AJORET African Journal of Religion, Ethics and Theology

Volume 1 (2): 62-75, November 2025 | ISSN: 3093-4591 (Online) | ISSN: 3093-4583 (Print)
Available online at: http://ajoret.brainfa.org/index.php/files
DOI: https://doi.org/10.63811/n4bmt830

Resilience Strategies during the Climate Crisis: Reading the "Book of Nature" with Kauma Traditionalism Religion

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Publication History
Date received: 22-07-2025
Date accepted: 19-10-2025
Date published: 04-12-2025

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ABSTRACT

The Kauma sub-clan of the larger Mijikenda community from Kilifi County, in coastal Kenya, has deep roots in a traditional religious system known as *dini ya jadi* (the ancient religion). This indigenous faith is characterized by its sacred relationship with the natural world, philosophically described as the "Book of Nature." In Kauma cosmology, forests, rivers, and land are not merely ecological resources but spiritual entities through which the ancestors and the *Mulungu aliye moyo* (the living Creator) communicate with the living. This is a worldview that has historically guided sustainable environmental conservation practices in their farming, hunting, and fishing. However, with the advancing challenges of climate change and ecological degradation, the survival of the sacred Kaya forests themselves is under intense threat. These forests, preserved through ritual and customary law, offer a living model of indigenous environmental stewardship that has protected communities from the harshest effects of climate shifts, such as famines and flooding. This paper addresses the marginalization and erosion of indigenous knowledge systems in mainstream environmental discourse and policy by interrogating Kauma's religious cosmology, particularly its practices derived from the "Book of Nature," which offers a significant framework for conceptualizing meaningful contributions to contemporary climate resilience strategies. By employing African eco-spirituality theory and drawing from oral traditions, proverbs, and songs, this paper aims to retrieve and reconstruct valuable ecological insights inherent in indigenous spirituality. This paper advocates for the reintegration of sacred environmental ethics into broader climate solutions, thereby enhancing both theological and ecological scholarship. It also calls for a decisive return to the balanced application of the "Two Books," the "Book of Nature" and the "Book of Scripture." This paper contributes to the growing literature on religious indigenous cosmologies during climate change.

Keywords: *Book of Nature, Kauma Tradition Religion, Climate Change*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The worsening climate change constantly poses existential threats to all life, especially humans, leading to calls for a unified effort to "Bell the Climate Change Cat". This unified effort urges organized religions, with their scripture-based teachings (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, etc.), to join non-institutionalized traditional religions, which rely on their "book of nature," for a typical religious response to the urgent climate crisis. Pope Francis articulated the need for a holistic approach to this ecological crisis, emphasizing the connection between people's spiritual experiences and the management of sacred groves in various social spheres. An inadequate response to the piecemeal search for solutions to the global ecological crisis prompted this call.

Albert Einstein, along with many scholars, has argued that one cannot solve a problem using the same level of thinking that created it.[1] Contemporary environmental strategies, often shaped by technocratic or extractive commodification practices, frequently overlook indigenous spiritual worldviews that could provide alternative ecological logics and moral foundations for sustainability. This presents a significant gap in the current literature, where numerous studies explore the impacts of climate change and the need for community-based or indigenous conservation, but few seriously engage with indigenous religious cosmologies as foundational frameworks for climate resilience. Specifically, Kauma's eco-spiritual worldview and its embedded environmental ethic remain underrepresented in scholarly and policy discourse.

This paper addresses that gap whose three objectives were; to retrieve and reinterpret the Kauma community's indigenous ecological knowledge embedded in oral traditions, proverbs, and songs through the lens of African eco-spirituality; secondly, to examine how the Kauma's sacred cosmology particularly the concept of the "Book of Nature" to reconstruct an alternative framework for understanding and responding to climate change and finally, to highlight the relevance and potential integration of indigenous spiritual worldviews into contemporary environmental discourse and policy as a response to the failure of dominant models.

In many African cosmologies, nature has a personality that is not passive but active in daily life, which validates the folk saying, "The frog knows more about the weather than the weatherman", which refers to the observation that animals, like frogs, or a bird like the weaver bird, often react to environmental changes before humans can detect them with instruments.[2] This lived experience is commonly associated with African wisdom traditions, where indigenous knowledge and natural observation (such as animal behavior) are valued and trusted alongside modern scientific methods. It reflects the practicality of traditional, experiential knowledge that has served as an accurate and insightful early warning system.

In the "Book of Nature," for the Kauma community, nature is not read through written texts but through *lived experience*, which refers to a deeply embodied knowledge system passed down through observation, ritual, and practice. This lived engagement with the environment forms a kind of experiential literacy, where wisdom is gleaned not from books, but from seasons, animals, winds, and the land itself. This is what Paul the Apostle (Rom 1:20) referred to when he said that there were attributes of divinity that were exhibited through nature or cosmology. Douglas Moo notes that Paul emphasizes general revelation through nature, affirming that creation itself reveals God's attributes to all people, thereby establishing universal accountability.[3] Paul explains that the invisible qualities of God, His eternal power and divine nature, have been perceived through what has been made, leaving humanity without excuse.

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[1] Albert Einstein, quoted in Richard L. Peterson, *Inside the Investor's Brain: The Power of Mind Over Money* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2007), 19.

[2] John Mwangi, *Religious Experiences and Environmental Management of Kaya Shrine amongst Kauma of Kenya* (PhD diss., Laikipia University, 2025), 75

[3] Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 102–103.

This book of nature offered vital information to those who sought it. In the African context, the "book of nature" can be referred to as a lived experience, concerning conversations around indigenous environmental knowledge and cosmologies. The wisdom for living among the Kauma is so intertwined and heavily draws from their environment, where nature serves as a reliable knowledge warehouse that is not separate from human life; it is a living, dynamic system from which people learn daily through direct interaction, observing animals, weather, seasons, plant behaviours, and spiritual signs. This form of knowledge is experiential, not abstract or theoretical.

The "Book of Nature" analogy offers a meaningful way to conceptualize how sacred meanings can help us overcome the consumerism and exploitative worldviews and practices that have led to the global ecological crisis. The answer to the question concerning the relationship between how the divine manifests itself in nature and how it is revealed in scripture provides insight into how humans can restore a harmonious and balanced relationship with nature. Scripture and nature are intended to shape human relationships through scriptural language and the natural world, revealing sacred meanings that can help mitigate the climate crisis.

2.0 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK.

This paper, a qualitative study, employed the theory of African eco-spirituality, which establishes that Africans historically maintained a harmonious and eco-friendly relationship with nature. The research methodology leveraged was the retrieval, reevaluation, and reconstruction of insights from Kauma oral narratives, proverbs, songs, and wise sayings, effectively revisiting the "book of nature" to confront the pressing issue of climate change. Moreover, scriptural texts from the Bible were rigorously analysed to demonstrate their critical relevance to the research objectives, which centre on the climate change crisis. The African perspective, which views the environment as sacred, particularly in the significance attributed to forest shrines, serves as a foundational tradition that informs the analysis of environmental management in this paper. This study, being qualitative, employed African eco-spirituality theory, whose tenets maintain that Africans lived in an eco-friendly and harmonious relationship with nature as evidenced from their oral narratives, proverbs, songs, and wise sayings that paint their 'Book of Nature' that protected them from any climate variations. The other sources being analyzed included scriptural texts from the Bible, which assisted in explaining their relevance to this research objective, in addressing the climate change crisis. The African perception of their environment as sacred, with a focus on their forest shrine, was employed as a tradition guiding the study's analysis of environmental management.

3.0 KAUMA LIVED ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION EXPERIENCE

What Western systems might classify as "science" or "ecology" is what many African communities understood through lived, embodied experience as farming, herding, fishing, healing, and spiritual rituals. Kauma traditionalism religion is geomythological, which means it's shaped by the environment where it's practiced.[4] The rhythms of life align with natural cycles, making the "Book of Nature" something "readable" through experience, rather than through institutions. The "Book of Nature" analogy offers a meaningful way to conceptualize how sacred meanings can help us overcome the immoral worldviews and practices that have led to the ecological crisis.[5] The question that may assist in addressing climate change, which relates to the sacred nature of scripture, is the problem of evil, which seeks to understand 'that if God created the world and God is good, how is it that He allowed or willed evil and suffering to enter it?

[4] Jace Weaver et al., "Rethinking Indigenous Religions," *Indigenous Religious Traditions* 1, no. 1 (2023), https://doi.org/10.1558/irt.25089

[5] Mwangi, *Religious Experiences*, 99.

Manes[6] maintains that the "Book of Nature" was often similarly used to assert that every life form was revelatory of divinity; however, Dupre[7] claimed that in the Middle Ages, there was a common belief that not words, but only concepts could grasp reality, where the human mind, rather than the divine word, became the source for deriving the purposes of nature, both for theorising natural laws and for imagining potential uses of nature. This was the point of departure where the Western world was fast losing faith in a God who created nature with specific meanings and purposes in mind, and faith that human society and nature were meant to coexist meaningfully through divine revelation. These developments dampened the readings of the "Book of Nature" out of a more genuine interest in relationships with the divine.

Species are going extinct at least ten times faster than the natural baseline, with monitored wildlife populations shrinking fastest in the Global South. However, nearly half of the world's remaining key biodiversity areas overlap with Indigenous lands, which is not a coincidence. Kauma stewardship, guided by their Indigenous wisdom and land management practices, has maintained and enriched biodiversity; yet, their role as protectors has been consistently overlooked. However, the Kauma people, part of the Mijikenda ethnic group in coastal Kenya, have long depended on their environment for subsistence, spirituality, and cultural identity. These marginalizing and despising attitudes have eroded the foundation of the ecosystem, whose consequences have had an economic or social impact on business stability and global prosperity. The erosion of the resilience of our global economy has placed a demand for a reevaluation of the wisdom of Indigenous Peoples, validated by the preservation of their natural world that sustains life.

3.1 The Use of the Two Books

The scripture text, for instance, the Bible has many instances with admonitions not to discard the 'Book of Nature'. When the common yearly variation in weather occurs in the tropics, different animals and birds respond differently. Those who can't relocate to favourable places where they can obtain food often enter a passive mode, where they reduce their energy consumption activities in a state called hibernation. Those who can relocate take the phenomenal migratory trip to some destination where they continue their lives. It's this latter batch that is used in the Judeo-Christian scriptures (Jer. 8:7-9) to admonish the people to rediscover the use of their latent intuition and senses to respond to life-threatening variations and changes, especially in weather. John Arthur Thompson comments on how Jeremiah laments the contrast between migratory birds that obey divine rhythms and God's people, who remain obstinate and unaware.[8]

The wisdom writings of Proverbs serve as a practical book for living for those clueless about how to conduct themselves concerning the 'Book of Nature'. The admonition is 'go to the ant, O sluggard, consider her ways and be wise... how long will you lie there... (Prov. 6; 6-11)' Bruce K. Waltke highlights how the ant is used as a teaching tool to exemplify wisdom without needing a leader, emphasizing the moral value of taking initiative. This becomes an invitation to learn from the ant's diligence and foresight as a divine lesson in personal responsibility and hard work. Those who lack understanding are cautioned that even small, easily overlooked creatures can reveal the path to growth. The examples of ants, rock badgers, locusts, and spiders in Proverbs 30:24–28 illustrate this point clearly. Tremper Longman similarly explains how these creatures embody the paradox of strength found in weakness, showing how God's hidden wisdom is expressed through unlikely forms in creation. To those seeking direction on how to order the lives of their fellows, the book of nature

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[6] Christopher Manes, "Nature and Silence," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 22.

[7] Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 103

[8] John Arthur Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 297.

equally carries their instructions, where they are pointed to the king of the jungle, the lion, the roasting cock, the he-goat, and the eagle, figures portrayed as models of authority and confidence (Prov. 30; 29-31). Together, nature and Scripture offer a richer, more comprehensive understanding of reality. Tremper Longman notes that these animals symbolize virtues of confidence, leadership, and strength, and their natural attributes offer guidance for human conduct and governance.[9] The two texts, perceived to have divine origins, instil confidence that they convey a complete and consistent narrative.

3.2 Hearing and Watching, Comparable to the "Two Books"

In the field of cinematography, watching a movie and experiencing the story through both audio and visual means consolidates a memorable experience. In the realm of cognition, the senses of hearing and sight complete and complement each other. Listening alone can help grasp some semblance of the full picture, but a lot is still missing. On the other hand, if one only watches the visuals without the sound, they would grasp only a good part of the story, and again miss a lot. However, the combination and coordination of the senses of sight and hearing make the story more sensible, with the two perception instruments filling each other's gaps. The two books written by the same author explain and interpret each other. Any discrepancy can only be attributed to human error. Earlier models of understanding the relationship between God and humanity relied on the concept of the book of nature, but this has largely been replaced by scientific knowledge of the material world as a means of gaining insight about God. Candice D. Wendt explains that during the Reformation, many religious thinkers accepted the concept of the book of nature as a valid means of encountering and interpreting divine truth. However, they commonly added cautions: both nature and human beings are limited, and nature ultimately teaches that humans bear the responsibility of recognising and responding to the truth God reveals.[10]

3.4 The Peril of Bias against the "Book of Nature"

The employment for all that is available, in this case, both books, is advocated when the book of scriptures and Matthew Henry observe in his commentary on Proverbs 9:9, "Instructions given to a wise man will only make him wiser; teaching a person who values knowledge leads to an increase in learning." This highlights the openness and eagerness of the wise to grow through guidance and education.[11] Learning continues endlessly in the school of wisdom—there is no graduation. The two "books" are designed to complete and complement each other. In contrast, much of Western education follows the scientific method, where experiments are designed, observations are recorded, and predictions are formed once all measurable factors have been considered. In many traditional settings, however, the rhythms of life are aligned with natural cycles, making the Book of Nature something interpreted through lived experience. These natural cycles function as stabilizing centres, much like well-built pipes that reliably carry water or sound philosophies that hold together coherent theories. When these foundational centres are dismissed or devalued, the advanced systems built upon them also begin to collapse. If lived experience—the basis for good experimentation —breaks down, then the outcomes of the scientific method become distorted. The idea that "a problem cannot be solved at the same level of thinking that created it" suggests that the climate crisis, driven largely by modern technology, cannot be resolved solely through the same technological mind-set.

[9] Longman, *Proverbs*, 544–45.
[10] Candice D. Wendt, *Interpreting the Sacred in "As You Like It": Reading the "Book of Nature" from a Christian, Ecocritical Perspective* (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 2009), 41.
[11] Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Proverbs 9:9, accessed June 4, 2025, https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/proverbs/9.html.

In the earliest times of known civilizations, events in the natural world were expressed through a collection of stories or oral narratives concerning everyday life. Traditionalist communities believed that the visible, mortal world existed alongside an upper world of spirits and gods, which acted through nature to create a unified and interconnected moral and natural cosmos. Humans, living in a world governed by free-acting and conspiring forces of nature, attempted to understand their world and the actions of the divine by observing and correctly interpreting natural phenomena, such as the motion and position of stars and planets. Efforts to analyze and understand divine intentions led mortals to believe that intervention and influence over godly acts were possible, either through religious persuasions, such as prayer and gifts, or through rituals, which depended on the manipulation of nature to appease the will of the gods. Humans, over time, believed they could discover divine intentions by observing or manipulating the natural world. Thus, mankind had a reason to learn more about nature.

Reading nature through human reason can be interpreted as anthropocentric "readings" of nature that were developing when nature was declared dead, while reading nature with the help of divine grace was on the decline. This study posits that revisiting the 'Book of Nature' with the help of divine grace is an essential tool in overcoming the present environmental crisis, as Church fathers and doctors, Origen and Augustine, well stated that religious readings of nature had the potential of locating sources of relief and hope in the face of evil and suffering. The decline of religious interpretations of nature was linked to a growing belief that sensory experiences of the natural world were no longer inherently sacred or imbued with symbolic meaning. This perspective was explored in Carolyn Merchant's book *The Death of Nature*.[12] These changes of attitude in readings of the Book of Nature began to characterize Western ideology as a visual word culture. Peter Harrison[13] observed that the visual language of symbols was gradually being replaced with the mental language of math and reason as the book of nature was deployed by those promoting the development of science. Nature was visually stripped of its hidden manifestations and made much more transparent, the awe and mystery vanishing.

3.5 The Book of Nature as Humanity's Unwritten Laws

Nietzsche's suggestion that the pursuit of truth led to the development of the scientific method, which in turn led to the discovery of the 'truth' that naturalistic explanations of our place in the universe are all sufficient. Because humans had discovered their answers to the big questions of life, they had plugged the final gaps; the God of the gaps was no longer needed. This was developed further by Merchant, who claimed that nature, too, was dead. These two deaths claimed from the west silenced the voice of unwritten laws and dimmed the light from the book of nature on how all lives were to co-exist. Antigone,[14] two thousand years ago, in literary history, challenged the ruler, Creon, on a stage in ancient Greece: in her speech, she says that there are "unwritten laws" of humanity, of reason, which are more important than the written laws. If we do not follow them, we are no longer human, and life loses its meaning. And for those laws, it is worth risking everything. The climate change challenge proves Antigone to have been right. Just as Rosa Parks insisted on her seat in the part of the bus that was reserved for white people, what is it that is important to the strikers and that gives these unwritten laws of humanity legitimacy and allows them to turn against the existing laws to fight for other, more important ones, which are still unwritten? The Kauma, like other traditionalists, lived with reverence and harmony as their unwritten laws in relation to nature. This was seen by how they gleaned only what they needed and not more from their environment.[15]

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[12] Arne Johan Vetlesen, *The Denial of Nature: Environmental Philosophy in the Era of Global Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 2015), 1–236.

[13] Peter Harrison, "The 'Book of Nature' and Early Modern Science," in *The Book of Nature in Early Modern and Modern History*, ed. Klaas van Berkel and Arjo Vanderjagt (Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2006), 4.

[14] Bonnie Honig. "Antigone's two laws: Greek tragedy and the politics of humanism." *New Literary History* 41, no. 1 (2010): 29.

[15] Mwangi, *Religious Experiences*,175.

The concept of dignity is one of those largely unwritten codes of relationships that can be viewed from two perspectives. Seeing others as having dignity means, on the one hand, not dominating them, and that means eliminating relations of domination, whether in terms of gender (patriarchy), ethnicity (racism), class (exploitation), or other realms of inequality. The second perspective is that of care and attention. It is not enough just to avoid dominating others. Seeing them as having dignity also means taking their needs seriously, not letting anyone starve or abandoning them to illness, and so on.

These honour codes of relationships bring humanity closer to nature and to the material from which they are made, the living, vulnerable physicality that connects us with the whole network of the plant and animal world. It was about upholding the laws of humanity, as Antigone discussed. Climate change early warning and appropriate response refer to returning to the basics or factory settings for harmonious and reverential coexistence with nature. This calls for embracing a kincentric relationship where humans are part of the diverse living systems that are intricately interrelated. Man is called to revisit his relationships with nature. The Kauma have three other perspectives on their relationship with nature.

3.6 Kauma Differentiated Views of the Environment

The shaping of attitudes and perceptions falls in the domain of religious sensibilities, which determines how one's beliefs are informed. The Kauma forest shrine's religious experiences shaped a combination of views that determined their relationship to its status before and after the arrival of Europeans, which, however, have had both changes and continuity over time. These ecological views are: anthropocentric, ecocentric, anthropocosmic, and kincentric.

3.6.1 Anthropocentric Perspective of the Environment

This is the colonial and post-colonial viewpoint that places humans at the centre of the universe. The heading for this section was adapted from the lead author's thesis. [16]This view presents the purpose of the universe as the resource center for meeting all human needs and them alone. The anthropocentric view is catalyzed by modern technology, which makes humans blind and insensitive to the sacred, and also in engagement with the sacred meanings in scripture. This viewpoint was only evident among those Kauma who defied the established structure of governance, and, like everywhere else, rebels are always found in every community. There are two sides to this ecological cosmology or viewpoint; on one hand, this can lead to conservation efforts, typically driven by fear that the forests' role in sustaining human life or providing economic opportunities may be threatened, rather than a recognition of their intrinsic ecological or spiritual value. This view of the environment, particularly regarding forests, prioritizes human needs and values over the intrinsic worth of nature. This perspective presents forests primarily as resources for human benefit, focusing on their economic, recreational, and utilitarian roles. This view focuses on resource extraction and exploitation, where Forests are valued for timber, fuel, medicinal plants, and other products that directly support human economies and livelihoods.

This ecological cosmology, or view on the other hand, can positively lead to conservation efforts, typically out of the motivation that you don't bite the hand that feeds you, in which case the forests' role in sustaining human life or providing economic opportunities is recognized as part of their intrinsic ecological, cultural, and spiritual value. Land uses like leisure, tourism, and cultural enrichment, again emphasizing their relevance to human experiences, determinations about deforestation, reforestation, or conservation are often guided by how forests can best serve human development goals, such as agriculture, urban expansion, or industry. The solution to defeating anthropocentrism requires a wider concern not only with the loss of sacred meanings in nature but also with the desacralization of the religious or holy. Christopher Manes.[17] It also identifies the Book of

[16] Mwangi, *Religious Experiences*, 178.
[17] Christopher Manes. "Nature and Silence." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks*

Nature as a foundation in shaping attitudes that can help mitigate the environmental crisis. The influence of medieval exegesis, Manes claims, promotes Renaissance humanistic anthropocentrism, whose main culprit of the silencing of the voice of nature in modern culture. As Michel Serres[18] suggests, nature came to be treated not unlike an enemy, as technology was used to suppress suffering through extreme measures.

3.6.2 Ecocentric Perspective of the Environment

The heading for this section was adapted from the lead author's thesis.[19] This is the pre-colonial ecological cosmology view that admonishes a hearkening to 'listen till one hears the earth cry' due to selfish uses that are not sustainable. The Kauma applied themselves to this light by listening till they heard the trees court and attract rain, which led them to formulate their ecological philosophy that enhanced the intrinsic value of trees by the belief that 'trees attract rain'. This ecological cosmology places intrinsic value on forests and all their components, independent of human utility, by emphasizing the interconnectedness of all life forms and recognizing forests as vital, self-sustaining ecosystems that deserve respect and protection for their own sake.[20] as water is perceived to be or to bring life. The interconnectedness of forests is understood as integral to the larger biosphere. Their existence and functions, such as oxygen production, carbon sequestration, and water cycling, are essential for the planet's overall health, benefiting all life forms. This ethical worldview assigns inherent value to both individual living beings and entire ecosystems, considering them as ends in themselves rather than means to human ends. The health and sustainability of the forest ecosystem are prioritized. His perspective is one of longevity for forests over short-term human needs. It promotes sustainable practices that ensure forests remain intact for future generations of all species.

3.6.3 Anthropocosmic Perspective on the Environment

This precolonial view offers insights into coexisting with nature, grounded in the idea that humans are part of the cosmic order and are embedded within it, rather than alienated from it. Time is the essential dimension for generating transformative harmony, and this ancient Chinese philosophy is consistent with the idea that heaven, earth, and human beings are co-created in harmony. In an anthropocosmic approach to environmental ethics, *humans are intimately intertwined with the environment.*[21] Kauma's shrines are often oriented in specific directions that align with cosmological principles, symbolizing the balance between opposing forces, such as life and death, fertility, and barrenness[22]. This spatial symbolism underscores the Kauma's belief in maintaining equilibrium within their environment and society. While sacred spaces hold spiritual significance, secular spaces such as homes, fields, and marketplaces are equally important in understanding the Kauma's relationship to their environment.

These spaces are not devoid of sacredness; rather, they represent a continuum where the sacred and secular intersect. For example, agricultural fields are seen as extensions of sacred groves, as both are essential for sustaining life. The Kauma's agricultural practices are deeply rooted in their ecological and cosmological view, as evident in their planting and harvesting seasons that are embedded in rituals geared to invoking the blessings of ancestors and spirits, highlighting the sacred dimensions of work. This combination of sacred and secular elements in everyday life illustrates Kauma's holistic worldview capable of transitioning humankind beyond reductionist, materialistic perspectives to spark

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in Literary Ecology. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens, Georgia: U of Georgia P, 1996. 15-29.

[18] Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract*, trans. Elizabeth MacArthur and William Paulson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

[19] Mwangi, *Religious Experiences*, 178.

[20] Dorothy Kleffel. "Environmental paradigms: Moving toward an Ecocentric perspective." *Advances in Nursing Science* 18, no. 4 (1996): 1-10.

[21] Sam Mickey. "Contributions to Anthropocosmic environmental ethics." *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 11, no. 2 (2007): 226-247.

[22] Mwangi, *Religious Experiences*, 179.

more relational worldviews and conceptions of the world that recognize deep interconnections among all beings. This is where a spiritual and ethical renewal sparked can revitalize anthroposophic worldviews during this intensely anthropocentric time.

3.6.4 Kincentric Perspective of the Environment

The kincentric perspective is a precolonial, harmonious relationship with forest environments that encourages practices that sustain both human communities and the forest ecosystem, rooted in respect, gratitude, and interdependence. The heading for this section was adapted from the lead author's thesis.[23] Trees, animals, rivers, and other elements within the forest are considered part of a broader kinship network.[24] Clan-based kinship systems influence the distribution of land and the placement of sacred and secular spaces. The Miji Kenda ecosophy holds that 'lands belong to a vast family of which many are dead, few are living, and countless numbers are still unborn'[25]. This wisdom voice pinpoints the importance of both inter- and intra-generational equity in African culture, concerns that have been raised in international environmental law discourses. The quality of the environment should be maintained in a way that short-term measures do not compromise the long-term sustainability and integrity of the ecosystem.[26] Future generations should not be deprived of the opportunity to enjoy the use of natural resources. Each clan is responsible for maintaining specific sacred sites, reinforcing a sense of collective identity and accountability. This spatial organization also reflects social hierarchies, with elders and spiritual leaders occupying central roles in both community life and the management of sacred spaces.

The perspective fosters a relational understanding where forests are viewed as living relatives, emphasizing the deep, reciprocal relationship between humans and the natural world. Rooted in Indigenous worldviews, this perspective considers forests as part of an interconnected family of life, where humans, animals, plants, and natural elements are all kin. Spiritual Connectivity is factored in as forests are perceived to serve as sacred spaces or the dwelling places of ancestral spirits. This connection fosters respect and reverence for the forest and its life forms, which calls for reciprocity and stewardship. This perspective emphasizes a reciprocal relationship. Humans depend on forests for sustenance and shelter, while forests rely on humans for respectful care and sustainable interaction. Kincentric perception is closest in identity to the Kauma cosmology and their environment, where humankind is perceived as a microcosm of the macrocosm, a small expression of the large universe, where humans are in continuity with the earth and cosmos. Religion often understood humans as embedded in the larger Earth and cosmos. Religions help transform practitioners from a smaller identity towards an identity with a larger whole.

Kauma's religious experience orients, grounds, nurtures, and transforms to embrace that man is not independent but dependent. Man does not claim personal rights and freedom, but fulfils communal obligations and duties. The basis of man's communalism in Africa is rooted in his relationship with the world around him. The African concept of community, or communalism, as formulated in the Ubuntu philosophy, is derived from kinship. Kinship in this context refers to family relationships rooted in a progenitor or an ancestor. The Kinship relationship is defined as a physical and blood linkage to the progenitor or ancestor. The community takes its roots or beginnings from this human origin (physical and blood source), and a network of relationships is built around this ancestral nucleus.

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[23] Mwangi, *Religious Experiences*, 179.

[24] Enriques Salmón. "Kincentric ecology: Indigenous perceptions of the human–nature relationship." *Ecological applications* 10, no. 5 (2000): 1327-1332.

[25] Martin Chanock, "Paradigms, Policies and Property: A Review of the Customary Law of Land Tenure," in *Law in Colonial Africa*, ed. Richard Roberts and Kristin Mann (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991), 61–64.

[26] Edith Brown Weiss, *In Fairness to Future Generations: International Law, Common Patrimony and Intergenerational Equity* (Tokyo: United Nations University, 1989).

Kinship served as the premise of the Kauma community,[27] forming the foundational social unit and general social organization that the community revolved around. It regulated and ordered the life of a community/society on a kinship basis. The most powerful principle of social organization was the concept of "brotherhood" derived from "blood-relationship", characterized by kinship affinity, loyalties, and obligations of relatives. This regulates social behavior and attitudes and orders social interaction in society among relatives and persons. Religious and social norms and codes of behavior, attitudes, and practices guide the delicate social interactions of kinsfolk and also how they relate to outsiders and strangers.

The distinction between sacred and secular spaces among the Kauma was not rigid but rather fluid. This fluidity reflects their cosmology, diffuses kinship in everything, and does not compartmentalize spiritual and material realms but views them as interwoven. The marketplaces, for instance, are typically seen as secular spaces, but can become sacred during festivals or rituals.[28] During such events, these spaces are transformed into sites of communal worship and celebration, blurring the lines between the sacred and the secular. Similarly, on the reverse, sacred spaces can serve practical purposes. Kaya forests, while primarily spiritual sites, also provide resources such as medicinal plants, firewood, and construction materials. However, access to these resources is regulated by spiritual guidelines, ensuring sustainable use and respect for the sanctity of the space. This duality underscores Kauma's recognition of the environment as both a spiritual and material resource.

This paper proposes that the kincentric perception of the Kaya Kuama people and their religious experiences fostered an ethic of environmental stewardship, where they believed in the sacredness of nature, with some trees being treated as sacred, which encouraged sustainable practices that regulated resource extraction and hence, conservation of sacred space and its environs. Cutting trees, for instance, or hunting for sport in Kaya forests and river Nzovuni without ritual permission was considered a violation of spiritual laws, which attracts penalties from both the community and the spirits. This cosmological approach to sustainability is particularly significant in the face of external pressures such as deforestation, urbanization, and climate change. Kauma's practices demonstrate how traditional knowledge systems can contribute to modern environmental conservation efforts, offering valuable insights into the integration of cultural heritage and ecological preservation.

Manners and customs refer to the social practices and customs that cover legal practices, family and marriage life, as well as methods of warfare. According to Mbiti, spirituality permeated all aspects of life for Africans, as evidenced by the numerous areas where African worship experiences can be observed almost everywhere. Religion from the African perspective can most accurately be defined by manners and customs. To the Kaumas of the Kenyan Eastern coast, spiritualism takes preeminence where everything is perceived through spiritual lenses of the world governed by the law of the spirit. This law reflects the dominance of spiritual reality in traditional African beliefs and worldviews. The whole of creation is replete with the dominant and pervasive presence of impersonal powers and forces, spirit beings, many divinities, and gods. To the Kaumas, "their world, in essence, is more spiritual rather than material," and "life is saturated with supernatural possibilities."

3.7 The Kauma's manner of Sacralizing Spaces

The Kauma sub-clan of Miji Kenda hallowed the Kaya Forest shrine by burying the *fingo*, (community protective charm) believed to have been gotten from their mythological home at Singwaya. This buried community protective charm consecrates the secret location. The setting it apart is marked by undisturbed vegetation. This is followed by installing pillars in honor of uninitiated family members who are believed to seek the attention of living members for help. The memorial sticks known as *komas* are installed on an altar where family members can offer sacrifices, seeking the mediation of the ancestors to Mulungu aliye moyo (the Living God). The community level installs memorial sticks

[27] Mwangi, *Religious Experiences*,126.
[28] Mwangi, *Religious Experiences*,126.

known as *vigango* (memorial sticks) for those initiated into the secret and semi-secret societies of the Miji Kenda departed ones in places that are hallowed as shrine altars. These are the three ritual spaces that are commonly hallowed as points of contact between the visible and the invisible, the living and the dead, the community and its God.

There are definite rituals that invoke religious experiences, such as spirit possession and divination. These religious experiences serve as early warning signs when nature is misused, or the "Book of Nature" is treated roughly and wrongly, and is ready for retributive justice in equal measure. And before nature or the natural world, the ancestors and the Creator act they communicating with the living**.** This cosmological worldview not only forms the core of Kauma spirituality, directing their environmental management**.** Kauma sub-clan of Miji Kenda represents the best learning and knowledge-sharing community from the Book of Nature for harmonious coexistence with nature, which nurtures all life in the only sacred home there is, the earth. African knowledge systems have traditionally been oral rather than textual**;** however, the environment becomes a "text" decoded not through literacy, but through immersion in life, observation, and intergenerational practice**.** Kauma traditional religion is entangled with, in an inseparable manner, other spheres of life, presenting a study of ordinary people in everyday situations that underscores the study of *lived religion*. The lived-religion perspective corrects the earlier theoretical tendency to privilege belief over practice and religious specialists over laypeople. This aspect of the Kauma religion, being shaped by its environment, as many other indigenous religions, slots it as a geomythological religion.

3.7.1 Admonition to live in a Harmonious Relationship with Nature

Humankind, according to religious text, was created in the image of the creator, while nature is likened to a mirror reflecting the creator's face, or a book written with his hand. This analogy of the "Book of Nature" suggests concerning the problem of evil that (1) despite the evil and suffering present in nature, creator's grace is manifest, even, at times, in things that appear evil themselves, and (2) that human capacities to perceive this grace are increased by scripture. Written sacred texts do not carry stagnant meanings, but meanings that have the potential to revitalize the purposes we perceive in our relationships with the natural world.

The knee-jerk reactions to climate change have been diverse, ranging from an attitude that nature would do well without humans, implying that human presence is somehow alien to nature, which has long been influential in environmentalism and wilderness conservation movements. There has been a feeling that "nature can do without human beings, but they cannot do without nature". However, humans have cared for nature for a long time, particularly indigenous peoples who have nurtured local nature in specific ways.

The next projection from this attitude is that human beings are part of nature, yet also exceptional in their capacity for cruelty and destruction, as well as in their tendency to imagine themselves as separate from nature. The middle attitude argument positively evaluates humanity as having the potential to make worthwhile contributions to the world. A central tenet of nature realignment ideology is that humans are part of nature and that healing our relationships with nature (or the numerous relationships we are part of in nature) is essential for both personal well-being and ecological balance. Eco-psychology assumes that the psyche, at its deepest level, remains sympathetically bonded to the Earth that nurtured us into existence. One major implication of this interconnectedness is that we, as human individuals, are deeply affected by the trauma of the current ecological crisis. The Cold War situation was characterized by military and technological competition between superpowers, placing more demand on consumerism to sustain the growth of the capitalist economy, which meant a higher demand for natural resources.

The concept of climate justice encompasses the idea of the environmental and climate crisis, which extends beyond the technical problem of global warming. The crises themselves and the way we attempt to deal with them must be seen in an ethical and political context; since, for instance, people, especially in the Global South, are much more severely affected by the crises, they contribute little to

emissions of greenhouse gases responsible for global warming and climate challenges. The ethical and political context states that the few states that are much wealthier and have better resources, currently the greatest cause of climate change, can reduce emissions and make compensations for the damage as spelled out in the Kyoto Protocol, and also in the Paris Agreement, where justice and equality are explicitly named as a binding compass. Justice has political consequences, for example, by letting those who are most affected take charge, such as the Indigenous Kauma people in Kenya in the Global South, as well as in Mozambique and Bangladesh, the island states on the edge of being submerged. Justice requires that those who have historically emitted the most greenhouse gases, and who are generally more affluent, take on a far greater share of the responsibility for reducing emissions. They should also provide substantial compensation for the harm inflicted on poorer communities that have contributed the least to climate change.

Humans are creatures capable of exercising imagination, a feature that most distinguishes them from other animals. The central theme of lectures on the theory of imagination and fantasy is that the magic of the imagination is somehow linked to how humans elevate fundamental aspects like nature and technology to freedom, combining vulnerability and power. This becomes problematic when people position nature and technology as opposing forces instead of recognizing them as interconnected and capable of working together. Sustainability, you could argue, means creating structures in which nature and technology don't appear as opposites. A wind turbine embodies this more cooperative logic, not the opposite.

If tipping points, like the disappearance of Arctic ice, or harmful self-reinforcing processes, such as permafrost thaw, did not exist, the situation would likely be far less severe. There is a real danger that as the planet heats up by several degrees, it moves towards becoming uninhabitable for its most noble inhabitant, humanity,[29] the condition that has led to calls for a unified stand to 'Bell the Climate Cat', where the concept of "justice" is interpolated with that of "being humane"[30].

4.0 CONCLUSION.

This research concludes that a revisit to the "Book of Nature" by Kauma Traditionalism can enhance the tackling of the global ecological crisis through religious experiences. The Two Books offer a meaningful way to conceptualize how sacred meanings can overcome the destructive worldviews and practices that have resulted in the current environmental crisis. There is a need to care and to provide sufficient resources for everyone, not merely to eliminate problematic power relations. It becomes even more significant that, by returning to a respectful use of the two "books," they transform the situation. The "Book of Nature" is seen as containing symbols and clues that make sense only to those who can connect them with scriptural teachings that emphasize humanity's responsibility to care for creation. The belief that nature could reveal the divine, much like a book, gradually merged with the idea that creation existed for humanity's benefit. This gave rise to the view that scientists were meant to uncover God's hidden truths within nature and use their findings to advance human well-being. Since the West is unlikely to adopt a new religion or significantly revise its existing traditions, it becomes essential to revisit older religious practices, such as those of the Kauma sub-tribe of the Miji Kenda. Over time, the sense of nature's sacredness shifted toward a more human-centered perspective focused on "human flourishing." In this process, divine purposes for creation, beyond human needs, and dependence on God's grace were overshadowed by confidence in human reason to interpret and structure the world through natural laws. Technology then became a tool for explaining and controlling the sources of suffering in order to prioritize human welfare above other forms of life.

[29] Timothy Lenton et al., "*Climate Tipping Points — Too Risky to Bet Against*," *Nature*, November 27, 2019.
[30] David Fopp, *The Youth Climate Uprising* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2024).

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