers, expansion, creativity and flexibility to be able to adopt, interact and influence the African society and community.

Individual Ambiguity

This is a theology that is held by an individual, regardless of their denomination traditions/confession. It is a theology that might be understood as an ‘emerging theology’ from an African traditional world view, and practiced in African context, built upon individuals experience as African Christians. Within this study I have found that the conflicting challenge of being an ‘African Christian’ is also ecologically ambiguous, with differing notions within the understanding of Godhead, spiritual world, cosmos, and how they relate to humanity. While exploring the African cosmology, Sindima shows that the African cosmology provides the influential factor on the way to relate to the earth and other forms of life. (Sindima 1990:137). This ambiguous concept can be displayed here,

² AIM means African Inland Mission.

for example, "the Christian notion of the human spirit rising above the mundane level of this world" can be relatively ecotheological bankrupt, but the understanding of African spiritual world is a reality of closeness between the humanity, nature and spiritual realm. African religion is also more embedded in the natural world, and God is presented as being visible within the biosphere. An attribute that is more ecological embedded, even though there are some anthropomorphic tendencies. Mbiti portrays this anthropomorphic character of African religion as he states that, It is very likely that... [Africans] came to believe in God's existence through such a link between heaven and earth. Man was at the centre of the universe, standing on the earth but looking up to the heaven, and that belief began to make sense and fit into man's continued attempt to understand and explain the visible and invisible universe, the earthly and heavenly worlds of which man is the centre. (Mbiti 1991: 41-42). Informant Kuria expressing this ambiguity stated that, How can I come into terms that this world, the environments and nature are good and divine as I was informed by my African heritage, but at the same time try to disassociate within them since they are all passing away? This is my paradox, and I believe it is something that bothers many Christians. (Kuria, interviewed on 9th January 2011).

Sindima shows that, the contemporary African society, basing on the above view as the key challenge. This is where he points out, as a result of Western influence, which has changed the African cosmology that informs their views of life and community. This factor has also influenced African hermeneutical process through which African appropriated their heritage, hence corrupting their value system. (Sindima 1990: 137). This idea is the main conflicting difference in 'an individual,' as contained within differing church theologies in African context, as they were presented by different 'European' missionary groups, and those of indigenous origins, as earlier seen. It seems therefore, the contextual ambiguity might be even stronger, beyond the 'western' motifs that was presented by Santmire within the understanding of the Western Christianity. Sindima expressed this ambiguity as having its roots from western theoretical thought forms, as well as African theoretical thought forms. This is where he stated that, [The West as A]mechanistic perspective that views all things as life less commodities to be understood scientifically and to be used for human ends [in contrast to the African life-centered cosmology] which can better serve their needs for cultural development and social justice in an ecologically responsible context... since it stress the bondedness, the interconnectedness of all living beings. (Sindima 1990:137). This issue as placed the whole Christianity within the African context at the "cross-road" (Nthamburi 1991). Not only in ecological matters, but in various day to day challenges being an African Christian. This is because; African Christian is being faced with an ambiguity that is of diverse sources, both home-grown and/or acquired, hence creating diverse challenges. The tension within this case might be between African Traditional Religion (ATR) and Christianity as it was presented in African, an ambiguity which can be described as "African Christian problem".

In many parts of Africa, African Christians cling tenaciously to their traditional religious beliefs and customs and are reluctant to give them up in favour of Christianity, and both will be practiced concurrently. This originally resulted into conflicts between ATR adherents, and early Christianity followings in Africa, because the Church dismissed traditional practices as heathenism, and often refused to engage minimally to encourage any form of dialogue with African traditionalists. This as relatively been challenged in theory, but not in practice, because the idea has just relatively reduced to an individual conflict, rather than institutional as it was experienced during the missionary period and post-missionary transition period. Minister informant Patrick stated that, Integration should be the case here, if we want to solve our challenges, with the environmental issue included. We must address the issue in both Christian way, and African traditional way. We are Africans my brother and our problems are homing, so our solution should also be. The Western Christian did so good to present Christianity to us, that was so nice and I always

respect them for that. It was a challenging event, which required a lot of sacrifice. It is our turn now to sacrifice, embrace what suits us, as long as we don't corrupt the essence of the gospel, and come up with a relevant, and practical theology that will serve us. We should reflect on the good part of what is valuable and separate them from what does not matter to us, which is western in nature without any major value to African Christianity. Failure to do this we will always remain in dilemma with an irrelevant religion. (Patrick interviewed on 12th January 2011). The classic picture of the traditional African "tribe" was homogenous, self-sufficient, and a static unit defined by common cultural values and practices. But this, cannot be spoken so of any African individual tribe, or any tribe member. Yes, I don't deny that there are some factors that unite a particular ethnic group into one ideological unit, and cultural symbol of unit, with 'maybe' similar language or custom. But what we should note is that the African tribe is no longer that very 'virgin' uninterrupted or uncorrupted tribe. Change in modern Africa has been inevitable, both structural and individual. The structural change has affected and influenced how African community functioned as one well-knit unit. While for the individual, the essence of a pluralistic society does not really exist. Society groups, society structures and society cultures are becoming more influenced by other cultural practices as they are in contacts with the outside cultures, societies, communities and world. Where I am in agreement with Aylward Shorter when he stated that, "the most important fact about pluralism is that it is not simply a plurality of social groups, but a plurality is that of the value-systems and cultures." (Shorter 1974: 17).

This change therefore is not only fruitful, but it also has consequences. To the greater importance, the plurality of 'tribe' brought cultural contacts, a factor that has brought modernization. But on the other side, this very modernization has been a factor that has escalated an individual 'thirst' and 'hunger' for material possession hence eroding little cultural values that were held. For example, before the plurality of the society, when African tribe where just homogenous tribes, some factors where held so dear within some society, the society taught humans their relationship with the world, to other human beings and to the fact of the ultimate concern. The view of production, interaction with the environment was highly held, Wealthy was rather distributed rather than being individually owned. This also brought an individual identity, to differentiate, for example, a Mumeru from a Kikuyu, A Luo from a Maasai, because everyone was donned within his/her cultural, tribal identity. Informant Kiplimo stated that, Things have changed, with education and 'new religious' way of life, the people no longer view the Mau forest as they used to. That sacred notion has been eroded due to other life challenging factors which need immediate response. (Kiplimo interviewed on 10th January 2011). The erosion of the social-spiritual bond between the people living near the Mau forest complex and the forest can be traced to the rapid changing society in social, cultural, political, economic and religious, a factor that as affected them how they can interest with their ecology. These changes have greatly altered the long-held beliefs, values and spirituality that had acted as the custodians of the cultural ecological laws, taboos and principles that were practiced by all people. Informants Oliech identified the shift of the people from the "traditional religious" way of life, to the Christian faith as the factor that has greatly influenced the people. This is whereby, he viewed that people are no-longer hold that spiritual aspect that was traditionally attached to the forest and sacred forest. This is where he stated that, With the coming of Christianity; over time the myths and taboos that where attached to the forest sacredness have lost the meaning. The young generation doesn't know much about them and the only sacred place they know is the church, and not the sacred lakes, mountains, rocks or forest. The forest is now being used for other reasons, losing the meaning which was very important in our society. (Oliech interviewed on 12th January 2011). The view above bring some connectivity between Santmire ambiguity theory and Adrian theory within Adrian's study of "sacred nature". This is because with the loss/ambiguity of 'individual spirituality' there resulted to some factors, either facilitated by the 'new' theological thinking or lack

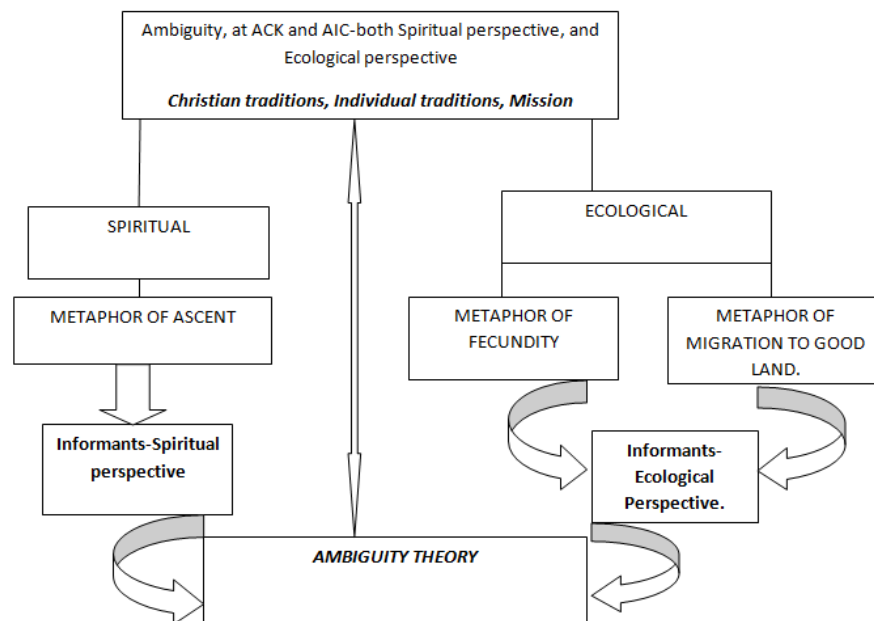
thereof, or social challenges, political or economic as discussed by Adrian which caused unsustainable and unregulated exploitation of the Mau forest complex for its timber, and other forest products, hence the current degradation.

Christian traditions ambiguity

This is the ambiguity that is based on the fact of being a Christian, the kind of ambiguity spoken by Santmire. A factor that might be limiting the Christians to response at all levels whether in a theoretical or practical way, even though in practical sense it should not be. I will not discuss this part in detail since it has already been discussed widely. It is within this understanding therefore, the ambiguity theory is coined. I will hereby only present the views of the informants as they portray this ambiguity, as sourced from the members of ACK and AIC a factor that shows clearly that Santmire claim that Christian theology is ambiguous is true. Informant Kiprop stated that, Our personal salvation has dominated our mind, this view has led to 'us' being arrogant and individualistic, a factor that we human beings think only about ourselves, and attach no value to the non-human world. This is because we have been taught that what matters is our 'personal' salvation, that will see us live a better life here on earth, and heaven to come since the world and that is in it will one day pass away. (Kiprop interviewed on 10th January 2011). The above quote holds a 'Western' Christian view that holds both an ecological and spiritual motif, this is because the view advocates for better 'Christocentric' life here in this present world and also the world to come. The view is also so anthropomorphic, with so much humanity arrogance, displaying human superiority over other creatures. The view also displays some ambiguity, that within the reign of Christ this world is not bad, but still the notion exists that this world will pass away and be replaced with a better world (a factor when misused has been so ecologically damaged as it has been viewed in this work in several occasions). On other hand, a Christocentric view of Christ incarnation in this world can be a good bridge to the spiritual motif, and ecological motif since the incarnate Christ and the cosmos Christ are integral to Christian theology, hence the concept of Christ embodiment is ecotheological rich. Another informant with a spiritual, ecological motif view was informant Koech, who stated that, The earth is the Lord and everything in it and we are simply caretakers. Human beings have an obligation of caring for the creation. God spells our clear guidelines for the protection of the environment. The law of the Sabbath and sabbatical year are a pointer to honouring God's creation. (Koech interviewed on 12th January 2011).

Informant Gerald also said that, Even though I haven't acted according to the will of our maker, when we are confronted by a crisis of a magnitude which requires us to repent and ask God's forgiveness for our participation in this destruction of God's creation, misused God's good creation, we have confused God's call for us to be faithful stewards of creation with a license to use all of creation as we see it. The first humans had to leave the garden of Eden when they decided they had permission to use all of creation despite warnings to the contrary. We have denied that God's covenant is with all living creatures (Genesis 9:9). We have even denied that all of the human family should enjoy the covenant. We forget that the good news that we are called to proclaim includes the promise that Jesus Christ came to redeem all creation (Colossians 1:15-20). (Gerald interviewed on 13th January 2011). In the above quote, the informant repentance that will lead to 'spiritual' cleansing is synonymous to the destruction caused to the environment against the divine will. The Bible was also mentioned as having presented some ambiguity within Christian thinking. Some of the informant within the studied churches viewed the Bible as an effective tool to handle all ecological crisis. While other Christians within the two studied churches, viewed the Bible as 'ecologically defective'.

With a lot of anthropocentrism and little concepts to offer that can be efficient for any effective environment and ecology teaching. Therefore, the ability for the Bible to deliver on ecological issues was found wanting due to it ambiguity. This is where the informants said that, Informant Rotich as was quoted earlier said that, The Bible challenges us to be better people and better Christians on how we should guard our souls, but the Bible is not very clear on the issues that concern ecology and environment. This is because there is no mention of anything to do with ecology or environmental issues in the Bible. But despite this, I don't rule out that the Bible can create awareness, and help us to be responsible Christians, I am sure some Biblical verses are relevant to this subject. (Rotich interviewed 11th January 2011). On similar sentiment was informant Mugambi also quoted earlier who stated that, The Bible is a true word of God, inspired and given to us for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training. It gives us genuine advice about being responsible Christians, and instructs us how to live well with other human beings and God. But sincerely on the ecological/environmental issues the Bible is not straight forward. Actually, some biblical passages are those of dominion to nature, giving us humanity all the authority over nature and all other created beings.



(Mugambi interviewed on 12th January 2011). While differing with the two above informants, Pastor Mark believed that the Bible is worthy, and efficient to handle ecological and environmental issues. This is where as he stated that, The Bible is full of conservatory teachings which can be very instrumental in shaping the way people respond to ecological crisis, verses like: - 'the earth is Lord's', shows that everything in it belongs to the Lord, and we are simply caretakers. The Bible is also clear that human beings have obligation of caring for God's creation. God spells out clear guidelines for the protection of the environment; the law of Sabbath and the sabbatical year are a pointer to honoring God's creation. (Mark interviewed on 13th January 2011).

A summary of the above analysis in diagram form

The diagram seen earlier presents the ambiguity portrayed in the two churches as earlier explained. The ambiguities are based on the three major theological issues of concern. Which are: - the mission traditions ambiguity; individual ambiguity, and Christian traditions ambiguity. The entire diagram represents the ambiguity that is contained in the entire Christian tenets of faith, either being promising or not so promising, and also the ambiguity that is contained within the theologies of the two studied denominations. The two parallel axis, positive (right), and negative (left), present the views of the individual members within the denominations. This is whereby, the negative represent the views that are not ecological friendly. The positive represents the views that are ecological friendly. This ambiguity is portrayed even in a deeper sense were by, an individual might as well have a conflicting ambiguous views, that only varies in degree, either with spiritual motive above ecological motive and vice versa, as portrayed by the arrows which leads to the ambiguity theory.

Conclusion

In many African communities prior to the coming of Christianity religion was a communal affair, the sense of community and humane living where highly cherished. This is the reason why Mbiti says that the individual can say: 'I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am'. This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man. (Mbiti 1999: 108). Humanity was religiously embedded with nature. Religion was inseparable with all affairs of African person lifestyle. It was something that permeated from the concept of being an African. This religion was also inseparable with African ecology. With the coming of Christianity, religion in Africa become an individual affair and/or an option, so was/is a 'spirituality', a factor that has therefore seen the separation of what is 'spiritual and/or sacred, to what is profane, and what can be termed as an 'ecological' and/or natural world. The data analysis that was done above has truly portrayed this ambiguity. Not only as purported by Santmire within his 'ambiguity theory', envisaged within Western Christian thoughts, but a reality within African Christian tradition lifestyle, a religion in conflict with itself, based on many factors as they were explored. First, a challenge of the Western Christian theology the same brought by the missionary to Africa with its ambiguity. Secondly, African Christian with conflict with self, based within split theology, within the understanding of continuity and/or discontinuity as it is argued by Bediako, and lastly, different theological views portrayed within the differing denominations within their confessions and theologies.

Ambiguity was witnessed, where most of the informants in these two churches held the spiritual concept and ecology concept as stated by Santmire. An informant could have a stand on both the spiritual motif, while still ascribing to the ecological motif. This view was either held explicitly or implicitly, but the notion of the concept being held is real. An individual could explain that their spirituality matters so much, but still express great fecundity attached to the nature, either because nature belongs to the ancestors, or nature is just important or, because God says so. These factors are analysed as they have great influence on the members of ACK and AIC, in regards to their positioning towards the Mau forest complex or any other related environmental issue, and how they respond to the environmental degradation being experienced at the Mau forest complex.

REFERENCES

- African Religions in Encyclopedia Britannica's Black History in <http://www.britannica.com/blackhistory/article-234647>. Dated 10th January 2013.
- Bediako, Kwame, 1999, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa*, Oxford: Regnum Books International.
- Harvey Sindima, "Community of life: Ecological Theology in African Perspective" in 1990, Charles Birch, William Earkin, and Jay B. McDaniel (eds), *Liberating life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology* (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books)
- Mbiti S. John, 1986, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*. Nairobi, Oxford University Press.
- Mbiti S. John, 1999, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- Mbiti S. John, *Concepts of God in Africa*. London, S.P.C.K.
- Nthamburi, John Zablon 1991, *African Church at the Crossroads: Strategy for Indigenization*, Nairobi: Uzima Press.
- Nthamburi, John Zablon, 2002, *The pilgrimage of the African church: Towards the twenty-first century*, Nairobi: Uzima Press.
- Robert K, Yin, 2003, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (3rd ed.), Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Roulston, Kathryn, 2010, *Reflective Interviewing: a guide to theory and practice*, Los Angeles: Sage Publication.
- Rubin, Herbert J, 2005, *Qualitative Interviewing the art of Hearing data* (2nd ed), Thousand Oaks, California; Sage Publications.
- Santmire, Paul, 2006, *Partnership with Nature According to the Scriptures: Beyond the Theology of Stewardship*, in R. J. Berry (ed), *Environmental Stewardship*, London, New York: T&T Clark International.
- Santmire, Paul, H, 1985. *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Santmire, Paul, *Partnership with Nature According to the Scriptures: Beyond the Theology of Stewardship*, 28th September, 2010 in (<http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Journal-of-Lutheran-Ethics/Issues/Dec...>)
- Schreiter, Robert, J. 2002, *The New Catholicity. Theology between the Global and the Local*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books.
- Sigurd Bergmann, 2005, *Creation Set Free. The Spirit as Liberator of Nature*, Chicago: WMB. Eerdmans.
