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24 MITIGATING GHANA'S INSANITARY ENVIRONMENT: CHRISTIAN PILGRIMS' BELIEF IN THE SACREDNESS OF PRAYER MOUNTAINS

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INTRODUCTION

The acutely frightening nature of global environmental problems and the need to mitigate them has necessitated the quest for active intervention by stakeholders, including faith-based organisations.² Roger S. Gottlieb, a philosopher of religion, has summarised his view of the modern global environmental or ecological crisis as follows:

Global climate change has already damaged, and will damage at an increasing rate, agriculture, wild lands and animals; raise the ocean level and precipitate more intense storms and worse droughts; expand the range of tropical insects and diseases and kill coral; and in all likelihood have effects that we cannot foresee. A staggering accumulation of *chemical, heavy metal, biological, and nuclear wastes* is found in every region, no matter how remote, and leads to a plague of environmentally caused diseases – most obviously the dramatic increase in cancer, immune-system problems and birth defects. From overuse of chemical agriculture and the destruction of forests, *loss of topsoil* threatens the production of food throughout the developing nations and leads to erosion and desertification everywhere. Massive erosion can also destroy ecosystem balance in rivers and coastal fishing areas. In what some call a *crisis of biodiversity*, the decimation of habitats through the expanding human settlements, logging, mining, agriculture, and pollution and the killing of animals for sport, use, or food have raised rates of extinction to the highest they have been for sixty-million years. Potential medicines vanish, ecosystems are destabilized, water supplies threatened, and irreplaceable natural beauties are lost forever.³

The survey of ecological crisis by Gottlieb provides a broader epistemic context within which Ghana's insanitary environment can be briefly examined and articulated.

In Ghana, it is estimated that more than 20 000 tonnes of waste is generated daily, with the capital of Accra alone accounting for about 3 000 tonnes. The waste, which comes in various forms, not only destroys the land, but also ends up in bodies of

1 School Chaplain and Economics Teacher, Mfantsipim School, Cape Coast, Ghana.

2 Drummond C and Bedford-Strohm H (eds). 2011. *Religion and Ecology in the Public Sphere*. New York: T&T Clark International. See also Awortwi H and Awortwi S. 2010. *Mind Your Environment: It Is Your Life Support*. Ghana: New Image Foundation; Gottlieb RS (ed). 2006. *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*. New York: Oxford University Press [<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195178722.001.0001>].

3 Gottlieb, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, 4-5 (emphases in the original).

water, leading to a reduction in fish stock in those waters.⁴ In addition to the pollution of land and water, the issue of environmental crisis in Ghana also entails land degradation and wanton depletion of forest resources through activities such as illegal mining, logging and bush fires.⁵ These activities aggravate the already insanitary conditions in the country, which undoubtedly culminate in outbreak of diseases such as malaria, bilharzia, onchocerciasis (river blindness), dysentery, cholera and typhoid.⁶ These disturbing environmental crises in Ghana, coupled with their attendant catastrophic health consequences, warrant the intervention of stakeholders such as faith-based organisations.

Scholarly discussion of the correlation between religion and the environment abounds. In almost all of these academic discussions, religion is generally employed as a resource to promote environmental sanitation. Scholars of religion such as Ben-Willie Golo, Matthew Clark and Roger Gottlieb have all written on the indispensability of religion in mitigating environmental crisis. Golo articulates the interplay of faith-based organisations, amongst various religions specifically Christianity, Islam and indigenous African religion, as indispensable agents of environmental sanitation in Ghana. He writes: "Contemporary resurgences of religious environmentalism are reflections of the sense of urgent need to re-orientate humankind's relations with the created order, based on a basic common denominator in the teachings and affirmations delivered in a range of religious doctrines. One of the unifying hubs of different religious traditions in Ghana is their common mandates for the mitigation of further environmental problems."⁷ Golo's position is corroborated by those of Clark and Gottlieb. In Clark's opinion, not only does eighty percent of the world's population claim to profess religious faith, but religious belief is also generally persuasive and persistent in influencing social behaviour.⁸ Gottlieb maintains that religion constitutes the arbiter and repository of life's deepest moral values. The implication of these arguments is that it is part of the essential role of religion in social life to serve as a realm in which the pursuit of power, pleasure and wealth is suspended in favour of attention to and conformity with humanity's "ultimate concern" or priorities. Religion thus prompts us to pursue the most long-lasting and authentic values,⁹ which include, as I shall argue here, concern for environmental sanitation.

4 Dei N. 2018. "Sanitation Problem can be solved with attitudinal change", *Daily Graphic*, 12 March, 16.

5 Awortwi and Awortwi, *Mind Your Environment*, 109-184.

6 Awortwi and Awortwi, *Mind Your Environment*, 93-104.

7 Golo B-WK. 2013. "Tending Creation Together: Religious Environmentalism as a Matrix for National Cohesion and Unity in Ghana", in Lauer H, Amfo NA and Boampong J (eds). *The One in the Many: Nation Building through Cultural Diversity*. Legon-Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 201.

8 Clark M. 2015. *Development and Religion – Theology and Practice*. Cheltenham, U.K.: Edward Elgar Publishing, 5.

9 Gottlieb, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, 12-13.

In this chapter, I argue that mitigating Ghana's insanitary environment from the perspective of Christian pilgrims' belief in the sacredness of prayer mountains has largely eluded scholarly attention. The chapter, therefore, attempts to fill this gap in scholarship. The main research question: What is the possibility of replicating the notion of Christian pilgrims' sanitation consciousness from prayer mountains to the larger Ghanaian public space where environmental filthiness commonly prevails? In attempting to answer this question, the chapter examines a range of contextually related and relevant subthemes. The first is the definition of Christian ecotheology. The second is the interface between pilgrims' perception of the sacredness of prayer mountains and the heightening of their environmental sanitation consciousness. I precede the discussion of these subthemes with a brief explanation of the methodology and methods of data collection for the chapter.

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

The present study is mainly a qualitative one. It basically explores the possibility of mitigating Ghana's insanitary environment from the standpoint of Christian pilgrims' beliefs in the sacredness of prayer mountains.¹⁰ In the light of the main research question of the study, a phenomenological method was employed to guide the collection of needed field data. The phenomenological approach in this context is an impartial observation and description of Christian pilgrims' attitudes and sense of awe or beliefs in the sanctity of prayer mountains as sites characterised by trepidation and the pilgrims' persistence to variously engage or experience the transcendent realm. The centrality of "experience" in the phenomenological approach to the study of religion has been underscored by scholarship on these questions. Sociologist of religion James Spickard, for instance, observes, "In the study of religion, the term 'phenomenology' draws us towards the experiences that are supposed to underlie religious life."¹¹ The overarching point in Spickard's assertion is that the phenomenological model of the study of religion seeks to impartially describe religious experience as it presents itself to subjective consciousness.¹²

The phenomenological approach to the study of religion requires the scholar of religion to suspend judgements about the phenomenon being studied, bracketing out potentially distorting presuppositions stemming from both confessional Christian theology and from positivistic science, so that by using empathetic methods the scholar can enter into the experiences of the believers or adherents to achieve in-depth understanding.¹³ The implication and desired outcome of this

10 Boateng R. 2016. *Research Made Easy Classic Edition*. Accra: Pearl Richards Foundation, 135.

11 Spickard JV. 2014. "Phenomenology", in Stausberg M and Engler S (eds). *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religions*. New York: Routledge, 334.

12 Spickard, "Phenomenology", 333.

13 Cox JL. 2006. *A Guide to the Phenomenology of Religion: Key Figures, Formative Influences and Subsequent Debates*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 209.

model is that personal biases arising from the scholars own religious confessions are considerably minimised.

Both primary and secondary data sources were used for this study. Primary data include a range of first-hand sources, collected through methods such as surveys, interviews and experiments. They are collected directly from the primary sources, with the research objectives in mind. On the research fields, I obtained primary data mainly from participant observations and unpublished works. Secondary data, on the other hand, refer to research data that have previously been gathered and can be accessed by researchers. I obtained secondary data from published books, scholarly journals in electronic data bases and other internet sources.

The populations for this study refer to all the sacred mountains in Ghana,¹⁴ the communities in which the sacred mountains are located and the pilgrims who visit the sacred mountains. Obviously, it was impracticable, if not impossible, to observe each unit of the population under controlled conditions in order to arrive at principles having universal validity.¹⁵ Moreover, the populations for the study were so large that their study would be expensive in terms of time, money, effort and manpower. Sampling was therefore required to help extend knowledge gained from the part to the whole.¹⁶ The use of definite procedures in the selection of parts of the populations were, thus, undertaken, for the express purpose of obtaining from their description or estimates the properties and characteristics of the whole.¹⁷

A purposive sampling technique was used to select two sacred mountains in Ghana, namely, Abasua Prayer Mountain in the Ashanti region of Ghana and Nkawkaw Mountain Olive Prayer Camp in the Eastern region of Ghana. A standard description of this method is that: "In purposive sampling, the units of the sample are not selected by a random procedure, but rather are intentionally picked for study because of their characteristics or because they satisfy certain qualities which are not randomly distributed in the universe, but they are typical or they exhibit most of the characteristics of interest to the study."¹⁸ Even though there are many mountains in Ghana, not all of them possess the relevant features of interest to this study. The two prayers mountains were selected for their potency to attract religious pilgrims to encounter the transcendental realm.

Primary data for the study was collected mainly from participant observations. Participant observation entails the idea of being both a spectator and an actor at the same time when observing and recording information. The observer must find

14 Sacred mountains in Ghana are many. They cover about one-quarter of Ghana's land. For details, Gracia Z. "Names of mountains in Ghana and their locations". Online at: <https://yen.com.gh/109470-names-mountains-ghana-locations.html#109470> [Accessed 3 April 2019].

15 Koul, L. 2000. *Methodology of Educational Research*. Third Revised Edition. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House PVT Ltd, 111.

16 Kumeckpor TKB. 1999. *Research Methods and Techniques of Social Research*. Accra: SonLife Printing Press and Services, 129.

17 Kumeckpor, *Research Methods and Techniques of Social Research*, 129.

18 Kumeckpor, *Research Methods and Techniques of Social Research*, 135.

a means of integrating himself into the group in one way or the other and attempt to observe and record from within the group.¹⁹ With this in mind I embarked on several research trips to the prayer mountains and the communities where the prayer mountains are located to collect the needed field data. I visited Abasua from 10 to 13 July 2016 and from 28 to 30 March 2017; and I visited Nkawkaw on 5 February 2015, 7 July 2016 and 25 July 2017. On these dates, I had the opportunity to participate in some of the activities at the prayer sites. These included church services on Sundays, all-night prayer sessions on Wednesdays, communal labour on Saturday mornings and healing and deliverance services on Wednesday mornings. With the permission of the leaders of the prayer mountains, relevant programmes or activities were audio or video recorded.

In the light of these participant observations, I posit that Christian pilgrims' belief in the sacredness of prayer mountains can contribute to the quest for Christian eco-theological discourse in Ghana to some extent. Considering the relatively large number of Ghanaian Christian pilgrims who patronise prayer mountains such as those at Abasua and Nkawkaw,²⁰ I argue that the prevalence of environmental sanitation consciousness at the prayer mountains, owing to the pilgrims' perception of their encounter with God or the Ultimate Reality, can be a ground-breaking theological paradigm for mitigating environmental filthiness in Ghana. This religious phenomenon possibility of transporting or replicating the notion of pilgrims' sanitation consciousness from the sacred sites to the larger Ghanaian public space where environmental filthiness commonly prevails. But before I attempt a discussion of the possibility of replicating the pilgrims' sanitation consciousness from sacred sites to the larger Ghanaian context, I must briefly explain Christian ecotheological discourse, examine the pilgrims' perception of the sacredness of prayer mountains and describe how that perception is believed to enhance their environmental sanitation consciousness at the sacred sites.

CHRISTIAN ECOTHEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE BRIEFLY EXPLAINED

Christian ecotheological discourse refers to a form of constructive theology that focuses on the interrelationships of Christianity and nature, particularly in the light of environmental concerns. Ecotheology generally begins from the premise that a relationship exists between human's religious or spiritual worldviews and the degradation of nature. It explores the interaction between ecological values, such as sustainability, and the Christian dominion mandate (Genesis 1:28).²¹

19 Kumekpor, *Research Methods and Techniques of Social Research*, 72.

20 More than ten thousand pilgrims patronise the prayer mountains a year. For details, see Okyere PK. 2012. *Reconstructing Sacred Space: The Place and Relevance of Abasua Prayer mountain in Contemporary Ghanaian Christianity*, M Phil thesis, University of Ghana, 106.

21 Troster L. 2013. "What is Eco-Theology?", *CrossCurrents* 63(4):380-385 [https://doi.org/10.1111/cros.12043]. See also Hallum A. 2003. "Ecotheology and Environmental Praxis in Guatemala", *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 7(2):55-70

Christian ecotheology draws on the writings of such authors as Jesuit priest and paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and process theologian Alfred North Whitehead, and it is well represented in Protestantism by the process theology of John Cobb, the systematic theology of Jürgen Moltmann and ecofeminist theologians, such as Rosemary Radford Ruether, Catherine Keller and Sallie McFague.²²

The relationship of theology to the modern ecological crisis became an intense issue of debate in Western academia in 1967, following the publication of the article, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis”, by historian Lynn White. In this work, White postulated a theory that the Christian model of the “dominion mandate”, understood as human’s dominion over nature, has led to environmental devastation.²³ White implies that Christianity has often been viewed as the source of negative values towards the environment. In 1973, theologian Jack Rogers published an article in which he surveyed the works of approximately twelve theologians who had published since White’s article. They reflected the quest for “an appropriate theological model” by which to adequately assess biblical data regarding Christians’ relationship with God and its implications on nature.²⁴ This has been the project of the Christian ecotheology movement, a movement that can be greatly enhanced through understandings of phenomena such as prayer mountains.

PILGRIMS’ PERCEPTION OF THE SACRED AND THE HEIGHTENING OF ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION CONSCIOUSNESS

During pilgrimage, the pilgrims’ perception of the supernatural orientation of the prayer mountains appears to significantly influence their interactions even with the physical environment. Some of the pilgrims believe that objects such as trees, leaves, sand, stones, water and other natural objects found on the prayer mountains are not mere objects, but rather carry the potency to mediate spiritual benefits or results. They consider these objects as aids to prayer or prayer accessories which facilitate their interaction with the transcendental realms. The pilgrims’ reverential attitude towards some physical objects on the prayer mountains seems to be aspects of sacramental theology which, in the opinion of Douglas Davies, is closely related to the doctrine of the incarnation. Davies writes:

[The] process of God entering into humanity in the individual man, Jesus of Nazareth, is spoken of in theology as the doctrine of the incarnation. It is a doctrine closely associated in Christian belief with what is often called sacramental theology, emphasising how ordinary aspects of life can be

[<https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2003.7.2.55>]; Emmanuel A. 1999. *Stewardship: Essays on Ethics of Stewardship*. Kumasi, Ghana: Wilas Press Ltd, 79-90.

22 Troster, “What is Eco-Theology?”, 1-6. See also Hallum, “Ecotheology and Environmental Praxis in Guatemala”.

23 White L (Jr). 1967. “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis”, *Science* 155(3767): 1203-1207 [<https://doi.org/10.1126/science.155.3767.1203>].

24 White, “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis”, 155.

endowed with religious significance. This refers not only to official church sacraments using wine, bread, or water as in the eucharist or baptism, but to many other aspects of life, and in one sense it embraces the very matter of the universe itself. In this incarnational-sacramental theology, God employs natural phenomena as vehicles for religious truth. For Christians committed to this view of the universe, attitudes to nature are grounded in a world of divine value and significance.²⁵

It is therefore no wonder that as sacred spaces, stringent rules and programmes of sanitation permeate the activities of all the prayer mountains under study in this work. On the prayer mountains, littering, spitting, urinating and defecating in the open spaces are deemed serious infractions by the culprits. All pilgrims are obliged to fully and actively participate in the regular clean-up exercises. These include weeding, sweeping, scrubbing and proper disposal of refuse. Waste disposal bins are placed at various points to augment cleanliness and the creation of environmental sanitation consciousness amongst the pilgrims. Availability of lavatory facilities for males and females, as well as designated places for refuse dumping, are some of the measures to augment sanitation activities on the Prayer mountains.

Thus, the notion of the sacredness of prayer mountains and sacred spaces, such as those at Abasua and Nkawkaw is not a mere metaphysical or abstract apprehension. Rather, it appears to be an empirically verifiable religio-social reality, which significantly influences or conditions human behaviour.²⁶ In that sense, I agree with anthropologist Clifford Geertz in his assertion that, "The holy bears within it everywhere a sense of intrinsic obligation ... which also enforces emotional commitment ... That which is set apart as more than mundane is inevitably considered to have far-reaching implications for the direction of human conduct."²⁷

AFRICAN CHRISTIAN ECOTHEOLOGY AND SUSTAINABLE SANITATION

The possibility of replicating the notion of pilgrims' sanitation consciousness from the prayer mountains or sacred sites to the larger Ghanaian context where environmental filthiness dominates, I contend, would be a viable remedy for environmental sanitation crisis in Ghana. This implies that the pilgrims' environmental sanitation consciousness at the prayer mountains hints at the quest for Christian ecotheological discourse which attempts to address the issue of environmental filthiness in Ghana. I pursue this argument from the perspective of African Christian ecotheology as holistic and sustainable motivation for environmental sanitation in Ghana.

25 Davies D. 1994. "Christianity", in Jean Holm and John Bowker (eds). *Sacred Writings*. London, United Kingdom: Pinter Publishers Ltd, 40.

26 Okyere, *Reconstructing Sacred Space*, 76.

27 Geertz C. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, 127.

One of the clearest and penetrating voices on the justification for African Christianity's active involvement in responding to civil society issues, such as environmental sanitation crisis in Ghana and other African countries, is the renowned missiologist Andrew Walls. He writes:

It is widely recognised that there has occurred within the present century a demographic shift in the centre of gravity of the Christian world, which means that more than half of the world's Christians live in Africa ... and that the proportion doing so grows annually. This means that we have to regard African Christianity as potentially the *representative* Christianity of the twenty-first century ... [The implication of this demographic shift in the centre of gravity of the Christian world is that] the things by which people recognise and judge what Christianity is will (for good or ill) increasingly be determined in Africa. The characteristic doctrines, the liturgy, the ethical codes, the social applications of the faith will increasingly be those prominent in Africa. New agendas for theology will appear in Africa. And one of the anvils on which the Christianity of the future will be hammered out will be the question of the nation, the state, the nature of civil society.²⁸

The attempt to appropriate the notion of pilgrims' environmental sanitation consciousness from the specific prayer mountain context to address the larger issue of environmental filthiness in Ghana is, I argue, an apt social application of the Christian faith to the larger environmental crisis, as well as a new agenda for African Christian ecotheology. Replication of the notion of pilgrims' environmental sanitation consciousness by Christian pilgrims in their communities, to reproduce upon their return their experience of environmental cleanliness at the prayer mountains, can serve as a means of addressing environmental filthiness in the larger Ghanaian public space.

This definition entails several implications. First, it calls for reinterpretation of the Christian pilgrim motif to encapsulate other Christians in Ghana who may not have had any pilgrimage experience to prayer mountains, but who also cannot be ignored in the quest to construct environmental sanitation consciousness to address environmental filthiness in Ghana. Here, historian of Christianity Diana Webb's perspective on the true identity of Christians is worth reconsidering. In her scheme of thought, "Christians [are] ... *peregrini* in the original sense of the Latin word, 'strangers' or 'foreigners' in the midst of a sometimes hostile society, spiritual pilgrims between earth and heaven, between physical birth into this world and spiritual rebirth into eternal life."²⁹ Webb's analysis accords with the theme of Apostle Peter's first epistle: "living as an alien".³⁰ It is said that Peter called his Christian readers "aliens" or "strangers" to make the emphasis that "Christians

28 Walls AF. 2002. *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*. New York: Orbis Books, 85 (emphasis in the original).

29 Webb D. 2002. *Medieval European Pilgrimage: c.700–c.1500*. New York: Palgrave, 2 [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4039-1380-7].

30 1 Peter 1:1-2 (NIV).

are really citizens of heaven and our sojourn here on earth is only temporary".³¹ Thus, from a Christian theological perspective, every Christian, irrespective of their geographical location and racial identity, is a pilgrim on earth whom God will hold accountable for all their actions, including their wilful and wanton destruction of the environment.

Second, the definition also calls every Christian pilgrim to underscore the inseparability between the sacred and the secular realms of existence. In other words, Christian pilgrims must ideally see the larger Ghanaian public space as essentially and qualitatively the same as the prayer mountains. This puzzle, however, does not appear insurmountable. It can be unravelled in the context of African Christian ecotheology as an holistic and sustainable motivation for environmental sanitation. African Christian ecotheology emphasises the need to see ecology from the perspective of an African Christian theological lens. It is couched on the theological premise that the African theistic cultural self-understanding of life, interpreted by the gospel, contains a motivation for African Christians to naturally appreciate the need for environmental sanitation from a religious awe of God first and foremost and, hence, to act in obedience to his command to seek first his kingdom in all things (Matthew 6:33).³² It underscores African Christian pilgrims' intentional and conscious adherence to environmental sanitation as a divine or biblical imperative.

In the light of this theological premise, Ebenezer Yaw Blasus, a theologian, points out that the African Christian's "failure to let God's concern for his environment be central in [ensuring environmental sanitation] could be classified for the Christian as 'ecological sin', because it reflects a refusal to do all things for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31), or to be not so constrained by *love* for God (2 Corinthians 5:14) and neighbour ... as to obey him (John 15:10)".³³ Thus Christian pilgrims, who by theological designation are aliens or strangers here on earth, are not excused by their perceived foreignness, as far as their adherence to environmental cleanliness here on earth is concerned. In other words, the "other-worldly" mindset of Christian pilgrims does not guarantee their exclusion from active involvement in ensuring environmental sanitation. Emmanuel Asante's position on this matter is apt and revealing:

[Christians'] concern for personal salvation, wellbeing, wholeness and integrity cannot be separated from a deep respect for everything that God created and pronounced as good. The well-being, and for that matter, the peace of the nation depends, among other things, on the conservation of the environment including bio-diversity, ecology and climate. Protection of the ecology is necessary both in terms of ensuring the sustenance of production of material goods and of ensuring availability of potable

31 Bailey M, Constable T, Swindoll CR and Zuck RB (eds). 1999. *Nelson's New Testament Survey*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 557.

32 Blasus EY. 2015. "'Compensated Reduction' as Motivation of Reducing Deforestation: An African Christian Response", *Journal of African Christian Thought* 18(1):24.

33 Blasus, "'Compensated Reduction' as Motivation of Reducing Deforestation", 24 (emphasis in the original).

water, non-polluted air and the protection of life from radiation, toxic substance and climate change. Lack of care for the environment endangers tomorrow's well-being.³⁴

Inherent in the theological premise of African Christian ecotheology is the need for African Christians, including Ghanaian Christians, to be understood as pilgrims and to recognise the larger Ghanaian context as spatially homogeneous and qualitatively indifferent to special sacred sites where their environmental sanitation consciousness is normally heightened. This not only implies the possibility of pilgrims or Christians encountering the transcendent and immanent God in the Ghanaian public space, but it also implies that historian of religion Mircea Eliade's designation of sacred sites as "spatial non-homogeneity" may be deemed contentious, if not questionable, in this context.

It is instructive to observe that African Christian ecotheology as holistic and sustainable motivation for environmental sanitation, in the opinion of Blasus, has the African primal religious context as its substructure. Blasus posits that:

From an African traditional cultural perspective, people may see "ecological sin" in terms of the breaking of ecological taboos, as what will incur the wrath of God (or the divinities and ancestors). Though based on fear-imposing religious myths that do not necessarily explicitly elucidate any ecological values, the taboos are invariably ecological "ethical codes" for ecosystem conservation. The effectiveness of the taboos as motivating tools in sustaining the ecosystem arises, perhaps, from the African fear of the divinities or respect for the ancestors; the latter, who are "interested in the welfare of their descendants ... serve as custodians of traditional moral order [including environmental sanitation] ... with power to punish ... or reward" breakers or upholders, respectively. This implies that the traditional African impulsion for [environmental sanitation] is essentially theocentric, as it is centered round divinities as the channels through which God works.³⁵

Thus, in a similar way, Ernestina Afriyie, a Ghanaian theologian, appropriately states that "traditionally, Africans are likely to treat the environment with little or no special respect when their belief in the relationships of the divinities and ancestors with nature are undermined".³⁶ In the light of Afriyie's statement, it is plausible to argue that the current environmental filthiness apparently engulfing Ghana may underscore Ghanaians' disbelief in the relationships of the divinities and ancestors with the environment. This is, however, a viable research area that can engage the attention of future interested researchers. Noting the importance of the absence of a specifically theocentric inclination to eco-care, including environmental sanitation,

34 Asante EK. 2017. "Religion, Politics and National Peace", *S.H. Amissah Memorial Lectures*, Compiled Series, MCG Headquarters. Accra: Alpha Royal Publications, 26-27.

35 Blasus, "'Compensated Reduction' as Motivation of Reducing Deforestation", 24. See also Gyekye K. 1998. *African Cultural Values*. Accra, Ghana: Sankofa Publishing Company, 162.

36 Blasus, "'Compensated Reduction' as Motivation of Reducing Deforestation", 24.

in the Western Church, Hugh Montefiore, a theologian, is reported to have lamented the seeming disinterestedness in the environment and called for a review of Western ecological theology and praxis.³⁷

The validity and appropriateness of the African primal religious standpoint on ecological or environmental issues is determined by the index of scripture. Kwame Bediako, a Ghanaian Missiologist, asserts that the Bible must be central in the engagement of gospel with culture.³⁸ This is because scripture is the yardstick, the model and measure for testing, urging, opening up, pointing out, and also controlling all engagements of gospel and culture in the continuing divine-human encounter that characterises Christian faith.³⁹ In the view of Blasus, the implication of the Bible's centrality in the engagements of gospel and culture is that "an African Christian eco-theology needs to pass traditional African beliefs and praxis ... through the prism of scripture, to reveal its light and shade, a process that will be of benefit to the universal Christian community".⁴⁰ As far as environmental issues are concerned, the primal religio-cultural self-understanding that seems to have theological affinity with the biblical world-view, according to Harold Turner, a scholar of Religion, is a person's "sense of kinship with nature ... used realistically and unsentimentally but with profound respect and reverence".⁴¹ This environmental sanitation consciousness of primal religions is considered to be "a profoundly religious attitude to man's natural setting in the world".⁴² A person's "sense of kinship with nature" implies that humankind is inextricably linked to nature⁴³ and, therefore, the environment. Human sinfulness, which results in environmental crisis or filthiness,⁴⁴ ultimately affects human beings negatively.

African Christian ecotheology is a holistic and sustainable incentive for environmental sanitation, because it ideally emphasises the need for African Christians pilgrims, especially in Ghana, to integrate the views of environmental sanitation inherent in primal religious tradition and Christianity, and to apply them relevantly in the larger Ghanaian context, as they would at designated sacred sites, such as prayer mountains. This fusion of two worlds of religious discourse in fashioning out

37 Blasus, "'Compensated Reduction' as Motivation of Reducing Deforestation", 24 (emphasis in the original). See also Montefiore H. 1999. "Why aren't more church people interested in the environment?", *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 16(3):74-77 [<https://doi.org/10.1177/026537889901600302>].

38 Bediako B. 2001. "Scripture as the hermeneutic of culture and tradition", *Journal of African Christian Thought* 4(1):2.

39 Bediako, "Scripture as the hermeneutic of culture and tradition", 3.

40 Blasus, "'Compensated Reduction' as Motivation of Reducing Deforestation", 24.

41 Turner HW. 1977. "The Primal Religions of the World and their study", in Hayes V (ed). *Australian Essays in World Religions*. Bedford Park: Australian Association for World Religions, 30.

42 Bediako K. 2000. *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience*. Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana: Regnum Africa, 87.

43 Blasus, "'Compensated Reduction' as Motivation of Reducing Deforestation", 25-27.

44 Anderson, *Christian Ethics in Plain Language*, 184.

environmental sanitation programmes in Ghana has liturgical, hermeneutical and policy implications “for national cohesion, unity and development”.⁴⁵ In Ghana, where about 69% of the population claims to profess Christianity, African Christian ecotheology seems to be a unifying hub for various Christian denominations to consciously mitigate environmental sanitation challenges, to promote unity and solidarity amongst the different Christian denominations and to stimulate sustainable national development. In Ghana, African Christian ecotheology may also be an indispensable tool for the realisation of the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), since Goal 6 of the seventeen SDGs emphasises the need for governments to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.⁴⁶

CONCLUSION

The crux of the argument of this chapter is that the problem of Ghana’s insanitary environment can be tackled from the standpoint of Christian pilgrims’ belief in the sacredness of prayer mountains. The chapter has contended that Christian pilgrims’ belief in the sacredness of prayer mountains, which results in their environmental sanitation consciousness at those sacred sites, appears to have the tendency of being used as a novel theological paradigm to mitigate the developmental issue of environmental filthiness in Ghana. This novel theological paradigm essentially builds on African Christian ecotheology, which emphasises the need for Africans and Ghanaian Christian pilgrims to integrate the views of environmental sanitation inherent in primal religious tradition and Christianity, and relevantly apply them in the larger Ghanaian context, as they would at designated sacred sites such as prayer mountains. This integration of two religious worldviews in fashioning out environmental sanitation programme in Ghana has liturgical, hermeneutical and policy implications for national cohesion, unity and development. The liturgy and hermeneutics of churches should reflect the relevance of and build upon a creative fusion of primal and Christian religious worldviews in mitigating Ghana’s insanitary environment. This fusion should not be seen derogatorily as being syncretistic, but rather as a synthesis of related religious views to attain ecojustice and environmental health in Ghana.

⁴⁵ Golo, “Tending Creation Together”, 201.

⁴⁶ For details on the SDGs, see Gyesei ZK. 2015. “Creating a new world; changing the MDGs to SDGs”, *Daily Graphic*, 21 October, 40-41.