

## RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENTALISM: THE CHURCH'S ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY PARADIGM (THE CASE OF THE CHURCH OF PENTECOST IN GHANA).

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### ABSTRACT

**T**he current environmental crises that ravage the planet earth and threaten its capacity to be a home for all living creatures and non-living elements of nature needs to be addressed radically and immediately at all levels. Pollution, deforestation, land degradation, poor sanitation, among others, disintegrates health, harmony and survival of creation. White has argued that Judeo-Christian thinking, the Bible, church fathers and modern science as cast in the matrix of Christian theology, underpinned the untrammelled exploitation of nature. Aquinas also maintains that the non-human animals are ordered for man's use. Aristotle put forward that nature has been made specifically for mankind and that the value of non-human things, in nature, is merely instrumental.

The church has a biblical injunction and mandate for environmental care, justice and sustainability. The purpose of this study is to examine the role of the church in environmental sustainability for the benefit of current and future generation. Methodological triangulation was deployed in the collection of data. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as percentages and graphs. The qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings indicate that the church's response to the environment was woefully inadequate. However, the church has the potential to impact on environmental care and sustainability. It is recommended that the church partners with governments and other relevant stakeholders to salvage the earth planet.

**Keywords:** Church, environment, sustainability

## 1. Introduction

Environmentalism is a broad philosophy, ideology (Bailey, 2002) and social movement regarding concerns for environmental conservation and improvement of the health of the environment, particularly as the measure for this health seeks to incorporate the concerns of non-human elements. Environmentalism advocates the preservation, restoration and/or improvement of the natural environment, and may be referred to as a movement to control pollution or protect plant and animal diversity. For this reason, concepts such as a land ethic, environmental ethics, biodiversity, ecology and the biophilia hypothesis figure predominantly.

Environmentalism and environmental concerns are often represented by the color green, but this association has been appropriated by the marketing industries and is a key tactic of greenwashing (Gibson,2003).

Evangelical environmentalism is an environmental movement in the United States and other parts of the world in which some Evangelicals have emphasized biblical mandates concerning humanity's role as steward and subsequent responsibility for the caretaking of Creation, the world of nature. While the movement has focused on different environmental issues, it is best known for its focus of addressing climate action from a biblically grounded theological perspective. The Evangelical Climate Initiative maintains that God's mandate to Adam to care for the Garden of Eden also applies to evangelicals today, and that it is therefore a moral obligation to work to mitigate climate impacts and support communities in adapting to change. Failure to carry this mandate will affect the current and the future generation.

The natural environment is the major domain and the source of livelihood for all human and non-human living things. It is from the environment that we get the fundamental prerequisite and essentials for life such as air, water, food supplies, shelter and clothing. Again, it is within the boundaries of the natural environment that we obtain medicinal supplies to treat the many sicknesses and diseases that afflict and plague humankind over the years. The environment is also the source of employment in the sectors such as agriculture, forestry, mining, quarrying and fishing. The extent of proper attention given to the environment will determine its sustainability.

Air quality, clean water for both domestic and industrial uses, proper afforestation and general practice of environmental ethics are to the large extent dependent on individual and community lifestyle and effectiveness in enforcing government laws and regulations.

Throughout history, all religions of the world have traditionally expressed some ethical concerns for the environment and its creatures. Greed and destructiveness to creation are condemned by most religious traditions. These have reflected in their historical teaching even if they are not put in practice. Traditionally, there have been various cultures that highlight environmental conservation and sustainability. There are proverbs, folktales, myths, legends, taboos and ritual practices in Africa and Ghana in particular all of which focus on natural environment preservation and conservation. There are rules and regulations on farming, fishing, hunting, felling of trees and sanitation. The stringent adherence to these traditional orders goes a long way to preserve some rivers, lagoons, trees, fishes and many others. Those who abused them are sanctioned.

However, with the rise of modern society, these concerns are fading. With the influx and development of modern science, economic and political institutions have taken the place historically accorded to religion and traditional religious attitude towards nature have largely disappeared in modern society. Yet in other sectors, some leaders of every religion in the world have returned to their origins to recover the pre-modern teachings to present them as religious environmental ethics.

“The 21<sup>st</sup> century environmental crises are vastly different from any other in human history” (Cairns, 2005, p.1). There is the problem of climate change: the gradual heating of the planet due to changes in the earth’s atmosphere. This is increasing the number and intensity of heat waves, cyclones and storms; increasing temperatures and changed precipitation patterns; warming oceans, sea level rise, damaging agriculture, melting glaciers; increasing changing frequencies of extreme weather events: floods, droughts and heat waves. These changes have significant, largely detrimental, impacts on natural resources (water, land, forests, clean air, ecosystems), the economy (transport and urban infrastructure, energy production, agriculture, timber...) and the social fabric (human health, displacement and migration of people). Climate change which also means erratic rainfall, cause crop failure, food shortages, and a rapid increase in malnutrition. It could create thousands of environmental refugees who must leave their homes to find basic necessities, while mounting pressure on vulnerable regions; it may lead to violent conflicts. It is humans that contribute to climate change through greenhouse emissions from coal electric plants, car fuel consumption and inefficient energy consumption to mention just a few.

India for instance has lost 85 percent of her original forest; and deforestation is a major cause of modern mass extinction of plants and animal species (Geisler, 1989). The recent tsunamis we have been experiencing (e.g., the recent one in Japan) destroyed houses, and left many injured and dead (Attorney General Dept. Tsunami, Activity Sheet, NO3, 2010). Depleting the energy sources, fouling the air with pollution and causing global warming and poisoning the land with radioactive waves, jeopardize the health and the wellbeing of lives on planet earth. Human activities in the pursuit of socio-economic advancement and infrastructural development have also resulted in environmental crises (Anderson, 2005). So the current environmental crises that ravage the earth planet and threaten its capacity to be a home for all living creatures (eco-system) and non-living elements of nature need to be addressed radically and with urgency at all levels- from the local to the international level. Poor agricultural practices are also detrimental to environmental sustainability. Farmers in non-industrial countries practice slash and burn techniques (crude methods) to clear areas for agriculture. Again, some commercial farming practices that aim at maximizing crop yield and profits are simultaneously impacting on the environment and public health negatively.

In addition, some mining companies perform open pit mining in some previously unspoiled areas. Again, illegal miners who use cyanide (some chemicals) disturb the forest, animals and other non-living things. This leads to rapid deforestation and its associated desertification or loss of vegetative cover. Environmental degradation is having a heavy toll on the ecology of the world and Ghana in particular. For example, it is estimated that over 90 percent of Ghana’s forest cover has been logged since 1940’s with current deforestation rate of 22,000 hectares per annum (Tamakloe, 2002). Also, one of the problems confronting Africa and Ghana in particular is the indiscriminate dumping of refuse and other waste where almost any place at all is used as a refuse and waste dump thereby polluting our environment. It is as a result of this that water bodies are drying up, (drying up) and others dead. The Ghana’s Daily Graphic, in its 13<sup>th</sup> March 2012 edition had on its front page, “The Dead Odaw River polluted with garbage”. The dead Odaw river has not only become a dumping ground for solid waste but also a receptacle for excreta, as some people squat along its banks to freely attend to nature’s call and also dispose of waste which pollutes the river. The flood in Accra that occurred in 2011 led to the loss of 9 lives.

This news item epitomizes the extent to which human activities are causing damage to our environment. Water bodies become muddy and choked with polythene bags, solid waste and garbage, all these serve as breeding grounds for mosquitoes and other water born diseases and disintegrate health, harmony and survival of creation. Besides, bush fires, cutting of trees for charcoal especially in the Eastern, Western and

Ashanti regions of Ghana have contributed immensely to the reduction or lost of vegetative cover. Primarily, only the forest reserve areas are intentionally cared for and preserved. The biotic life is affected and human health is affected adversely through inhuman activities that plunder the environment. The results are, floods emanating from torrential downpour, and severe aridity and fire outbreaks in some sectors of the world. Again, animals lack shelter and food. Medicinal value has diminished and water bodies are affected.

Ecologist, Paul Ehrlich (1968) who published 'The Population Bomb' warned that the growth of human population threatened the viability of planetary life-support system. Besides, the use of second hand refrigerators, Chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) emissions, halons and other gases cause fumes that speed up the depletion of the ozone layer. This results in high temperature and related health effect especially in the northern region of Ghana. Besides, famine, diseases and war result in premature deaths. Noise pollution from churches' all night services, noise from night clubs and trucks on the road may cause stress, hypertension, stroke and heart attacks to those who are constantly exposed to them. All these create pressure on the environment and therefore need to be managed well to ensure long term sustainability of the environment. According to White (1967), many traditional Western ethical thought are anthropocentric (human- centered). In that, either they assign intrinsic value to human beings alone that is, strong anthropocentrism or absolute anthropocentrism (human chauvinistic perspective) or they assign significantly, greater amount of intrinsic value to human beings more than to any non- human things such as the promotion of human interest or well being at the expense of non-human things (that is, anthropocentrism in a weak sense).

White argued that the Judeo Christian position that, humanity was made after the image of transcended supernatural God who is completely separated from nature also extended same virtue to humanity to be separated from nature; and this theology paved way and endowed in humankind the unlimited power for the untrammelled exploitation of nature. White was saying that Christians must be blamed for they bear huge burden of guilt for the ecological crises we are facing due to their anthropocentric position. To him, Christian religious institutions must be reprimanded for their misplaced priorities, for neglecting or failing to have a clearly defined religious rationale for environmental care. White was in effect saying that the church fathers and the Bible itself support the human centered position as opposed to biocentrism or biospheric egalitarianism, and that is why the environmental elements are abused and treated harshly and unjustifiably to achieve man's goals and interest. White quoted the book of Genesis Chapter 1:26-28 for his argument.

However, subsequent research in the natural and social sciences as well as in the environmental humanities, challenge many of White's key assumptions. For instance Minter and Manning (2005) have indicated that the dynamic presence of humans within stable natural order, the pernicious metaphysical and moral implications of agriculture, the anti-ecological implications of democracy and the direct linkage between the world view of philosophical humanism and environmental destruction do lend some support to the fact that anthropocentric view is overstretched.

Aristotle (Politics, BK.1 Chap.8) maintains that nature has made all things specifically for the sake of man and that the value of non-human things in nature is merely instrumental. Anthropocentrism ideals see it unacceptable to articulate what is wrong with the cruel treatment of non-human animals, except that such treatment may lead to bad results for human kind.

Emmanuel Kant 'Duties to Animals and spirits' in lectures on Ethics for instance suggests that cruelty towards dogs might encourage a person to develop a character which would be desensitized to cruelty towards humans. From this standpoint, cruelty towards non-human animals would be instrumentally rather than intrinsically wrong. In addition, anthropocentrism often recognize some non-intrinsic wrongness of anthropogenic( human caused environmental devastation) such a devastation will cause a damage to the wellbeing of humanity now and the future since our well being is tied to a sustainable development.(Passmore, 1974)

Thomas Aquinas (Summa contra Gentiles B.K. 3 PT. 2 Chap.112 also argued that non-human animals are ordered for man's use. All the moral obligations we have toward the environment are deduced from our direct duty to its human inhabitants. This simply means we have a very high anthropocentric reason to be non-anthropocentric or be completely biocentric in our daily thinking and actions. This is referred by experts as enlightened or prudential anthropocentrism.

Contemporary environmental ethics calls for basic change in values in connection to the environment. A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and the beauty of the biotic community. Environmentalists, who are biocentric, believe all organisms and entities in the ecosphere are equal in intrinsic worth. The killings of a wild flower then when taken in itself is just as much wrong as all other things being equal as killing of human being (Tailor,1983).

The rise of environmental or green parties in Europe in the 1980's was accompanied by almost immediate schism between groups known as realism and the fundamentalist (Dobson, 1992). The realist stood for reformed environmentalism, working with business and government to impact pollution and resource depletion especially on fragile ecosystems or endangered species. The fundamentalist argued for radical change, the setting up of stringent new priorities and even overthrow of capitalism and liberal individualism which were taken as a major ideological causes of anthropogenic environmental devastation.

The two perspectives were underpinned by two positions namely shallow or deep environmental movement introduced by a Norwegian Philosopher and Limber Anne Naess in 1970s.The deep ecological movement endorses biospheric egalitarianism, the view that all living things are alike in having value in their own right independent of their usefulness to others. Deep ecology philosophy rejects atomistic individualism in the notion that a human being is such an individual possessing a separate essence; Naess argument radically separates the human self from the rest of the world, this to him does not only lead to selfishness towards other people but also induces human selfishness towards nature.

The church is a prominent body in these matters because the central purpose underlying God's creation of this world are as follows: First, to give Him pleasure. Psalm 104: 31 says, 'the Lord rejoices in all He has made.' Revelation chapter 4:11 attest to it: Thou art worth oh Lord, to receive glory, honour and power for thou art created all things and for thy pleasure they are and were created. Second, to testify God's existence and power: The heavens tell of His glory, the skies display His marvelous craftsmanship (Ps. 19:1). Third, that God may be known (Rom. 1:19-20). Fourth, everything God created He said it was good. Obviously, the environmental crises raised early on are not consistent with the purpose of creation. This is the reason why the church must be awakened to demonstrate its environmental mandate. The church is the vehicle through which God can establish His purpose for creating this world because this purpose is not revealed to the circular world.



## **Justification and research objectives**

Business organizations have long been criticized for their negative effects on the natural environment in terms of wasting natural resources, depleting the energy sources, poisoning the land with radioactive waves, indiscriminate bush burning and waste disposal, deforestation, land degradation and fouling the air with pollution. These environmental crises are detrimental to health and the wellbeing of lives on the planet earth. It is likely that corporate responsibility will increase in these areas in the coming years to contribute to the minimization or eradication of the environmental menace. There are both governmental and social pressures on corporations to adhere to strict environmental standards and practices and to voluntarily change production processes in order to do less harm to the environment. The issue of environmental crisis is a global phenomenon with global implications. It is due to its global dimension that necessitated the Kyoto and the Montreal protocol to find global and permanent solution to it. However, the State's role has woefully been inadequate if not a failure. Unfortunately, the church in Africa (particularly Ghana), although a strong force to reckon with in terms of its role in education, good governance, responsible citizenship to mention just a few, has not been involved in policy and decision making in this area. This undoubtedly reflects a gap. The purpose of this paper is to point out the significant role that the church can play in environmental sustainability. This paper will eventually call for all key stakeholders to collaborate to work towards environmental sustainability for the benefit of both the current and future generation.

## **2. Methodology and sample strategy**

Methodological triangulation was deployed in the collection of data. In qualitative paradigm, we are concerned with meanings attributed to events and experiences by participants in their naturally occurring environments (Willig, 2001). It is normally based on specific context and usually describes the real world settings of people to better understand social realities, processes, meanings, patterns and structural features (Golafshani, 2003). Thematic analysis was used. Interview data was transcribed and categorized into the following themes: Climate change control, Health & sanitation management, Proper farming practice, Disaster management & control and Social services.

Twelve (12) leaders from the church of Pentecost were sampled and interviewed on environmental crisis, care, justice and policy. Non-probability purposive and convenient sampling techniques were used. The respondents for the interview were chosen due to the fact that they were strong Pentecostal members who received Christ, and had the baptism of the Holy Spirit and have been in the Pentecostal church for over 30 years. Again, they were among the highly educated in the church. The minimum qualification among the interviewees was Masters degree. I selected the church of Pentecost- Accra in Ghana, as a study base in terms of interviews because it is a leading Pentecostal church in Ghana in terms of numbers and organizational administration. Again, the church has shown some traces of engaging in environmental action. Responses from the interviews were categorized into themes such as: climate change, health & sanitation, proper farming practice, disaster management & control and social services.

Questionnaires were also administered to church pastors and leaders from more than 10 denominations, majority being Pentecostals, from various regions such as Greater Accra Region, Central Region, Volta Region and Eastern Region of Ghana. These church leaders/pastors were students of School of Theology and Missions of Central University College-Ghana. The population constituted 73% being charismatic/Pentecostals. The rest were Anglicans, Presbyterians and Roman Catholics. This group met for church service. It was after the church service that I sought permission from the management of the School and the students to solicit information on the natural environment from them. Forty –one questionnaire forms were

issued and every one of them was completed and retrieved. This fairly small sample size seems reasonable for generalization and policy considering the difficulties in accessing pastors to respond to such issues since they think they do not hold political power or mandate to influence national political issues. Another difficulty in having access to pastors is their fear of vilification or undue criticism. Ignorance and insensitivity to incorporate environmental elements in their church routines is also another reason. Tables and graphs were used to describe results.

### **3. Analysis of findings**

#### **3.1 Climate change control**

In a 2 hour interview with a Geographer theologian on the issue of environmental care, the participant provided the narration below:

‘The Pentecostal and the charismatic churches were doing nothing good to the environment. However, the historic mission churches were doing very well. The mission churches’ members attend workshops on climate change. For instance, when there was UN conference on the environment, the World Council of Churches sent delegates to attend the conference (interviewer 2).

Another participant provided the voice below:

It is only occasionally, that I see the children’s movement of the church of Pentecost trying to educate the general audience to shun from bush burning and indiscriminate cutting of trees during drama performance (Interviewer 7).

One participant also provided the voice below:

The church of Pentecost never includes environment care in its crusade, conferences and retreats but sometimes invites government officials to such programmes who on their own sometimes address the church on environmental care when given the opportunity to talk. The human right advocacy which is also environmental care element is practiced by the church in our English worship Assemblies but not at the local assemblies where we have 100% dominated by the indigenes. The church’s environmental care on the whole is very minimal and this may be explained by its too much focus on spiritual things such as preaching, teaching, prayer & fasting and holy living. Simply, the church does not show interest in environmental care. However, the leaders of the church could rise up to the occasion by formulating a policy to educate the church members on environmental care issues such as tree planting (Interviewer 8).

#### **3.2 Health & sanitation management**

During an hour in-depth interview with a Christian psychologist with a strong Pentecostal background, his answer to the question: ‘Does the church care for the natural environment?’ was

‘No! Not at all the church does not have interest in environmental care; it has no positive environmental attitude. The church is extremely religious. There is only a clean-up exercise once a while’ (interviewer 1).

An hour discussion with one interviewee also made the comments below:

Yes the church is doing fairly well because today some theologians are writing on environmental issues such as HIV/AIDS and biblical perspective, sanitation and climate change to serve as a material to educate people. The Episcopal cathedral church of Saint John the Divine in New York City has led the way in the greening of Christian liturgy. The Presbyterian Church has instituted a young adult eco-steward, trained in biblical and theological foundation for environmental stewardship (interviewee 3).

An hour discussion with another interviewee also showed the views below:

There is education by the churches to combat indiscriminate defecation, malarial control programs and others. The church uses various platform to advocate the need for all and sundry to be environmentally conscious (Interviewee 4).

An interview with an agriculturist elder in the church of Pentecost on the issue of the church's environmental consciousness, maintained the following opinion:

The church has not been impressive in this direction at all. Although once a while it undertakes clean up exercise- weeding and cleaning the gutters (interviewer 6).

I also had discussions with a Pentecostal Adult educationist on environmental care. Her position was as narrated below:

The church only engages in clean-up campaign for sanitation improvement. 'This is the only area I see the church doing something once a while'. The Pentecostal/charismatic church is not doing much at all except that their recent policy to extend bore whole water to the rural communities to provide them with good drinking water has been successful (Interviewee 9).

On the question of whether the church has any policy on the environment, a participant has this to say:

Unfortunately no! This is perhaps due to ignorance or mere negligence. It is only once a while that the church does some clean up exercise and cautions members to avoid littering their compound (interviewee 10).

One interviewee also lamented:

The church does not have a policy but could partner with the government and other environmental agencies like Zoomlion Company Ltd. to help sustain the environment by improving sanitary practices (interviewer 12).

### 3.3 Proper farming practice

During an interview with a church leader and a banker on the issue of the church's environmental consciousness, he said:

My former local church at Breman Esikuma district in the central region of Ghana practiced the growing of forest in the 1980's. The witness movement which is a wing of the Church of Pentecost that always went about to preach the gospel about Christ sometimes educated the community members on the proper methods of farming: to spray cocoa rightly, taught them how to prepare organic manure to use as fertilizers. However, other movements in the same church such as the women and men's movement never engaged in any environmental care activity at all. Also, I do not see Christians' environmental care in the cities of Ghana.



## Disaster management and control

A historian pastor of a Pentecostal church also maintains the impression below:

During flood, church members are not able to attend church. Some church buildings and other properties are also destroyed by flood. So the church is becoming more concerned with environment issues. They are now making efforts to manage flooding (interviewee 5).

### 3.4 Social services

Another participant also commented:

I am not aware of any policy; but the Church has a Social Service Unit that only deals with providing schools, clinics, offering scholarship to the needy but the brilliant and providing vocational training to the poor. However, it is not late for it to develop relevant policy in this direction (interviewee 11).

### 3.5 Questionnaire on the natural Environment

The information below is the result from the administered questionnaires.

**Table 1: Demographics**

Category	Percentage response	Chari/Pentec	Mainline Churches	Roman catholic
Church pastors	93			
Non pastors	7.1			
Church denomination		73.17	19.51	7.31

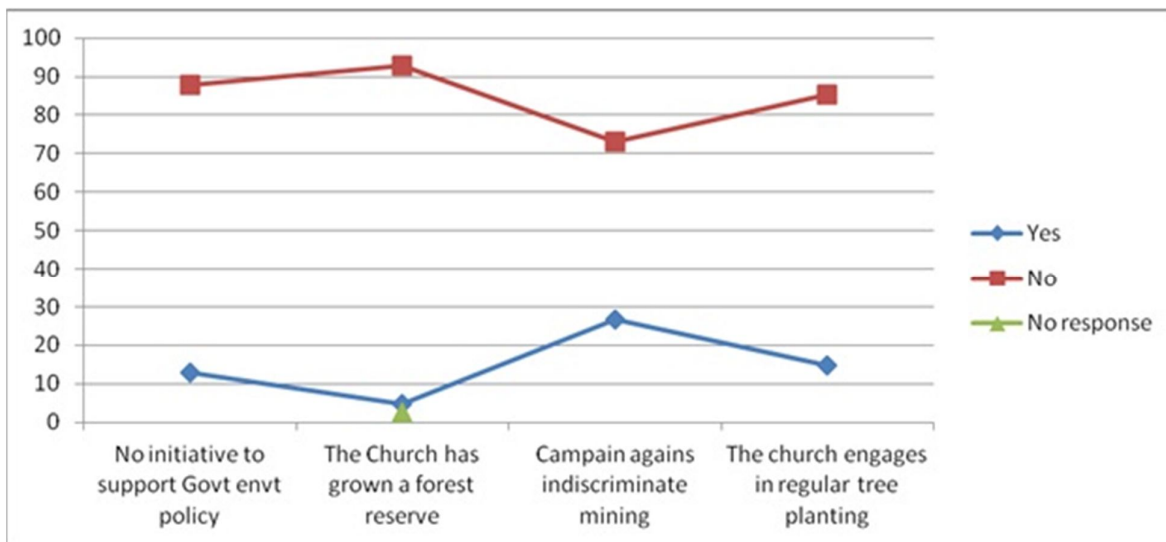
**Table 2: Responses of respondents to environmental questions**

Questions	Yes	No	No response	Total
The Church has grown a forest reserve	4.87	92.68	2.4	100
No initiative to support Govt. policy on the environment	12.19	87.80	-	100
The church can rise up and take its responsibility to care for nature	80.48	19.51	-	100
The Church plays a role in campaigning against indiscriminate mining and pollution	26.8	73.7	-	100
The church's care to the environment is woefully inadequate.	68.29	9.75	21.97	100

Source: Field data

The data above clearly indicates that the church does not demonstrate much concern about environmental care. Contributing to growing forest reserve, supporting government policy on the natural environment, campaigning against indiscriminate mining and pollution recorded 4.87%, 12.1%, 26.8% respectively.

Further explanation is given in the discussion part of this paper.



The figure above shows four core environmental issues considered by the respondents. As can be seen, the entire “NO” responses fall within the range of 70-90%. This showed that respondents reported that the church is deficient in these environmental issues. Further highlight is given in the discussion of this paper.

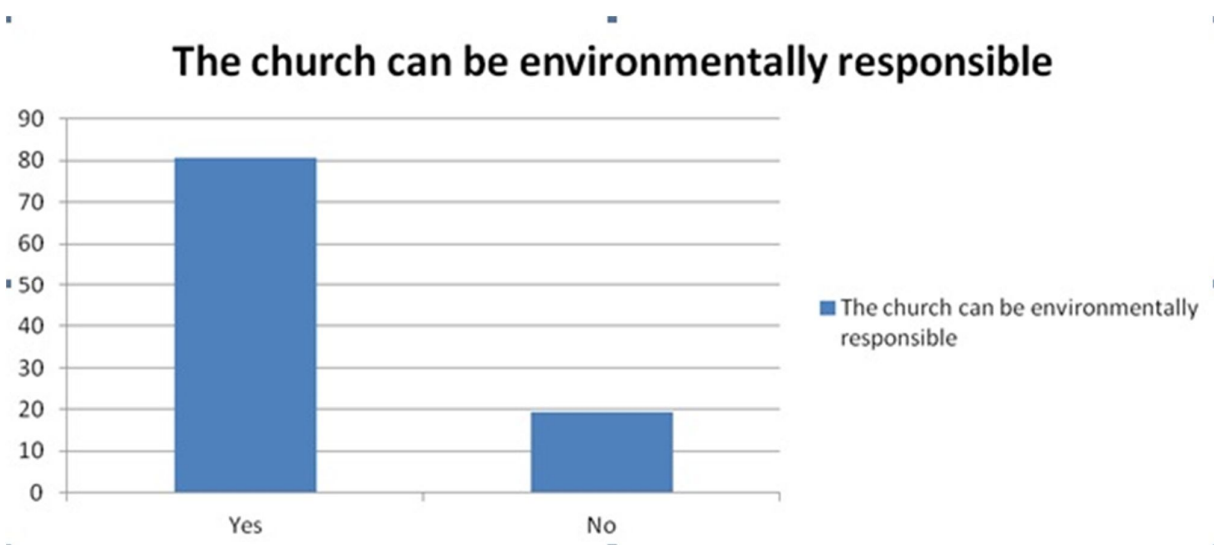


Figure 2 above shows that the church could be environmentally responsible. It has the experts, the financial and the material resource and the commitment. The figure is explained further in the discussion of this paper.

#### 4. Discussions

There are interpretational errors made by White in his discourse on Genesis chapter 1:26-28. For example, the term '*take dominion*' or '*subdue*' does not mean mankind is told by God to exploit or abuse nature to his advantage; but rather to show care or stewardship to creation. For in Genesis chapter 2 Adam was to care for the garden (the environment). Schaeffer (1970) was among the first Christian apologist to respond to White's critique. He said, the Christian call to exhibit dominion is true but this is to be done rightly, that is, treating nature as having value in itself, exercising dominion without being destructive. In addition, as far back as 1554, John Calvin had interpreted 'dominion' to mean 'a responsible care' and 'keeping' that does not neglect, injure, corrupt, mar or ruin the earth.

The Judeo-Christian tradition differs widely from modern environmental theology in that it sees a whole host of goals to which humans could aspire. Instead of preserving nature as humanity principal end, numerous goals are also worthy of attention such as reduction of poverty, ensuring respect for humanity, enhancing social conditions, promoting political regime that respect human freedom and other goals ought to be pursued. However, where there are many goals, trade off will be necessary.

The biblical mandate of the church for environmental care is to be commitment to the task of promoting a sound and healthy environment, care for people, the poor, marginalized, wildlife species, plants etc. It links environmental concerns with social justice issues. The two purposes of this care are for sustainable development and environmental integrity. Sustainable development encompasses meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs. It fosters economic growth without sacrificing the natural resources of a given community. It creates access to natural resources for future generation. Finally, it creates environmental integrity, economic prosperity and community livability. On the other hand, environmental integrity is the protection and improvement of air, water, land that all living things depend on for their survival. It means not only avoiding harm to the natural environment but actually enhancing the environment through developmental decisions.

In both the Old and the New Testament, we have ample evidence of Scriptures pointing to the fact that there are numerous moral, regulations and laws aimed at protecting the environment and they depict the fact that the natural environment is good and also reflects God's glory.(Ps 19:1. I Tim. 4:4.

Before the creation of humanity, God honoured other parts of the created order by saying they are good. Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18,21,25.This is because the created order also gives God glory (Ps 19:1) completely apart from humanity and what they do with creation would indicate further that nature serves something beyond human purposes and as such it must be respected and honored. Job 38 and 41 also pinpoint creation's vast scope in relationship to human understanding.

Every call to save the environment is predicated on human action. The environmental disaster such as land degradation, pollution, deforestation and others have a very serious implications on humanity and the ecosystem thus the church acts in response to reverse the situation that humanity inflicts on the created order.

Besides, there is a more realistic view that nature and humanity are imperfect as marred by sin; and again subject to decay. The church therefore works on nature to maintain it. Groom (1989) shares the same view; he said, if religious educators promote spirituality that ignores responsibility for the world, they are not promoting a Christian spirituality as one cannot fulfill himself spiritually unless one walks in harmony with the earth. Again, one cannot be a true creature of the earth unless one reflects with one spirit and soul on the meaning, the beauty, loveliness and essentials of all creation (Beasley, 1993). Mathew Fox, an Episcopal

priest and founder of the University of creation spirituality has argued for an end to dualism in which humans and nature are seen as separate. He posits rather creation centered spirituality. Where a Christian worship service is altered to include more explicit emphasis on nature.

The beauty and the abundance of the world are a gift from God and the love of God requires respect for God's gift and for God's will of creation. Besides, love of neighbor requires justice, which prohibits the selfish destruction of the environment without regard for those in it today and future generation. Individuals, families and communities depend on the bounty of the earth so the need to show care to nature. Humanity is also seen as subordinate owners of the earth which needs transformation and improvement. The church must be involved in this role.

In addition, God is the creator of the universe and maintains its existence through an on-going creative order. Additionally, God's plan for creation is that of harmony and order, not disruption and interruption. It is also worth noting that God's creation share a common home which must not be abused. Caring for creation shows the church's faith in God. It is required therefore of those who have been given trust to proof faithful. More so, Christ redemptive mission extends to all creation. Again, God has covenant with all living creature (Gen.9:12-16) so animals and plants should be treated well as other beings, and not be abused.

This world and all the things thereof belong to God (Job 41:11); He pilots the operations of the universe (Heb.1:3), It is by Him all things hold together (Col. 1; 17), He makes spring pour water into the ravines, it flows between the fountains, they give water to the beast of the field..., makes grass grow for the cattle and plants for man to cultivate, bringing forth food from the earth. This shows how God is concerned for the natural environment. Interestingly, God has placed all these under the care of mankind; and since God saw what He created to be good, mankind must take a good care of it.

The creation story shows in details the concern and the value God attaches to the natural environment. He created the light, land, water(the seas) the sky, caused vegetation to appear, seed bearing plants and trees, made the sun and the moon to govern day and night, made also the stars, made birds to fly in the air. He also made animals, livestock and wild animals and also made man in His own image (Genesis 1;4,10,11, 12,14, 18,21,25,27, 31). This explain the reasons why the church must care for nature.

In Genesis chapter 2:6, God caused streams to come up from the earth and covered the earth, verse 10 God caused rivers to flow in Eden to water the Garden. In the land of Havilah, gold , aromatic resin and onyx (minerals) were found. Genesis chapter 2 :15, says 'and the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it'. All the beast of the field and the birds of the air were brought by God to Adam for them to be named. And whatever the man called each living creature that was its name. Clearly man has a responsibility to take care of nature.

We read in Psalm 8:3-4: When I look at the heavens, the work of your hands, the moon and the stars, which thou hath made, what is man that thou art mindful of him. God made them all.

What God has made must not be destroyed, rather must be nurtured and conserved.

God again, instituted various environmental laws and regulations to help manage creation very well. It is from this pattern that the church's stewardship responsibilities must be taken seriously. They are the law of Sabbath for rest of mankind and animals (Exo. 23:10, 12). This is meant for rest, restoration, vitality, fertility, to refresh and improve productivity. Also, the law of Jubilee: God commanded that the land be not sold permanently... (Lev. 25:23,28). So after every 50 years the land be returned to the original owner. This

is to regulate and control greed and exploitation. Again, the law of harvesting suggests that when you reap the harvest of the land, do not reap the very edges of your field (Lev. 19:9). Also, the vineyard must not be visited the second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. This must be left for the poor and aliens Vrs 10. Apart from above, we have the law of sanitation: these include the law of cleansing, food, hands and utensils (Lev. 13;14). Besides, He ordered that those with infectious diseases be quarantined, infected clothing were incinerated, infected houses were destroyed (Lev. 13:14, 9-11), Lev. 14:43- Human waste product were to be buried.

Besides, in the book of Genesis, we realize that in Laban's community, they had a time to go to the Well to collect water to give to the animals to drink. This shows sound water resource management and waste control.

Also, in the book of Genesis when there was famine in the world there was food in Egypt and all the people went there to buy food. Egypt managed its environment well. That was why those who did not manage their agricultural practices and storage facilities well lacked food and had to travel to another country to buy some food.

After Noah's flood, different birds were sent to check if the land (the environment) was dry enough for resettlement. Flood must be well managed. Flooded environment is not conducive for human survival.

In the land of Nineveh, when the plant that produced shelter for Jonah was removed, he felt discomfort (he was annoyed for the scorching sun). Climate change management is a significant issue today.

The use of donkey during Jesus's triumphant entry into Jerusalem also indicates that the non-human creation is also important. Animals are not to be labeled unclean; Acts 9. No creation of God is to be destroyed-1 Timothy 4:4; muzzle not an Ox while treading.

Jesus calmed the storm and the turbulent (Lk 8:22-25) in order to avert danger exposed to his disciples. Disaster management is a critical issue today.

There is a medicinal value of mud, sand and clay; it was used to aid the healing of the blind during Jesus's encounter with the blind. Land degradation through indiscriminate mining and improper farming system are serious environmental concern today.

Again, Bible reveals Jesus' frequent prayers on the mountain. Mountains provide a place of service to man and other animal/creation, (Matt. 14:23, Lk 6:12);

Trees provide essential substances that could be used by humans for various purposes; antiseptics, perfume, medicine, good rainfall. Indiscriminate felling of trees must seriously be regulated.

Unfortunately the results from the table shows that the church is not doing much at all. Respondents were questioned on various environmental issues. On the question of whether the church has grown a forest reserve, 93% percent of the respondent said 'No'. This figure is unfortunate because properly grown forest reserve maintains genetic variability, ensures carbon sequestration, recycling of organic matter, checks soil erosion, provide shelter for animals, preserves water bodies, aids rainfall( good climate condition) and may also serve as a tourist attraction for socio-economic benefits. The absence of properly prepared forest reserve is therefore detrimental to environmental sustainability.

It is also found out that **88%** of the respondents do not engage in any relevant debate to support government policy and laws on deforestation. This figure is also alarming and is opposed to environmental consciousness because proper deforestation is associated with advantages such as reduction of desertification, attraction of rainfall and socio-economic and medical values.

In addition, the results show that 73% of the population held the notion that the church never created a forum in any of its activities such as crusades, retreat or convention to campaign against pollution and indiscriminate mining. Air, water, land and soil pollution have negative implications for aquatic/biotic life. Land degradation and destruction of possible farm lands and human habitat from indiscriminate mining and quarrying have endangered human existence.

An interesting finding from the results that reveals inconsistency in the church's position is the information that 68 % of the population think the church educates its members on the importance of the environment and yet does not have a policy or adequately practice environmental care. However, 80% of the population believe that the church can rise to the occasion and meet its environmental obligations.

It is pertinent to point out that within the Christian circles there are those who do not care for nature because of the following: First, they have the view that the earth and everything in it belongs to God and so God will take care of them Himself. Too, that the material world is unimportant and that focus must be on the spiritual things which are permanent and eternal than nature which is ephemeral. Others think there is nothing like environmental crisis and so no care is needed. However, it is counter argued that Christian environmental stewardship is not for just crisis but issues management. Some Christians lack knowledge about the fact that the world is part of God's creation and so it must be linked to Christian concept of salvation. Some churches lack knowledge about environmental issues thus fail to keep and preserve them resulting in disaster to humanity. Others have the impression that the world is theirs and therefore they could treat it as they please. Ignorance about the task entrusted to Christians to care for nature is another factor. Christian environmentalist, (earth keepers) do not want to be identified with pantheism) so decides not show much care to nature.

## **5. Conclusions and Recommendations**

There is abuse of the natural environment by polluting the rivers, lagoons, lakes, streams, the land, logging and conversion of tropical forest into agricultural practices and industrial uses. There are also poor sanitation and health management. There is lack of sanitary facility, lack of utilization of available community toilet, old age cow dung are used as principal fuel and there is issue of defecating in an open fields. All these cause cough and cold, fever, anemia, asthma, diarrhea, malaria and so on Jariwala et al. (2013). There is need for collaboration between government and non-governmental organizations (including the church) in the provision of services including health care, education, water and sanitation. However, various governments have been extremely restrictive, bureaucratic and therefore shown tendency to interfere private venture. Because of this they are difficult to trust Alam (2011). Beyer et.al (2000) said, the World Bank is a key external financier of health activities in low and middle income countries and an important voice in local and international debate on health policy. Thus the World Bank plays a role in helping to improve health, nutrition and population outcomes of the poor, enhancing performance of health care system and securing sustainable health care financing. The global church could do much better than the World bank if it rises to the occasion in contributing aggressively to environmental care.



Most churches organizations and para church organizations are into farming activities in the rural areas. A proper blend of organic and synthetic farming will be the best option especial in meeting the goal of satisfying demand pattern of farming produce and that of sustaining the environment. Tu et al., (2006) in their research studies on different practices of organic farming, applying organic subtracts such as composted gintrash( CGT) animal manure ( AM) and Rye/vetch green manure and commercial synthetic fertilizer used as conventional control, discovered that microbial biamas and microbial activities were generally higher than conventionally managed soil with composted cotton gin trash being most effective. The balance of the two is important to meet demand and the healthy needs of the people.

Soil organic matter is recognized as able to tightly control many soil properties and major biochemical cycles ( Manley et al., 2007).

Trewaas (2001) asserts that there is a widespread belief that low-yielding organic agriculture systems are more friendly to the environment and more sustainable than high-yielding farming system. The organic farming system maintains soil fertility, avoid pollution, allow the use of crop rotation and it is animal welfare concern. While the alternate farming system leads to escalating production cost, heavy reliance on non-renewable resources, water contamination, chemical residues in food, soil degradation, and health risk to farmers handling pesticides. The desire for a sustainable agriculture is universal, yet agreement on how to progress towards it remains elusive. The church could be very instrumental in this direction.

Given the global reach of religions and their social, cultural and political influence in many parts of the world, the message that conservation of the natural world was a fundamental element of faith, was seen to have a tremendous potential significance for the future of the environment. Since many environmental problems have stemmed from human activity, it follows that religion might hold some solutions to mitigating destructive patterns by creating a mindset that creates a productive and cooperative relationship between humans and nature; generate modesty, compassion, and balance among followers, which may ultimately mitigate the harm done to the environment; develop attitudes, resources and practices to minimize negative environmental impact and formulate policies in line with the principles of environmental protection and sustainable development. There is a theological reason for stewardship and conservationism.

Based on the findings from the interviews, questionnaires and the literature, recommendations are made. The church must embark on all out efforts to use policy and programmes, laws and institutions, every treaty and alliance, tactics and strategies, every plan and course of action to halt the destruction of the environment and to preserve and nurture the ecological system.

Systematic ethical framework be put in place to support ethical ideas concerning the environment—a theory devised to justify the injunction to preserve the integrity, stability and the beauty of the biosphere. Actions taken by the church must be ethical and that means it must tend to preserve the integrity, stability and the beauty of the biotic community. This means developing a new theology of nature and humanity, providing a better perspectives on nature and offering ample grounds for a realistic environmental ethics. Christians should be forthright in defending their faith as relevant and sufficient for dealing with environmental issues.

As the church contributes in health and education globally, it could as well contribute to environmental sustainability by using the pulpit as an opportunity to educate people on environmental issues. The church could establish animal task force to care for homeless, sick, wounded or abused animals. It could as well build and manage or partner actively with veterinary institutions to care for animals. Again, the church can help in any resource whatsoever, to revitalize the zoos.

The church could also take it upon itself to engage in regular tree planting and growing exercise at roadsides and in various communities and also grow a forest at vantage places. This could also serve as a base for wildlife. The church could serve as an interest and pressure group to have a dialogue and engage in relevant debate to support government policies, regulation and laws on deforestation, bush burning and poor sanitation. It could also campaign against indiscriminate mining and pollution of all forms. This means clean air and land conservation should be pursued and policy against waste exported into the country is promoted. Besides, the church's collaboration with other stakeholders for a statewide energy conservation campaign could yield good results.

Again, through the use of both the print and the electronic media, the church can preach its position and advocate for environmental care and sustainability. Also during its conferences, crusades and rallies, it could allot a day or two for clean up exercise and tree planting and growing.

The church could establish a fund from which scholarships could be awarded to relevant students to pursue courses on environmental management, environmental theology and agriculture. It is also recommended that the church could provide financial support or partner with environmental agencies and departments to ensure environmental sustainability.

It could organize seminars, workshops, conferences, retreats, conventions on environmental sustainability, for example the use of environmentally sound technology, proper method of farming, bush burning control and the use of chemicals detrimental to the soil fertility, avoidance of the use of harmful chemicals for fishing (for example, DDT, proper waste disposal, recycling of waste material). Again, the church could maintain well ventilated church buildings;

ensure improvement in the lives of slum dwellers; mitigate the impact of failed rains and prolonged drought by providing irrigation, crop rotation, and using drought-tolerant crops to improve soil fertility and increase harvests.

The church could also provide the funding to support disaster risk reduction activities; not only about weather-related disasters but about geo-hazards – earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanoes and support climate change adaptation. Finally, the church can invest and use green technologies such as renewable energy/solar in church buildings. Climate risk management must therefore be developed within an integrated framework that reflects the continuum between future climate change risks and current risks of weather driven natural disasters.

A careful approach from the church to care for nature will ensure environmental sustainability in especially in Ghana where statistically, Christianity constitutes over 60% of religious adherents in Ghana.

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