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The Earth is Groaning

Christian awareness towards environmental management

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Introduction: Rationale of the Paper

The environment and its management is a rich and important area for study. The environment is threatened by among other things, human activity. With the adverse effects of climate change experienced the world over it has become evident that the environment has limits in its capacity to sustain human beings. The earth indeed is groaning. To avoid further negative effects on people, there is need to properly manage the environment. This can be achieved from different perspectives. One such perspective is religious. It is human beings however who are capable of being religious. The environment as such can not be religious. At best it can be indifferent. Human beings are the ones who ascribe religiosity into the environment. Consequently they behave in ways that can either destroy or manage the environment. Furthermore, human activity is often informed by how human beings understand reality. That is their worldview, their awareness. Religion in general and the Church in particular determine peoples' worldviews. In so doing, the positive aspects of religion can be harnessed to manage the environment.

Ecology on which environmental management is based has traditionally been associated with natural and not social sciences or humanities. There has been a trend therefore to discredit religion and the study of religion to purely psychological tendencies of human beings. This is the case notwithstanding the fact that religious psychological tendencies actually influence human behaviour which in turn influence natural science and the studies carried out in natural sciences. This erroneous view about a subjective as well as an objective science that religion is can be

corrected. This paper helps lift the study of religion to its rightful place in the world of interdisciplinary studies. This trend is demanded from serious scholars given the complexity that reality is.

The multidisciplinary and complex nature of reality also means that academic studies ought to be approached from as many perspectives as possible so that reality can be grasped more adequately. This understanding is informed by the fact that though truth is one, its conception is often multifaceted. A religious perspective to the truth of environmental management adds to the body of human knowledge on the environment.

A more specific rationale of academic importance, is that the paper adds a lot to ecotheology or the theology of nature, not only as a domain of academic studies but also as an impetus for praxis in human relations to the environment. Christianity has been viewed as a source of negative values towards the environment. Indeed, faulty biblical exegesis has done a lot of harm not only to the environment but even to other areas of human existence. Following in the footsteps of ecotheologists such as St. Francis of Assisi, the paper attempts to rediscover the richness of Christian beliefs and practices.

The significance of indigenous traditions for the development of ecotheology can also not be understated. Traditional local communities like other marginalized people are often left by the more privileged society to fend for themselves. They are neglected and live in the fringes of society at times with extreme want. They do not share in the benefits accrued from humanity's common pool of knowledge and technology. This betrays the basic Christian tenet of being one's brother's or sister's keeper. This scenario is not only manifested in economic indicators such as low income and general poverty among the such communities. It is also shown in the little documented information about them. The paper making reference to a traditional African community therefore has the rationale of attempting to add to the documentation about aspects of the community, and hopefully reduced the void about such people. The paper would then serve to uplift the status of the these peoples and their culture. Consequently this would enable them contribute to the wellbeing of themselves and humanity through their indigenous knowledge, cultural practices and belief patterns of and about the environment.

A Religious Conceptual Framework

A survey of a conceptual framework may help situate awareness of environment management in a religious setting. Mircea Eliade, a Romanian scholar who taught at the University of Chicago from 1957 to 1985 understood religion as an "...experience mediated by the Sacred (Paden 2007)." For Eliade,

Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, as something wholly different from the profane. [The] act of manifestation of the sacred... hierophany... expresse... that something sacred shows itself... From the most elementary hierophany – manifestation of the sacred in some ordinary object, a stone or a tree – to the supreme hierophany (which, for a Christian, is the incarnation of Jesus Christ) there is no solution of continuity. In each case we are confronted by the same mysterious act – manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part of our natural 'profane' world (Eliade, 1959).

Eliade concept of the “sacred” was influence greatly by Rudolf Otto's (1929) *Das Heilige (The Sacred)* where Otto instead of studying ideas of God and religion, undertook to analyze the modalities of “the religious experience”. In particular, the feeling, though frightening and irrational, of religious fear before the awe-inspiring *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, the numinous which present itself as the “wholly other”.

This understanding has immense relevance in environmental management. For instance, the biblical conceptual framework that human beings are “Stewards of Nature” finds a clear explanation from Eliades view of the religious experience. The created world that is all forms of flora and fauna as well as inanimate inorganic material, are manifestation of the sacred. In relation to human beings the created therefore invokes a feeling of religious fear in believers. Consequently, these believers will take good care of God's created reality.

John S. Mbithi's (1969) conceptual framework that Africans are “Notoriously Religious” and Placide Tempels (1959) concept of the “life-force”, can be explained more clearly from Eliades perspective. The notoriety of Africans is found in their conscious understanding and belief that reality is imbued with the presence of the Supreme Being. For instance mountains, forests and rivers are dwelling places of spirits. According to Tempels they even have a life-force in them. Reality must therefore be respected. All these modes of looking at reality have immense implication to environmental management.

The import of Eliade's theory is also found in it being non-reductionist. Unlike the functionalist theories of Freud, Durkheim and Marx, which reduces religion to something other than what it is, Eliade propounds the view that religion must always be explained “on its own terms”. The functionalist theories of especially Freud and Marx, misunderstood the role of religion in human life. Freud for instance finds religion to be a neurosis and an illusion. It merely serves to satisfy a guilt conscious in those who are religious (Pals, 1996). Marx on his part sees

religion as opium for the masses. It serves to alienate human beings in a class struggle. For him religion is an illusion, a "... most extreme example of ideology, of a belief system whose chief purpose is simply to provide reasons ... for keeping things in society just the way oppressors like them (Pals, 1996)." These conceptions reduces religion to a psychological feeling instead of it being an objective reality. Eliade's theory on the other hand corrects the Freudian and Marxian reductionist misunderstanding of what religion is and does in human society (Pals, 1996). What Eliade presents is that religion is what it is, and therefore its functions emanates from its being, the awe experience of the other. Eliades theory explains the role of religion in environmental conservation. By bringing in the "sacred" into the realm of human experience and way of life, religion whether Christianity by the Church or traditional religion in the process of inculturation, succeeds in making religious human beings to manage well the environment.

This notwithstanding, Eliade's theory has inherent weaknesses. For one, Eliade presents all that is religious in favourable light, yet experience has shown that religion can and indeed has elements that are not always positive. There are dysfunctional elements of religion. For instance, religion has been used to destroy the environment. From Eliade's understanding this can be argued. The fact that the environment is the complete "other" contra poses it from the self. This may have negative implications where the individual can easily misuse the "other" for the self's selfish end. This is informed by the fact that the "other" is not part of the self. The harmony and respect that emanates form the biblical principle of being one's brother's keeper though can be used to minimise this extreme of the self. The golden rule, do to others what you would like to be done to you, expounds this understanding. The weakness of Eliade's theory means that caution ought to be taken not to apply it uncritically. It also means that this theory ought to be grounded in the positive aspects that Christianity and traditional Religion offer to environmental management. A Christian Liberation theory can also help to ground Eliades understanding.

Liberation theory postulates that liberation:

...is both the undoing of the effects and the elimination of the causes of social oppression. The achievement of human liberation on a global scale will require far-reaching changes at the institutional level and at the level of group and individual interactions. These changes will involve transforming oppressive behavioural patterns and "unlearning" oppressive attitudes and assumptions. Liberation is possible. It is possible to recover the buried memories of our socialization, to share our stories and heal the hurts imposed by the conditioning, to act in the present

in a humane and caring manner; to rebuild our human connections and to change our world (Sherove-Marcuse, 2002)

This theory is normally used in situations of oppression especially those of a socio-economic, political and religious nature to advance the understanding that emancipation is possible. Liberation theology is a product of this theory. This theory helps to explain the role that religion plays in liberating people from the bondage that the harsh environment has put them into by they managing the environment. The import of this theory is that it places the onus on the people themselves to better their situation. Being religious, the Christians can use this human resource to manage the world.

Christianity and Environmental Management

Environmental management has become a global issue with immense significance given the adverse effects environmental disasters and calamities have brought to human ecology. Enormous literature is available on the subject. The concern of this paper is on literature on the environment and religion, more specifically on Christianity's understanding of the created reality. The "Forum on Religion and Ecology" an internet site, for instance has a 31 page bibliography on Christianity and ecology. Different aspects of the environment are discussed by different authors. Of particular relevance are those that present biblical, theological and ecclesiological studies on the environment. From these studies one of the most central concepts in religious perspective to environmental management, stewardship is highlighted (Bakken, 2009). This is where human beings are considered to be custodians of the earth and the entire creation. Here the earth and all in it is viewed as belonging to the Lord. Human beings become custodians who must eventually render account for their actions. This concept has positive implications as concerns environmental conservation.

An important Old Testament scholar worth mentioning is Bernhard W. Anderson (1984; 1994). Anderson work gives particular attention to the theology of creation. His two books *From Creation to New Creation: Old Testament Perspectives* and *Creation in the Old Testament* presents Christian understanding of creation with direct implication to environmental protection and care. The first book relates various biblical texts and themes to ecological concerns. For example, Anderson's interpretation of the "primeval history" of Genesis 1–9 (creation through the Noachic flood) is that, though the human-nature relationship is inescapably marred by violence and tragedy, humanity is to serve responsibly as managers of the household of creation—a notion that is grounded in God's universal and ecological covenant with nature and all living things—a notion that is also reflected in God's benevolent rule. The

second book on its part is a collection of texts by Old Testament scholars on the biblical doctrine of creation, ranging from classic treatments by Hermann Gunkel and Gerhard von Rad, to reappraisals by Claus Westermann and H. H. Schmid regarding the significance of creation for ancient Israelite thought, to explorations of the contemporary relevance of creation for human liberation and ecology. Anderson's introduction argues that biblical texts on creation must be read with attention to their mythopoetic form and literary function and he delineates the different dimensions of Israel's creation faith as relating to national identity, order, dependence, origination, and redemption. The two books are important eye openers for anybody who discusses the Old Testament versus the environment. It also contextualizes the drama of the Old Testament to the people of Israel.

Elizabeth Achtemeier's (1992) *Nature, God and Pulpit*, is practical in its own right as it delves into the area of sermon making and delivery. She timely responds to the neglect of the subject of the environment in preaching by providing a comprehensive interpretation of the biblical witness on God's relationship with nature in order to furnish preachers with content for sermons on the subject. Sample sermons and meditations on nature are included as are pointers for using this material in sermons. She presents biblical teachings on: creation and its purpose, the place of human beings in creation, contingency and providence, the corruption of creation, and the redemption of creation. She insists on both the theological importance and value of creation and warns against worshipping the creature rather than the creator. This understanding helps sort out fears as regards liberation theology's exaltation of the battered creation. Indeed the environment ought to be presented not as an end in itself, but being a creature, as a means of glorifying its creator. This understanding helps tone down the excess of liberation theology.

Unlike Anderson and Achtemeier who are Old Testament scholars, Richard Cartwright Austin discusses environmental issues from both the Old and New Testaments but in a holistic manner (Austin, 1990; 1988a; 1988b; 1987). This approach looks at biblical truths from an objective perspective. It draws from biblical theology rather than emphasis on direct scriptural quotations. This approach is more appropriate when handling a context that is removed from actual biblical texts. He immerses his discussion in the context of the American people using their political language to present biblical teachings on the environment. In *Reclaiming America: Restoring Nature to Culture*, Austin (1990) employs language of the American political tradition in order to advocate policies for environmental liberation that are appropriate to both the biblical tradition and contemporary circumstances. Part one of the book underscores the right to "the pursuit of happiness" and the role of independent farmers in a

free society in order to present the emotional and moral requirements for satisfying human work. Part two presents a moral vision for a new agriculture that can meet human needs while also protecting the environment. Part three proposes that we should incorporate the rights of human access to nature and the rights of nature itself into the Constitution and offers a strategy for land reform. Part four suggests four ways—including nature within its worship, mission, service, and spiritual life—the Church can participate in the effort to redeem the Earth.

Austin (1988b) presents a reading of the Bible in terms of “biblical ecology”—a moral perspective on the relationships among and between God, humanity, and the Earth in another of his work, *Hope for the Land: Nature in the Bible*. Here he examines, in turn, several themes including: 1) liberation of oppressed people and lands, 2) God’s creativity and the human vocation to nurture the world’s abundance, 3) a Sabbath ecology of covenantal relationships of rights and duties among all living things and the land, 4) stories of “the fall,” expressing the breaking of these relationships, and 5) ecological visions of hope for their restoration. Austin’s survey includes not only the usual texts—creation narratives, Israel’s history in the land, and eschatological visions—but also the stories of David and Solomon and the ministry of Jesus.

Austin’s (1988a) other book *Beauty of the Lord: Awakening the Senses*, utilizes both intellectual reflection and personal narrative, to help Christians recover a sensuous experience of God and nature through the concept of beauty. He argues that faith derives from the experience of beauty in God and is strengthened by the awakening of one’s senses to beauty in nature. He suggests that such awakened experience can lead to a more creative and integrated personal identity, to the active enjoyment and protection of the Earth, and to an acceptance of death as part of the good creation. In order to achieve this ideal, however, one must first overcome personal projections and religious and social values that have shaped modern attitudes toward nature and bodily awareness.

Finally in *Baptized into Wilderness: A Christian Perspective on John Muir*, Austin (1987) draws a portrait of John Muir (1838–1914) as one whose religious consciousness fused wilderness experiences with scriptural images and then argues that by listening to Muir, American Christians can recover a sense of their relation with nature that fits the gospel. According to Austin, Muir found God in nature (e.g., nature was Christ for Muir). Muir combined a physical engagement, a sensuous openness, and spiritual discernment in his encounters with wilderness, finding intrinsic value in all creatures and viewing nature’s “destructive” processes as part of God’s creative work. He was an evangelist urging urban inhabitants to overcome their alienation from nature and a pro-

phetic advocate of wilderness preservation. Recognizing the limits to preservationism, Austin also tries to think with Muir about the possibilities for productive, interactive relationships between culture and nature.

A theological minefield that offers a completely new and refreshing way of looking at ecotheology are Papers from a 1990 conference in Cuddesdon, England, by contributors who hold that the environmental challenge cannot be "domesticated" by taking the "safe" approach of reinterpreting existing Christian language but rather requires that Christians completely re-think traditional attitudes toward the natural world (Ian Ball & Reader, 1992). Part one examines the underlying character of the environmental issue as involving human identity. Part two critiques the limitations of some of the attempts to reformulate the Christian tradition such as stewardship. Part three provides examples of ways to engage in the search for new answers through open discussion, pilgrimages, community drama and artistic creativity. These are not only enriching concerns, they are also practical approach as concerns environmental management. The critical methodology applied in the conference adds value to these concerns and approaches and offers useful lessons in the Christian's environmental management awareness.

Karen Baker-Fletcher's (1988) *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit: Womanist Wordings on God and Creation*, speaks to a Christian woman's mind. Baker-Fletcher writes from the heart as a black feminist Christian who values the natural world and is concerned with issues of environmental justice. She notes that humans are both earthly and spiritual creatures and God as Spirit is immanent in them and in all creation. Jesus Christ, as the embodiment of the Spirit in Creation, fully represents our human connectedness to creation. She then asserts that our survival requires realistic visions of a new order within which all people, together with the rest of creation, can flourish in freedom. Although black theologians have not written extensively on ecology, Baker-Fletcher affirms that women of color have a deep appreciation for creation due to their historical connections with the land. Her essays reflect on both her own experiences with nature and the black community's struggles with issues such as racism and environmental injustice. Mary Catherine Clipson (2000) "Sustainable Living: A Case Study of Nuns and Their Beliefs, Attitudes and Practices" Ph.D. dissertation situates a special group of women in the Roman Catholic tradition as useful mode of evangelizing sustainability of the environment. Nuns or religious women life inspired by monastic life is a form of liberation from the world. This detachment from the things of the world means that one is inspired not to misuse the environment; but rather to respect it in anticipation of the future heavenly world. On a broader understanding, this awareness apportions women a significant role in environmental management.

Liberation theology offers relevant insights for a Christian's efforts towards environmental management. This is the case especially because the focus of this type of theology is highly contextualized. It is localized. Liberation theology however has the weakness at times of romanticizing the poor or the marginalized. It is thus useful to take a more critical and analytical perspective as concerns liberation theologies concerns. The understanding could be that Christians themselves are the contributing factor in environmental degradation and that they have within themselves the capacity to remedy the environmental ills they could have brought to themselves. This notwithstanding Leonardo Boff's liberation theology is useful. Boff (1997), a leading Brazilian theologian in his *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, extends the theology of liberation to include the Earth, which, like oppressed people, is exploited by the rich and powerful. He argues that the dominant paradigm, which sets humankind over things rather than alongside them in cosmic community, must be replaced by a new paradigm of connectedness. Boff describes the new paradigm of the Earth as planetary community and utilizes terms such as cosmogenesis. He then characterizes the ecological crisis as a loss of connectedness and shows the linkages between ecology and liberation theology. Boff gives special attention to the Amazonian region and its people. For the Amazonians God is described in panentheistic (God in all and all in God) terms, the Spirit is described as being immanent in Creation, and Christ is presented as the Cosmic Christ while St. Francis is presented as a model of ecological spirituality.

In another equally relevant work, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*, Boff (1995) fuses liberationist, ecological, and mystical perspectives into a new religious paradigm for the post-Cold War era. The first part of the book develops Boff's holistic, trinitarian, panentheistic "ecological paradigm," a paradigm that extends the liberationist "option for the poor" to include other threatened beings and species. He argues that the blame for environmental and social problems lies within a global capitalistic system that serves the interests of the rich. He notes that the solution lies not with forms of environmentalism that reflect those same interests, but with an "ecologico-social democracy" that includes all creatures and seeks both social and ecological justice for all. The second part of the book primarily examines issues of global justice after the collapse of communism. The final section of the book presents Boff's basis for this new social and ethical order through his presentation of the "mental ecology" of mysticism. The concept of mysticism motivated by ecological democracy of all creatures is particularly relevant as it may help develop an authentic "Christian spirituality" of the environment. Such spirituality is possible in a community of believers, the Church. But the Church is human and thus fails to live by what is expected of it.

Richard A. Baer (1966) as early as in the 1960s noticed the human failings in the ecclesiastical institution. He criticizes the Church's failure to respond to the crisis of land abuse in general and deforestation in particular. Baer lays out the theological imperative for engaging the issue. He cites biblical texts affirming nature's value for human beings and its intrinsic value for God, and states that both the worship of and the spoliation of nature are dehumanizing and incompatible with belief in creation. Baer argues that the Church's efforts are needed to overcome public apathy and to confront social power structures with an ethic of land use.

Traditional African Religion and Environmental Management

M. L. Daneel (2001) opens a window into the African value system albeit with a mix of Christianity. The book recounts the history, work, and theological underpinnings of the Traditionalist and Independent Christian Shona earthkeepers of the Masvingo Province in Zimbabwe, who fight 'the war of the trees' against ecological degradation. The first part of the book recounts the history of the earthkeeping mission and the second part deals with the Christian dimension of this work. Being in a typical African setting one finds the useful ingredients for an inculturated awareness for environmental management.

Joseph OY Mante, "Towards an Ecological, Christian Theology of Creation in an African Context." Ph.D. dissertation notes: (1) that Africa south of the Sahara desert has an ecological crisis and African theologians have not adequately responded to it; (2) that the main-line Western theologies that have influenced African theologians have themselves been ecologically bankrupt; (3) that the present trend in thoroughgoing indigenization in contemporary African theologies tend to divert attention from other issues such as ecology; and (4) that there is a need to respond (theologically) to the ecological crisis by attempting an ecological doctrine of creation which will be helpful for the current African context. Mante's ideas opens ones mind to issues of ecotheology in an African setting albeit in a general sense. His insights particularize ecotheology in a specific African community, the Pokot. This is also what David J. Ndegwah (2007) attempted to do in his *Biblical Hermeneutics as a Tool for Inculturation in Africa: A Case Study of the Pökot People of Kenya*. Using John's Gospel text on the Good Shepherd, Ndegwah shows how the Pokot have understood and contextualized the parable of the Good Shepherd. He then comes out with a Pokot Biblical Hermeneutics. Ndegwa's methodology of Pokot biblical hermeneutics helps in understanding and explaining how the Christian values, such as that of stewardship of the environment has been applied by the Pokot.

While briefly discussing traditional African beliefs and practices that has negative impact on the environment, Nahashon W. Ndungu (2005), in a book *Challenges and Prospects of the Church in Africa: Theological*

Reflections of the 21st Century, presents contemporary factors among them an erroneous application of biblical principles in the destruction of the environment. In the same book Adam Chepkwony (2005) delves into the theme of inculturation, a central theme in environmental management. Indeed Chepkwony's assertion that African religion should be the basis on which the gospel of Jesus finds its true expression in Africa can not be overemphasised. This is a wise counsel to be applied in localized awareness of environmental management.

Professor B. E. L. Wishitemi (2008) in an inaugural lecture 'Community-Based Conservation and Tourism Development Adjacent To Protected Areas in Kenya' provided very useful insights to environmental management awareness. His concern is on conservation of biodiversity outside protected areas in Kenya, more particularly in pastoral community rangelands of Kenya. Wishitemi rightly identifies declining land space, increasing human populations, alienation of local people, lack of socio-economic incentives and lack of models to be adopted as hindering conservation of biodiversity. He strongly contends that communities must be brought back to the centre of conservation as the Traditional National Park Model has failed because it concentrates less on local expertise, needs and development. What this means is that the local people must be involved in all aspects of ecological management of their habitat. One significant aspect of the local communities involvement in environmental conservation is their religious inclinations. Pastoral communities are religious. Their religious beliefs and practices contribute immensely in their attitudes and behaviour in relation to the environment. There is need therefore to incorporate this aspect of their way of life if any tangible results are to be expected. Inculturation is the process of effecting this strategy.

A masters thesis by Simon Gisege Omare (2006) *Role of Isukha Religious Beliefs and Practices in the Conservation of Kakamega Forest* also provide useful inculturation perspective. Chapter one of the thesis provides useful bibliography for African religion where scholars such as John S. Mbiti among others are discussed. This help in analysing traditional religion. In chapter three aspects of Isukha traditional religious beliefs and practices such as taboos, totems, rituals, specialists among others are discussed. While chapter four delves into obstacles to and efforts of conservation.

The Case of the Roman Catholic Church

A Universal and Local Mandate:

Christianity in general grapples with new challenges in its mission. It needs to update itself, look for and formulate strategies if it has to achieve its goal of evangelisation. The Roman Catholic Church for example, attempts to address many of the problems facing communities

by helping them cope with the challenges these communities face. Apart from its normal pastoral work, the Church is involved in provision of education, health, development, counselling services as well as offering advocacy in issues of governance and human rights.

Evangelisation is the bringing of Good News to every creature. It is the basic mandate and mission given by the founder of Christianity, Jesus Christ, to his followers, the Christians (k 16:15, 13:10; Matthew 28: 18-19; Luke 24:47; John 20:21.). The Roman Catholic Church in its self-understanding has a universal mission to establish the kingdom of God on earth by proclaiming the Gospel to every creature (Flannery, 1975). This awareness is captured in one of the documents of Vatican Council II, 'Pastoral Constitution on the church in the Modern World'. The document, hailed as one of the most important blueprints of the Church's activities in the world, clearly affirms that the church is in solidarity with the whole human family. It reads:

The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and the hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. ...That is why Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history (Flannery, 1975).

This understanding has motivated the church to involve itself in activities that promote the development of the society.

The involvement of the church in society is spelt out in what is referred to as 'The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church', a document published in 2004 by the Pontifical Council Iustitia et Pax. In it the Church propounds its specific point of view on social matters. Aspects of these social teachings and action spring from the church's understanding of the human person, the family and society. Specifically it propounds issues of ethics and political society such as law, morality, the common good, justice, peace, human rights, war and international relations. It also addresses issues of ethics and Economic society such as labour, property, capital, population, resources and the environment. In particular, Chapter Ten of the Compendium concerns 'Safeguarding of the environment' (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004; Hervé, 1990; Rodger, 1999).

The environment and its proper management are therefore taking a central place in the mind and mission of the Church. In his 2010 message for World Day of Peace to the world, which is also traditionally celebrated on New Year Day, the head of the Roman Catholic Church, the Pope, Benedict XVI (2010), specifically addressed the issue of environmental management. The document entitled 'If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation', links respect for creation, that is the environment, to

peaceful co-existence of human beings. Earlier, the Pope in his encyclical, 'Charity in Truth', noted that "... development is also closely related to the duties arising from our relationship to the natural environment" (Benedict XVI, 2009). This understanding has implications in the proper management of the environment where it is seen as God's gift to all people, and therefore its use entails a shared "... responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole" (Benedict XVI, 2009).

Benedict XVI's insights on the environment follow those of his predecessors, among them John Paul II. In 1980, John Paul II Message for the World Day of Peace had the theme, 'Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All Creation. The message of John Paul II emphasised the relationship of human beings to the universe around, all of which are God's creatures. It also noted as quoted by Benedict XVI, that "... ecological awareness, rather than being downplayed, needs to be helped to develop and mature, and find fitting expression in concrete programmes and initiatives (Benedict, 2010)". These programmes and initiatives are seen in what is done by some Catholic communities. For instance, in the Philippines, the most Catholic populous country in the Orient, Catholic Bishops released a pastoral letter in 1988 on the environment. The pastoral letter calls ecological degradation a threat to life and social stability in the Philippines. It reflects on the original beauty of the island's native ecosystems as well as the wounds inflicted by exploitative "progress." The Bishops call Filipinos to be stewards of creation in order to preserve and heal their homeland. They also point to what they see as signs of hope in Filipino culture. The letter also argues that the care for the Earth is nurtured and sustained by various strands of Christian faith, including devotion to the Virgin Mary. Specific actions for individuals, churches, governments, and nongovernmental organizations are also recommended (Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, 1988).

A statement by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2001) argues for dialogue and the common good in public debates about US policy on Global Climate Change. The Bishops in a document entitled *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*, notes that at its core, global climate change is not about economic theory or political platforms, nor about partisan advantage or interest group pressures but it is about the future of God's creation and the one human family. In the mind of the Bishops, the superpower status of the United States of America means that the United States of America which by extension include the Bishops, bear a special responsibility in the stewardship of God's creation. America must shape responses that serve the entire human family. But their particular vocation in this respect is to argue that the focus of dialogue should be on the needs of the poor, the

weak, and the vulnerable. This insight recalls the Christian doctrine of the option for the poor and being one's brother's keeper. Christians ought to use their influence to make the world a better place, if not for self, for the other. Christians must evaluate their actions in relation to how it affects the environment which in turn affects another person wellbeing.

The 'concrete programmes and initiatives' are also evident in the mind of Kenyan Roman Catholic Bishops (Catholic Justice & Peace Commission, 2008; 2009; 2010). For instance, Lenten Campaigns (carried out during the forty days of prayer, fasting and repentance before Easter) for the years 2008, 2009 and 2010 had issues on the environment. Week 3 of the 5 week programme of creating awareness and practical application on social issues has been dedicated to the environment. Programme for the year 2008 considered climate change, with a call to Christians to be proactive in their thinking in order to reverse the effects of climate change. The year 2009 had meditation on environmental care with Christians being reminded that they have destroyed their forests thus causing immense havoc and climate change. Consequently they were asked to maintain the integrity of creation by planting indigenous trees. The year 2010 proposes care for the environment through the example of an old and bent woman who positively changed the face of a seeming unproductive mountain side by years of planting flowers and trees.

On their part, the Bishops of Eastern Africa who were delegates to The Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops held in October 2009 in Rome issued a statement just days before the start of the Synod to the effect that the environment was on their list of important new elements for discussions (Radio Vaticana, 2013). This was a significant step as the *Lineamenta*, a document published in 2006 to help prepare the agenda for the Synod did not mention the environment (Synod of Bishops, 2006). The concern on the environment made the Bishops to make a call to their local churches to guarantee sustainable and responsible care of the earth. The call included among other recommendations: promotion of environmental education and awareness, persuading local and national governments to adopt policies and adhere to legal regulations for the protection of the environment, promotion of alternative and renewable sources of energy, and encouraging everyone to plant trees and treat nature and its resources with respect (Radio Vaticana, 2013).

Inculturation as a Strategy

The relationship between land use and ecology with resultant effects such as environmental degradation, poverty and poor quality of life of the local communities present pastoral challenges to the Church. The Church therefore needs strategies to face such challenges adequately. An incultured awareness to environmental management enriches these

strategies. Sound ecological management involves responsible use of the environment. When Christians “cultivate and care”, (Genesis 2:1), that is, use the environment responsibly, they follow God’s command.

On the other hand, African traditional religion recognizes that a divinity creates, sustains, provides for and rules all created reality (Mbiti, 1991). Traditional African values system emphasizes harmony not only among humans but also between humans and their animal, plant and inanimate environment in their day to day lives. Indigenous African people have numerous cultural beliefs and practices which control all aspects of their lifestyle (Mbiti, 1969). In this respect, the way they perceive the environment, its role and importance in their lives, forms of its utilization and their efforts at managing it for sustainable utilization for themselves and posterity, guides how they relate to the environment. This awareness has implications to the good use of created reality whether flora or fauna.

The effort by the church in environmental management is thus, not a lone ranger affair. The church recognises that it is the responsibility of the entire human family. The words of Pope Benedict XVI while recalling the teaching of Vatican Council II that the goods of creation belong to humanity as a whole is fitting in this respect:

Humanity needs a profound cultural renewal; it needs to rediscover those values which can serve as the solid base for building a brighter future for all. Our present crises – be they economic, food-related, environmental or social are ultimately also moral crises, and all of them are interrelated. They require us to rethink the path which we are travelling together. Specifically, they call for a lifestyle marked by sobriety and solidarity, with rules and forms of engagement, one which focuses confidently and courageously on strategies that actually work, while decisively rejecting those that have failed. Only in this way can the current crisis become an opportunity for discernment and new strategic planning. ... We are all responsible for the protection and care of the environment (Benedict XVI, 2010).

Indeed, this responsibility knows no boundaries. Be they believers or non-believers; Christians, Muslims, Hindus or Traditional African Religious Believers; Catholics or Protestants. All have a responsibility towards the care of the environment.

It is in this respect that Christianity endeavours to adopt aspects of African Traditional Religions to properly manage the environment. The principle of subsidiarity as is that of inculturation, where positive aspects of traditional religious values and practices are incorporated into Christianity, demands this. The Pokot people of Kenya can serve as an example for an inculturated strategy for environmental management. This marginalised people have over the years used their traditional cultural

knowledge, value system and practices to manage the environment. The environment on its part has sustained the Pokot. Ida Wingrup in a graduate thesis underscores the role Pokot 'Indigenous Knowledge' plays in managing forests and forests resources (Wigup, 2005).

On the same note, Anne Kisaka Nangulu in her doctoral research studied 'coping mechanism' by the Pokot in what she calls a 'harsh environment' (Nangulu, 2001). Indeed, in spite of the many challenges and difficulties, natural ones such as unfavourable climatic conditions and rugged terrain, and human ones such as cattle raiding, Nangulu contends that "... most Pokot have learned, over the years to rely not only on one, but multiple activities, all complementing each other to survive in a harsh environment" (Nangulu, 2001). Of these mechanisms she notes that lending and borrowing of food is based on reciprocity. Reciprocity is a cultural value and virtue that informs Pokot coping mechanism which by extension would help in environmental management. It is in this sense that the environment reciprocates human efforts of managing it by it providing for human sustenance. This could be an African ecological spirituality.

This spirituality in an atmosphere of biblical inculturation is captured clearly with an application of biblical exegesis of the Johannine passage of the Good Shepherd by the Pokot people. In understanding the text in their context, the Pokot can apply the teachings of the bible and consequently of Christianity in their day to day lives. They too can enrich the Christian message of Good News with their positive cultural values and way of life. This is what David J. Ndegwa (2007) rightly indicates.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to present the awareness of Christianity to its mission to evangelize the environment. The natural environment on which human beings depend for sustenance is groaning due to many factors. Something has to be done to liberate the environment. Human beings are called to be proactive. Through being aware of its responsibility to take care of the environment, Christianity has the task to educate humanity. It does this not only by its own insights based on its theology and the bible, but also through the wisdom of other religious traditions. Through the strategy of inculturation, Christianity courtesy of traditional African religious beliefs and practices brings humanity to the awareness not only of hearing the groans of the earth, but also doing something about it.

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