

Environmental Care in Ghana: A Moral Duty for Ghanaian Christians

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Abstract: *Since human beings depend on the natural environment for survival, humans have the moral duty to ensure the sustainable use of the environment. Being part of the human family, Ghanaians have a share in this universal moral duty that involves the particular moral obligation to care for the natural environment within and outside the geographical area of the nation. Similarly, Christians are bound to observe God's injunction to love their neighbour and care for creation. These notwithstanding, in Ghana, the natural environment is at the mercy of different forms of environmental abuses, thereby undermining the healthy survival of both the present and future generations. This paper challenges Ghanaian Christians to realize and accept that they have a moral duty to care for the environment and also recognize the urgent need to collaborate with the government, and other stakeholders to salvage the environmental crisis in Ghana.*

Keywords: *Environment, moral duty, Ghanaian Christians*

1. INTRODUCTION

As very rightly affirmed by Rajotte, F. and Breuille, E. (1992), "many people are asking how the churches can respond to the ecological crisis (globally)... more and more individuals and groups are becoming involved in local efforts to conserve or restore the environment, as part of their Christian concern for the world."¹ Considering the fact that currently Ghana is experiencing an alarming rate of deforestation, coupled with illegal mining that threatens the destruction of fresh water bodies, and having been ranked by the World Health Organization as one of the dirtiest countries on Earth and second in open defecation, it is crystal clear that there is an environmental crisis in Ghana that urgently demands a moral response. This study challenges Ghanaian Christians, as a matter of urgency, to recognize that they have the moral duty to care for the natural environment and actualize the said moral duty by collaborating with the government and other stakeholders to promote and participate in the agenda to salvage the environmental situation in Ghana.

2. GHANAIAN CHRISTIANS

Formerly, Ghana was known as the Gold Coast. According to the 2010 Census,² the following statistics show the respective religious affiliation of Ghanaians: Christians 71.1%; Muslims 17.6%; No religion 5.3%; Traditionalists 5.2%; others 0.8%. Before the advent of foreign religions such as Christianity and Islam, Ghanaians were basically traditionalists³ adhering to their indigenous norms and taboos that dealt effectively with environmental problems. The influx of foreign religions and cultures such as Christianity and Islam have apparently usurped the influence that the traditionalists had in Ghana but unlike the latter, the former have not been successful in putting in place measures that can effectively respond to environmental challenges in Ghana.

¹Cf. Rajotte, F. and Breuille, E. (1992). What is the crisis? in *Christianity and ecology*, Breuille, E. and Palmer, M. (eds), London: Cassell Publishers Limited, pp. 3-4.

²See Ghana Statistical Service, (May, 2012), 2010 Population & Housing Census. Summary Report of Final Results. Accra: A Publication of the Ghana Statistical Service - (Sakoa Press Limited), p. 40.

³'Traditionalists' are Ghanaians who, "in spite of the inroads of western civilisation and religions such as Christianity and Islam, have still not abandoned the indigenous religion bequeathed to them by their forebears, which is commonly referred to as African Traditional Religion." See Appiah-Sekyere, P. and Awuah-Nyamekye, S. (2012). Teenage Pregnancy in the Life and Thought of the Akan: Moral Perspectives. *Sociology Study*, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 129.

Actually, Christians are people that have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and savior and follow his way of life and teachings.⁴ As mentioned above, the three main religious groups in Ghana are Christians 71.1%, Muslims 17.6%, and Traditionalists 5.2%. This study has sampled Christians not with the intention of expecting only Christians to embark on the agenda of salvaging the environmental mess in Ghana but to recognize that they have the moral duty to cooperate and collaborate with the government, NGOs and other stakeholders to remedy the environmental crisis. Ghana. Additional reasons for choosing Christians include the following:

More than two-thirds of Ghanaians are Christians. In fact, as stated above, Christians form 71.1% of Ghana's population. This population or numerical strength is an important factor. If 71.1% of Ghana's population, namely, Christians gain the awareness and understating that they have a moral duty to care for their natural environment, the effect will be enormous.

In another perspective, Christian Churches in Ghana have well established structures⁵ such as schools, hospitals, parishes, stations and other institutions that can be utilized to promote the aforementioned healthy environmental agenda.

Next, Christianity has managed to spread out to several areas including remotest and rural parts⁶ of Ghana and if the aforementioned agenda, namely, care for the environment is understood and embraced by Christians, it may equally spread to the remotest parts of Ghana.

In a further development, Christians acknowledge that human beings live in society and have moral and social responsibilities.⁷ Furthermore, it is part of Christian beliefs to respect the integrity of creation.⁸ This paper posits that the moral and social responsibilities that humans have, include that of caring for the natural environment as John Paul II rightly asserted: "I wish to repeat that the ecological crisis is a moral issue."⁹ Hence, humans, (especially Christians and specifically in this study, Ghanaian Christians) have the moral duty to care for the natural environment. The fact that Christians have a duty to care for the environment was strongly affirmed by a Conference in Coventry Cathedral as follows: "CHRISTIANS have a mandate to look after the earth, and should collectively work towards finding lasting solutions to the environmental crisis...."¹⁰

3. MORAL DUTY

In his second work, *the critique of practical reason*, Immanuel Kant, (1788), treats his famous Categorical Imperative, his duty ethics. According to Kant,

Our` moral imperatives` - unconditional `oughts` - have their provenance in the formal structure of the human mind. It is the concept of `duty` universalized. Before any act I should ask myself: Would I approve if all men do this? Any action that can be universalized can be accepted as ethical.¹¹

Kant's Categorical Imperative, states that "Act only on the maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law."¹²

This paper employs the Kantian duty ethics to challenge Ghanaian Christians to recognize, accept and promote it in Ghana that Ghanaians have a moral duty to care for the natural environment.¹³ In its

⁴On who a Christian is and what makes him/her a Christian see The Holy See, (1994). *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Liguori Publications, Nos. 1691-1696.

⁵ On schools established by the Basel, Wesleyan, Anglican and Roman Catholic missionaries, see Okyere, V.N. (2000). *Ghana: A historical survey*. Accra: VINOJAB Publications, pp. 44-46. See also Koduah, A. (2004). *Christianity in Ghana Today*. Accra- Ghana, pp. 60-63.

⁶On the spread and mushrooming of Christian Churches in Ghana, see Asamoah-Gyadu, J. (1998). The Church in the African state: The Pentecostal/Charismatic Experience in Ghana, in *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 51.

⁷ Cf. The Holy See, (1994). *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Liguori Publications, Nos. 2420-2424.

⁸The Holy See, (1994). *Op. Cit.*, Nos. 2415-2418.

⁹Cited by Rajotte, F. and Breuilly, E. (1992). What is the crisis? in *Christianity and Ecology*, Breuilly, E. and Palmer, M. (eds), London: Cassell Publishers Limited, p. 2.

¹⁰ Ashworth, P. (25th September, 2015). Church must lead caring for earth, conference concluded, in *Church Times*. London: Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd., pp. 6-7.

¹¹Christian, J. L. (1998). *An introduction to the art of wondering*. New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, p. 306.

¹² Ibid..

¹³ Both on national and global levels since Ghanaian Christians belong to the Ghanaian society which is a subset of the global human society.

practical dynamics, for example, each Ghanaian (starting from Christians) should ask him/herself, (before defecating openly, or setting a bush fire, or destroying a forest or getting involved in any other type of environmental abuse) this question: “would I approve if all Ghanaians do this in Ghana?, and all human beings do this in the world?”¹⁴The study challenges Ghanaian Christians to employ their human and ecclesiastical resources to disseminate the moral duty maxim among the Christians themselves and extend it to the non-Christian population as they endeavour to collaborate with the government, NGOs and other stake holders to salvage the environmental crisis in Ghana.

4. GHANA: LOCATION

Ghana, is a West African nation that is bordered on the North by Burkina Faso, on the South by the Gulf of Guinea, on the East by the Republic of Togo, and on the West by La Cote D'Ivoire (Ivory Coast). Geographically, it is located between the Latitudes 4° 44' and 11° 15' N, of the Equator, and between the Longitudes 3° 15' W and 1° 12' E of the Greenwich Meridian.

In fact, Ghana can be located precisely on Latitude 5 degrees, 36 minutes North and Longitude 0 degrees, 10 minutes East.¹⁴

The total area of Ghana is 238,537 km² (92,100 miles²) comprising land: 230, 940 km² and water: 8,520 km².¹⁵ Ghana has two major seasons, namely, the wet and dry seasons. With its proximity to the equator, Ghana has a climate that is characteristically tropical and humid. Actually, the climate is tropical. The eastern coastal belt is warm and comparatively dry; the southwest corner, hot and humid; and the north, hot and dry. There are two distinct rainy seasons in the south, May-June and August-September; in the north, the rainy seasons tend to merge. A dry, northeasterly wind, the Harmattan, blows in January and February.¹⁶

Ghana's population is about 24,658,823 (2010 Census).¹⁷ According to the 2010 Census, the ethnic groups in Ghana are Akan (47.5%), Mole-Dagbani (16.6%), Ewe (13.9%) and Ga-Dangme (7.4%), Gurma (5.7%), Guan (3.7%), Grusi (2.5%), Mande (1.1%), other (1.6%).¹⁸ As regards the religions in Ghana, the 2010 Census declared that there are Traditionalists, (5.2%), Christians (71.2%), Muslims (17.6%) and others (0.8%), none (5.3%).¹⁹ As typical Africans, Ghanaians are notably religious.²⁰

5. THE ENVIRONMENTAL SITUATION IN GHANA

There are different dimensions of environment.²¹ This paper focuses on the physical or natural aspect of environment. Before the advent of foreign cultures and religions such as Christianity and Islam, traditional Ghanaian norms and taboos effectively ensured environmental protection and sustainability.²²With the advent of foreign cultures and religions such as Christianity²³ the influence of

¹⁴See <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/geography/nature.php>. Retrieved 6th May, 2015.

¹⁵ Cf. <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/general/statistics.php>. Retrieved 5th May, 2015.

¹⁶ See <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/geography/nature.php>. Retrieved 6th May, 2015.

¹⁷ Ghana Statistical Service, (May, 2012), 2010 Population & Housing Census. Summary Report of Final Results. Accra: A Publication of the Ghana Statistical Service (Sakoa Press Limited).

¹⁸ Ghana Statistical Service, (May, 2012), 2010 Population & Housing Census. Summary Report of Final Results, p. 34.

¹⁹ Ghana Statistical Service, (May, 2012), 2010 Population & Housing Census. Summary Report of Final Results, p. 40.

²⁰See Pobee, J. S. (1992). Religion and Politics in Ghana: A Case Study of the Acheampong Era. Accra: Ghana Universities Press, pp. 1-3.

²¹ Examples include, social, political, religious, economic and natural dimensions of environment. See <http://www.unep.org>. Retrieved 3rd May, 2015.

²²Traditional Ghanaian methods that ensured environmental protection and sustainability included sacred groves, folktales, totemic animals and taboos. (See Awuah-Nyamekye, S. (2014). *Managing the environmental crisis in Ghana: The role of Traditional African Religion and culture with special reference to the Berekum Traditional Area*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 90-128; See also Sarpong, P. (1974). *Ghana in retrospect: Some aspects of Ghanaian culture*, (reprint 2006). Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, pp. 51-63; That Traditional Africans (including traditional Ghanaians) utilized their traditional environmental methods to ensure ecological balance and sanity, see also Mbiti, J. S., (1991). *Introduction to African religion 2nd ed.* Nairobi, Kampala, Dar es Salam: African Educational Publishers. p. 44.

traditional Ghanaian norms and taboos in ensuring environmental protection and sustainability has gradually reduced to the barest minimum. Acheampong Elvis Akwasi vividly describes the situation in Ghana as follows:

Ghana like many other African countries is endowed with very rich culture and tradition. The traditional culture of Ghana stressed a strong relationship with the environment, and in the past, a culturally acceptable environmental management resulted from strictures and taboos related to water bodies, land, and deep forest. Though there are some cultural practices that are peculiar to some towns and villages, in general they have so many things in common and served the same important purpose of conserving nature. This, to a large extent helped saved the environment and our ancestors rarely died of pollution related ailments. With the advent of Christianity, Islam, civilization and its accompanying technology in Ghana, however, many of these beliefs, taboos, customs and traditions have been relegated to the background and are regarded by many as fetish and useless, though they played a key role in environmental protection.²⁴

Considering the present environmental situation in Ghana, it is obvious that the borrowed culture(s) and religions have not been as successful as the traditional Ghanaian norms and taboos were in ensuring environmental protection and sustainability in Ghana. Presently, the environmental abuses in Ghana are numerous. They include (to mention just a few) bush fires, deforestation, indiscriminate logging, illegal mining known as “gallamsey,” uncurbed littering and open defecation.

5.1. Bush Fires

In Ghana, bush fires are destroying the natural environment at an alarming rate. This was affirmed by Mr. Abu Iddrisu, the Northern Regional Manager of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) when he expressed worry about the rate at which the environment was being depleted due to excessive bush burning.²⁵

Apart from destroying the environment, bush fires sometimes destroy crops. For example, a report by The Ghana News Agency (GNA) stated, “Raging bushfire has destroyed three rice farms in the Yendi Municipality from January to March this year.”²⁶

Different governments, Churches and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and individuals of good-will have spoken against the destruction caused by bush fires in Ghana. It seems that the perpetrators of the bush fires place their individual selfish interests above the national interest.²⁷ Consequently, data estimate that every year, bush fires destroy about 30% of the forest area in Ghana.²⁸

5.2. Illegal Logging

According to the Ghana News Agency, (GNA), the original forest cover in Ghana was 36% of the nation’s landmass and reduced to 23% by 1972, 13.3% in 1990 and 10.2% in 2000.²⁹ Illegal logging is causing deforestation and desertification. In fact, GN Aquotes Kyere Boateng as saying: “We have come to realize that some 85 communities encourage illegal logging in 85 forest reserves for financial benefits because they did not receive adequate compensation.”³⁰ Tamakloe (2008) asserts that since the 1940s, more than 90% of the forest in Ghana has been destroyed and the destruction of the forest continues.

²³On the advent of foreign culture(s) and Christianity, see Wiltgen, R. M. (1956), *Gold Coast mission history 1471-1880*. Techny, Illinois: Divine Word Publications, pp. 1-10.

²⁴Acheampong, E. A. (30th November, 2010). The Role of Ghanaian Culture and Tradition in Environmental Sustainability, from <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/The-Role-Of-Ghanaian-Culture-And-Tradition-In-Environmental-Sustainability-198388>. Retrieved 5th June, 2015.

²⁵GNA, (4th February, 2011). Nine people to be prosecuted for indiscriminate bush burning, <http://www.Ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/crime/artikel.php?ID=202>. Retrieved on 6th May, 2014.

²⁶GNA, (21st April, 2011), from <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/regional/artikel.php?ID=207322>. Retrieved on 6th May, 2014.

²⁷See Appiah-Sekyere, P. (2011). Humanist Ethics: Its Relevance in Ghana Today. *Integrative Humanist Journal, Vol. 1*, No. 1, p. 15.

²⁸Cf. <http://www.allafrica.com/stories/>. 20th June, 2015; See also Appiah-Sekyere, P. (2011). Humanist Ethics: Its Relevance in Ghana Today. *Integrative Humanist Journal, Vol. 1*, No. 1, p. 15.

²⁹See GNA, (21st December, 2006), from <http://www.ghanaweb.com/>. Retrieved 17th June, 2014.

³⁰Cf. GNA, (12th February, 2011), from <http://www.ghanaweb.com/>. Retrieved, 17th June, 2014.

Albeit in 1988 Ghana initiated a conservation plan called the Forest Resource Management Project and in 1989 Ghana restricted the export of 18 tree species, and again in 1994 Ghana banned the export of raw logs, illegal logging threatens Ghana's remaining forests.³¹ Whereas in the late 19th century, hardwood forests covered the southern half of Ghana presently considerable portions of these once-extensive forests have been destroyed. In fact, within (1990-1996) about 1.3 percent of the remaining forest was lost every year.³²

5.3. Sanitation and Open Defecation

On sanitation in Ghana, the WHO and UNICEF in a joint report, ranked Ghana as the seventh dirtiest nation on Earth. The report also disclosed that,

Ghana's access to household toilets is only 15%. It is one of the lowest sanitation coverage in the world. The situation with sanitation coverage is worse only in Sierra Leone, ranked 13%, Chad, Madagascar and Togo, ranked 12% each, Niger, ranked 11% and South Sudan, which has a 7%.³³

Coupled with the dirt is the problem of open defecation.³⁴ The insufficient toilet facilities may be one of the major factors causing open defecation. Kamal Kar, the founder and chairman of the World-wide Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) Foundation, made a strong appeal to the Ghana government to demonstrate the political will towards eradicating open defecation in the country.³⁵ Kar's CLTS Foundation is "spearheading a world-wide campaign to eradicate open defecation in countries, including Ghana, where the practice is a major public health problem. In Ghana, the fight against open defecation campaign has focused on the Volta, Central, Northern, Upper-East and Upper-West Regions, where open defecation is said to be endemic in many districts and communities."³⁶

5.4. Sanitation and Water Bodies

The sanitation challenge in Ghana is so enormous that it has affected some of the fresh water bodies. Whereas formerly, a culturally acceptable environmental management resulted from strictures and taboos related to water bodies, land, and deep forest, it is a thing of the past. Acheampong Elvis Akwasi rightly refers to the past saying

Among the Akan community which forms the majority ethnic group in Ghana, water bodies are associated with the gods or *abosom* and are used in accordance with strictures and rules that are relayed to the local folks by fetish priests who are the mouthpiece of the gods. Customary laws mandate users to keep lakes and rivers pure because they are regarded as the dwelling place of the gods (*abosom*). The *abosom* were highly revered and feared in the past and even they are still accorded that respect by some Ghanaians. It is believed that, these gods are highly endowed with divine powers and will strike defaulters dead instantly with no mercy nor give a second chance. In the past, our ancestors used a very astute way to protect the water bodies and avoided many water related diseases. Those part of the river used for bathing, swimming, or for watering crops and washing domestic animals were found downstream in relation to those used as a source of drinking water. In an effort to minimize water pollution from household waste and to reduce the quick spread of water-borne diseases, communities were often situated more than half a mile radius from rivers and lakes. Since the distance makes the drawing of drinking water a heinous task, water conservation was a common tradition. People feared the gods and hence adhered strictly to these directives and preserved the water bodies better than what pertains in contemporary Ghana.³⁷

³¹ See <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/geography/nature.php>. Retrieved 6th May, 2015.

³² See <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/geography/nature.php>. Retrieved 6th May, 2015.

³³ See WHO and UNICEF joint report, "5 Facts About Ghana As One of The World's Dirtiest Countries," from <https://yen.com.gh/15343-5-facts-ghana-one-dirtiest-countries-world.html>. Retrieved 3rd May, 2016.

³⁴ On open defecation, see Taylor M. E. (19th November, 2015), Ghana ranked 2nd in open defecation, from <http://pulse.com.gh/health/world-toilet-day-ghana-ranked-2nd-in-open-defecation>. Retrieved 4th May, 2016.

³⁵ GNA (Tuesday, 19th May, 2015). Ghana charged to eliminate open-defecation, <http://www.ghananewsagency.org/health/ghana-must-show-political-will-towards-eliminating-open-defecation-foundation-89565>. Retrieved 8th May, 2016.

³⁶ Ibid..

³⁷ Acheampong, E. A. (30th November, 2010). The Role Of Ghanaian Culture And Tradition In Environmental Sustainability, from <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/The-Role-Of-Ghanaian-Culture-And-Tradition-In-Environmental-Sustainability-198388>. Retrieved 5th June, 2015.

Affirming the above words of Acheampong, Fiergbor, L. (3rd May, 2013), hits the nail on the head when he says,

Sanitation problem has been in this country for many years, but the sad story is that, each and every day, the problem of sanitation is not solved or cannot be solved, rather the situation gets out of hand every day at a speed that if we are not careful, we cannot even move from one point to the other because everywhere is garbage. The choked Chemu Lagoon, until steps are taken to control the dumping of garbage into the lagoon the channel will remain choked, even if it is dredged regularly. This is because residents alongside the lagoon dump into the lagoon solid waste instead...It is not only the Chemu Lagoon which is suffering this fate, the Odaw River, the Korle Lagoon, the Onyasia drain and others, country wide. The contamination of the river has made all aquatic creatures impossible to live. Until we change our minds, attitudes and realizing that we are killing our own selves, government cannot do anything about, we will all die gradually through sicknesses and diseases and artificial disasters caused by our own doing. Examples like outbreak of cholera, TB, malaria, diarrhea...³⁸

Successive governments in Ghana have made attempts to resolve the sanitation problem. However, if one examines the magnitude of the sanitation challenges in Ghana, one can easily deduce that successive governments in Ghana have not demonstrated maximum political will towards sanitation. This is confirmed by Kamal Kar, the founder and chairman of the World-wide Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) Foundation when he remarked that “Madagascar and others, comparatively less endowed than Ghana, were able to eliminate the practice totally because of the strong political will.”³⁹

Every year on 22nd March, Ghana joins the rest of the world to celebrate World Fresh Water Day.⁴⁰ Notwithstanding this effort to safeguard fresh water bodies, the pollution of water bodies is another overwhelming environmental challenge in Ghana.⁴¹ In a further related perspective, Ziem reiterates that “in Ghana, the effects of the activities of mining companies on water bodies through dewatering, ground water pollution, the free use of water for mining operations, pollution of streams through cyanide and other waste spillages, are contributing enormously to impoverishing the communities who live around their operational areas.”⁴²

6. EVALUATION

It is crystal clear from the above discussions, that the urgent need to salvage the environmental situation in Ghana cannot be over emphasized. Needless to say that the efforts that are made to remedy the environment are not successful in achieving the desired goals. It is against this background that this paper challenges Ghanaian Christians to recognize and embrace the care for the environment as a moral duty and collaborate effectively with the government and other stakeholders to salvage the environmental situation in Ghana.

As indicated above, Christians form the majority of the Ghanaian population and have the infrastructural and institutional resources. Furthermore, their religious beliefs, as regards their social responsibilities towards their fellow humans, place them in a vantage position to facilitate the environmental care agenda in Ghana.

Among the religious beliefs of Christians is this that God created⁴³ the universe and every creature

³⁸ See Fiergbor, L. (3rd May, 2013), http://lawrenceofefiergbor.blogspot.com/2013_05_01_archive.html. Retrieved 4th May, 2016.

³⁹ GNA (Tuesday, 19th May, 2015). Ghana charged to eliminate open-defecation, <http://www.ghananewsagency.org/health/ghana-must-show-political-will-towards-eliminating-open-defecation-foundation-89565>. Retrieved 8th May, 2016.

⁴⁰ 22nd March is a day set aside to create awareness and focus attention on the importance of fresh water as well as advocate for the sustainable use and management of fresh water bodies. This was established by the UN General Assembly when it accepted the recommendation of the 1992, United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) and designated 22nd March, 1993 as the first World Fresh Water Day.

⁴¹ See Ziem, J., (30th April, 2013). Ghanaians Must Protect Fresh Water Resources, from <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Ghanaians-Must-Protect-Fresh-Water-Resources-272519>. Retrieved 2nd May, 2016.

⁴² Ibid..

⁴³ Cf. *Genesis* Chapters 1 and 2.

therein and asked humans to have dominion⁴⁴ over all creatures. To have dominion does not mean domination since the latter connotes exploitation that can lead to disorder, chaos and annihilation. Rather, dominion involves care for God's creation (including the natural environment) such that the order, goodness and life-giving characteristics of God's creation will be sustained.⁴⁵

In a related perspective, Christians believe that Jesus Christ commanded them to "love your neighbour as yourself."⁴⁶ The neighbour in this love commandment includes human beings that are in the present generation as well as those yet to be born tomorrow, next week, next month, next year, thus, the future generations. Ghanaian Christians cannot claim to be following the love commandment of Christ if they fail to care for the natural environment such that it can sustain their neighbours in both the present and future generations.

In the view of this paper, any use of the natural environment that benefits only the user but prevents the wellbeing of other humans, in the present and future generations, can be categorized as egoistic and contrary to the love commandment of Christ. In other words, if a Ghanaian Christian defecates openly, or litters indiscriminately or destroys or pollutes the natural environment that directly or indirectly results in environmental hazards/diseases thereby preventing the good health and wellbeing of his/her neighbor then the said Christian cannot claim to be following Christ and his love commandment.

In another perspective, Ghanaian Christians are indeed Ghanaians and have the moral duty to observe Ghanaian cultural values. In this light, if Ghanaian Christians believe that human life as well as the whole of creation are gifts from God, then in line with Ghanaian culture, it behooves the recipient of a gift to show appreciation⁴⁷ to the donor. Such appreciation involves the duty to take good care of the said gift. For Ghanaian Christians to live in a nation that is second in open defecation and seventh dirtiest worldwide, whereas the said Christians proudly claim to be more than two-thirds of the total population, a lot of questions such as the following can be deduced.

- Are Ghanaian Christians content with the environmental situation in Ghana since they are apparently "unconcerned" about the open defecation and other abuses of the natural environment that are causing preventable diseases such as diarrhea, cholera, malaria and dysentery to claim the lives of more than 7,500⁴⁸ children? Are they not failing to follow the love commandment of Christ as far as environmental care is concerned?
- Furthermore, Ghanaians have the cultural value that is communalistic.⁴⁹ Gyekye (1996) asserts that The African and the Akan society (the majority tribe in Ghana) place a great deal of emphasis on communal values... underpin and guide the type of social relations, attitudes and behaviour that ought to exist between individuals who live together in a community sharing social life and having a sense of common good."⁵⁰ In fact, communalism is a value that is characteristic not only in Ghana but also among Africans a whole.⁵¹

⁴⁴ See *Genesis* 1:28.

⁴⁵ See Page, R. (1992). *The Bible and the Natural World*, in *Christianity and ecology*, Breuilly, E. and Palmer, M. (eds), London: Cassell Publishers Limited, pp. 25-26.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Mk.* 12:30-31; *Matth.* 22:37-40; *John* 13:34-35.

⁴⁷ See Sarpong, P. (1974). *Ghana in retrospect: Some aspects of Ghanaian culture*, (reprint 2006). Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, pp. 51-63.

⁴⁸ According to the WHO, and UNICEF joint report, each year, more than 7,500 Ghanaian children die from diarrhea. See "5 Facts about Ghana as One of The World's Dirtiest Countries," from <https://yen.com.gh/15343-5-facts-ghana-one-dirtiest-countries-world.html>. Retrieved 3rd May, 2016.

⁴⁹ According to Gyekye (1995) the term communalism is "the doctrine that the group (that is, the society) constitutes the focus of the activities of the individual members of the society." For Gyekye, communalism puts "emphasis on the activity and success of the wider society rather than, though not necessarily at the expense of, or to the detriment of, the individual." See Gyekye, K. (1995). *An essay on African philosophical thought: The Akan conceptual scheme*, (Rev. Ed.). Philadelphia: Temple University Press, p. 155.

⁵⁰ See Gyekye, K. (1996). *African cultural values: An introduction*. Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company, p. 35.

⁵¹ Bujo (2001) states "Africans of which the Akan are inclusive do not think in 'either/or,' but rather in 'both/and' categories." Cf. Bujo, B. (2001). *Foundations of an African ethic: Beyond the universal claims of Western morality*, trans. Brian McNeil. New York: Crossroad Publishers, p. 1.

True Ghanaians, as true Africans, cherish the African value of communalism that posits that individual morality affects the well-being (flourishing) of a community. Since a true Ghanaian lives by Ghanaian cultural values, a Christian that is a true Ghanaian with the Ghanaian/African spirit of communalism will decarbonize any egoistic attitude towards the natural environment and because of the common good of her/his community, care for the natural environment. Bujorightly crystallises this fact when he says “For Black Africa, it is not the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* (“I think, therefore I am”) but an existential *cognatus sum, ergo summus* (“I am related, therefore we are”) that is decisive”.⁵²

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

To collaborate effectively with the government, traditional leaders such as chiefs, queen mothers, NGOs and other environmental agencies to salvage the environmental challenges in Ghana, this paper offers the following recommendations:

- Ghanaian Christians need to practicalise their religious beliefs in caring for the natural environment just as in the past indigenous traditional Ghanaians applied their traditional religious beliefs⁵³ to ensure environmental sanity.
- In a similar vein, Ghanaian Christians can employ their enormous human, physical and other resources to disseminate a wholesome understanding of the concept of dominion.⁵⁴
- Next, Ghanaian Christians must do everything possible to preserve their Ghanaian identity and cultural values which include those that deal with the natural environment.⁵⁵
- Ghanaian Christians, with their abundant human and infrastructural resources should include environmental education in their schools, catechesis and liturgy.
- Ghanaian Christians must respect Ghanaian traditional norms and taboos and desist from using derogatory terms such as fetish or pagan⁵⁶ when referring to the traditional religious and cultural beliefs and practices.
- Without any mal-afore-thought as regards the importance of prayer for Christians, this study recommends that the overwhelming emphasis that Ghanaian Christians place on healing services and all-night prayer sessions in response to diseases, similar emphasis should actually be placed on preventing the causes of the diseases such as open-defecation, choked gutters, indiscriminate disposal of garbage, pollution of water bodies, to mention just a few. It sounds ironical (if not hypocritical) for one to defecate openly or close to a water body thereby causing a cholera outbreak and later pray to God for healing. The irony is obvious: a believer in God abuses God`s handiwork and goes to God to be delivered from the consequences of the said abuse.

8. CONCLUSION

From the above discussions, it can be deduced that since humans need the planet to survive, Ghanaians, by virtue of being members of the human family have planetary responsibilities. In a similar perspective, as believers and followers of Christ, Christians are bound to observe God`s

⁵²Cf. Bujo, B. (2001). *Foundations of an African ethic: Beyond the universal claims of Western morality*, trans. Brian McNeil. New York: Crossroad Publishers, p. 4.

⁵³ See Acheampong, E. A. (30th November, 2010). The Role Of Ghanaian Culture And Tradition In Environmental Sustainability, from <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/The-Role-Of-Ghanaian-Culture-And-Tradition-In-Environmental-Sustainability-198388>. Retrieved 5th June, 2015. That Traditional Africans (including traditional Ghanaians) utilized their traditional environmental methods to ensure ecological balance and sanity, see also Mbiti, J. S., (1991). *Introduction to African religion 2nd ed.* Nairobi, Kampala, Dar es Salam: African Educational Publishers. p. 44.

⁵⁴That dominion does not mean domination but sustainable use of and care for creation. Cf. Page, R. (1992). *The Bible and the Natural World*, in *Christianity and ecology*, Breuilly, E. and Palmer, M. (eds), London: Cassell Publishers Limited, pp. 25-26.

⁵⁵Awuah-Nyamekye, S. (2014). *Managing the environmental crisis in Ghana: The role of Traditional African Religion and culture with special reference to the Berekum Traditional Area*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 90-128; See also Sarpong, P. (1974). *Ghana in retrospect: Some aspects of Ghanaian culture*, (reprint 2006). Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, pp. 51-63.

⁵⁶Cf. Acheampong, E. A. (30th November, 2010). The Role of Ghanaian Culture And Tradition in Environmental Sustainability, from <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/The-Role-Of-Ghanaian-Culture-And-Tradition-In-Environmental-Sustainability-198388>. Op. Cit..

injunction to love their neighbour⁵⁷ and care for creation.⁵⁸ Hence, Ghanaian Christians have to fulfil their human and religious responsibilities towards the natural environment.

Actually, for Christianity to be true to itself in the Ghanaian context, it must be part of the hearts⁵⁹ and lives of Ghanaians, in whatever situation Ghanaians find themselves. Therefore, if the environmental crisis in Ghana is such that Ghana is the seventh dirtiest nation and second in open defecation worldwide, resulting in the prevalence of preventable diseases such as cholera, dysentery and diarrhea claiming more than 7,500 lives of children each year, then Ghanaian Christians have a significant duty to perform. A failure in this regard would imply that Christianity has successfully christianised majority (71.1%) of Ghanaians but is failing to christianise the use of the natural environment upon which the Ghanaian Christians depend for their survival and livelihood.

In the light of the above arguments, this study affirms that Ghanaian Christians have a moral duty to care for the natural environment by collaborating with the government and other NGOs and environmental agencies to salvage the environmental crisis in Ghana.

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⁵⁷Cf. *Mk.* 12:30-31; *Matth.* 22:37-40; *John* 13:34-35.

⁵⁸See *Genesis* 1:28

⁵⁹ Cf. Rajotte, F. and Breuilly, E. (1992). What is the crisis? in *Christianity and Ecology*, Breuilly, E. and Palmer, M. (eds), London: Cassell Publishers Limited, p. 5.

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