



## Theological Principles for Ecological Sustainability and Human Flourishing

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### **Abstract**

No human society is free from environmental crises. Ghana is a West-African country that is currently experiencing different environmental crises including unmanaged air and water pollution, land degradation, and deforestation, among others. Many Ghanaians engage in all sorts of environmentally-harmful activities in their attempt to make their lives flourish. This situation underscores a misconception of the relationship between the state of the condition of the human environment and human flourishing. This research was, therefore, conducted to present a biblical view of human flourishing and demonstrate that true human flourishing cannot be achieved in an environment that cannot sustain human life. Using the literature-based research methodology, the paper conducted a biblical/theological survey of selected biblical texts and examined selected environmental challenges facing contemporary Ghana. The main thesis of the paper is that activities geared toward human flourishing should enhance environmental wellbeing and not be a threat to it.

**Keywords:** *Creation; Eco-theology; Ghana; Salvation; Pollution*

### **Introduction**

The earth is imperiled by various kinds of human activities that adversely affect the land, water, air, and myriad forms of biological life within the ecosystem. Therefore, human societies all over the world are confronted with one or more environmental challenges that come with various health implications. The species of animals and plants that depend on wetlands, forests, grasslands, and marine environments for sustenance are endangered or driven to extermination as a result of the daily degradation and destruction of these natural environments (Schaefer, 2009).

World leaders have met on different occasions to find solutions to environmental crises. The first United Nations Conference on Environment and Development took place in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992 (Stott, 2006). This summit (popularly referred to as “Earth Summit”) was a gathering of over hundred

heads of states, representatives of government, scientists and special interest groups. This was followed by the September 2002 Johannesburg conference with its focus on “sustainable development, biodiversity, resource depletion, pollution and climate change” (Stott, 2006, p.131). These and other meetings related to the environment have contributed to awareness creation and the adoption of more pragmatic and confrontational approaches toward the attainment of sustainable environment. Nonetheless, environmental crises persist everywhere in the world.

While environmental issues are of global concern, they tend to be more intense in Africa. Many African societies face different levels of environmental crisis. Ghana (the context of this research) is a West-African country that is currently experiencing different environmental crises such as air and water pollution, land degradation, and deforestation, among others. Geographically, Ghana shares boundaries with Cote d’Ivoire, Burkina Faso, and Togo. The country has a total land area of 238,533 km<sup>2</sup> with an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 110,000 km<sup>2</sup> of the sea (Tamakloe, 2000). Climatically, Ghana has the tropical humid conditions and experiences two major seasons; namely, the rainy season and dry season.

In Ghana and other parts of Africa, rapid population growth, tremendous increase in the consumption of resources and the use of polluting technologies are three common influential factors that harm God’s creation (Kinoti, 2006). Ghana’s population has increased from 24 million to 30.8 million over the last decade (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). Increase in population catalyzes urbanization which is usually accompanied by increased automobile use with its attending plethora of problems. Again, the increase in population means putting a lot of pressure on the state’s resources. The amount of residential land required by 24 million people is far less than that required by 30.8 million people. Therefore, with an increased population, Ghana is bound to increase her residential land, hence reducing the land available for commercial use. Harnessing a nation’s resources requires technology. Almost all technological means of tapping resources pollute the environment in one way or the other. Consequent to increasing population, unprecedented increase in consumption of resources and the increase in use of polluting technology in Ghana, the country is currently experiencing different environmental crises despite various environmental legislations implemented by the Ghana Environmental Protection Agency.

Most of the activities that result in environmental pollution are undertaken as means of living. In the process, people do not prioritize the effect of their activities on the larger community. For example, people pollute water bodies through illegal mining activities and yet do not see anything wrong with it as long as their activities provide them with means of life. Thus, people search for flourishing and fulfillment through means that are detrimental to the life of the society. There is clearly a misconception of the relationship between the state of the condition of the human environment and human flourishing. In Ghana, where majority of the people are Christians, Christianity is expected to provide responses to the various challenges facing the country, more so environmental challenges. This research was, therefore, conducted to present a biblical view of human flourishing and to demonstrate that true human flourishing cannot be achieved in an environment that cannot sustain human life.

Every kind of theology must be biblically grounded. For this reason, the next section places the research topic in the biblical context.

### **The Bible, Humankind and the Ecology**

The book of Genesis reveals God as the Creator of all things when it says “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1 NIV). The details of how God created the universe and its contents follow this verse. The creation of humankind took place on the sixth day. God took a decision to create humankind in his own image and likeness (Gen. 1:26) and he did so, creating humankind as male and female who bear his own image (1:27). God created Adam from the dust and breathed into him to animate him as a living soul (2:7). He then created Eve out of Adam’s rib and joined them together in a

marriage union (2:18-25). This symbolical relation between God and humankind is referred to as the doctrine of *imago Dei*. This doctrine holds that all human beings bear God's image.

The Bible does not give details of what constitute the divine image in humankind. However, one can agree with Grudem (2011) that the *imago Dei* has moral, spiritual, creative and social aspects. Human beings have morality by which they distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. Decision making also requires morality. Human beings are not only material but spiritual beings as well (cf. Gen. 2:27). The creative and intellectual ability of human beings is also deeply rooted in their *imago Dei*. Everyday life attests to the social nature of human beings which they derive from God. Wesley (2007) gives a three-dimensional view of the *imago Dei*; namely, the natural image, moral image and political image. The natural image of God in humankind comprises the attributes of will, freedom and affections; that is, the attributes that define personality. The moral image includes holiness, love and righteousness. These attributes are required to facilitate human-divine relationship. The political image has to do with leadership and managerial abilities that enable humans to govern themselves and other creatures.

The political ability that God gave humankind was to be used in ruling over the other creatures. God gave Adam and Eve dominion over every living thing upon the earth, saying, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule [or have dominion] over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Gen. 1:28 NIV). Adam and Eve, as the first human pair, were responsible for populating the earth, and thus, ensuring that the human species continue to exist. After the flood, God blessed Noah and the other survivors using the same words he had used in blessing Adam and Eve (9:1). The people who survived the flood, like Adam and Eve, had the responsibility to populate the world after the flood had killed all other people. They were to use God's blessings upon them to maximize divine-given resources by "multiplying."

Apart from multiplying, Adam and Eve were tasked to "subdue" of the earth. The noun form of the Hebrew word *kavash* (translated "subdue") is *kevesh* which means "a footstool." The verb *kavash* is used in the military sense to mean placing one's foot on the neck of their enemy as a sign that the enemy has submitted to his/her defeater. *Kavash* may be used figuratively in reference to bringing a nation into submission (cf. Num. 32:29) or bringing something into control (cf. Mic. 7:19). Therefore, human beings are to be in control of other creation. This does not, however, mean humankind should abuse the other creatures; rather, they were to take good care of what God had handed over to them. "To subdue" means to have responsible authority of other creation.

The Hebrew word *radah* (translated "have/take dominion") primarily means "to rule", "to have charge" or "to have dominion", it literally means "to descend", "to go down" or "to spread." In the Old Testament *radah* is also used to signify the rule of the head of the household over household servants (Lev 25:43), the rule of officers over laborers (1 Kings 5:16), or the rule of a king over his enemies (1 Kings 4:24). All these examples underscore that *radah* signifies power, control, and authority that one has over the other. Thus, contextually, the use of *radah* places humankind in a place of power and authority to rule over the rest of God's creation. The nature of the rule—whether benevolent or malevolent—is not stated in any of the passages stated above. One can, however, deduce from the social context of Genesis 1 that human "dominion" over other creation has to do with benevolent rule within the sovereign rule of God. Human rule must be within the limits imposed by the sovereign Ruler (God) who has given humankind delegated political authority. This view is supported by Gibson's translation of Genesis 1:26a as follows: "Then God said, let us make man (to act) as our representative (on earth), (to be) someone (enough) like ourselves (to be able to understand what we were about in creating the world)" (Gibson, 1981, p. 77). Based on this understanding, human dominion over other creation means going down and walking among the subjects as an equal rather than ruling over the subjects as a dictator. The power to take dominion does not give room for indiscriminate behavior toward or the exploitation of the environment.

Two more observations could be made based on the foregoing discussion in relation to the use of the words *kavash* and *radah*. First, the biblical economy (at the time of Adam and Eve) was largely based on subsistence agriculture in its crude form; farming activities were practiced on rocky slopes using crude means without modern technology as today's world has (Opkins, 1985). In such a context "it is not difficult to understand how the relationship with the earth could be viewed in adversarial terms of *radah* (dominion) and *kavash* (subdue), and how the human task of producing food could be regarded as overpowering (*radah*) the intractable ground so as to gain upper hand over it" (Onyekachi, 2017, p. 27). The second observation is that the writer's understanding of human authority over creation draws from the priestly authority in the socio-religious life of ancient Israel. The story (in Gen. 1:28) forms part of the priestly tradition that gave birth to the creation account of Genesis 1 (the first creation account). Priesthood was associated with prestige and priests were closely associated with kings and royal authority (1 Kings 1:28-40) (Onyekachi, 2017). Priests were mediators of the divine-human relationship and therefore, played a key role in the socio-religious life of the people of Israel. Given this understanding, one can agree with Onyekachi (2017, p. 27) that the "distinctive role held by the priests is behind their conception of the preeminent role of the archetypal human in the world of creation as a whole, and portrayal of the first man like a priestly figure representing the divine and mediating God's rule."

The second creation account (Gen. 2:4-25) also has something to contribute to the biblical understanding of the relationship between humankind and the environment. This account reveals that after God created the universe, plants did not spring up from the ground immediately. The reason was that God had not caused rain to water the ground and again, he had not created humankind to take care of the land (Gen. 2:5). Kline (2006, p. 69) asserts that "God's making the world was like a king's planting a farm or park or orchard, into which God put humanity to 'serve' the ground and to 'serve' and 'look after' the estate." The creation of humankind was meant to provide a caretaker for God's creation. The concept of stewardship is central to the mandate God gave to Adam to "work and till" the Garden of Eden: "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Gen. 2:15 NIV). The key Hebrew verbs in this text are *abad* (work) and *shamar* (care for). *Abad* means "to work," "to cultivate," "to nurture," "to sustain," "to dress" (implying adorn, embellish, improve) and "to husband" while *shamar* means "to safeguard," "to be in charge of" (see Gen. 30:31 where it is used in the sense of "to tend or take care of sheep") (Reyburn and Fry, 1998), "to care for," "to watch," "to preserve," and "to protect." The writer of Genesis uses these two active verbs to underline God's intention for humankind to foster, develop and revere the universe in a manner that meets human needs and glorifies God. God ordained human work right from the beginning of human history. Work is, therefore, a divine command, though it is not an end in itself but "a means of sustaining the individual and family; and a means of serving the community"; its end is the glorification of God (Kudajie and Aboagye-Mensah, 1993, p. 107, 109). For this reason, human beings are expected to live and act, in such a manner that will protect, preserve and sustain the wellbeing of the created order and all its resources.

Aside from the creation account(s), there are other passages in the Old Testament that show God's concern for the environment. For example, the story of Noah and the flood reiterates God's concern for his creation. God's love for animals is evident in his command to Noah to save at least a pair of every kind of animal from the flood (Gen. 6:19-20). After the flood, God made a covenant with Noah and with every living creature (9:9-11). Central to the Noahic covenant is God's promise of not destroying human and animal life by flood again. This promise underscores that God does not want any animal or plant species to become extinct. He desires the preservation of his creation.

The Decalogue also demonstrates God's care for his creation. The Sabbath rest, for example, is meant to give both human beings the needed rest so that no one overworks him/herself or is overworked by someone. Exodus 20:10 states clearly that one's livestock must enjoy the Sabbath as well. Even animals are not to be overworked. God also provided a period of rest for farmlands. Farmlands and crops

were to enjoy the Sabbath. He instructed the Israelites: “But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of Sabbath rest, a Sabbath to the Lord. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards” (Lev. 25:4 NIV). The regular periods of rest provided for human beings, animals and the land are meant to ensure restoration.

The rest of the Old Testament teaches that God really wants people to treat other creation with care and respect just as they care for themselves. Caring for the environment serves to testify about the existence of the glorious God. The Psalmist says the heavens declare the glory of God and the expanse shows his handiwork (Psa. 19:1). From an eco-theological perspective, the degree to which the natural environment shows God’s glory depends on the ability of the environment to sustain life. In other words, the state of the environment must communicate God’s glory to people. Human activities should, therefore, reflect their sharing and participation in divine governance to the end of glorifying God.

Environmental care is not limited to the Old Testament. The New Testament also highlights God’s concern for his creation. Jesus cared about the environment and died to redeem creation. In Christ’s future Kingdom the universe will be transformed into a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1). Paul makes the point that the final redemption is not just for human beings alone but also for the whole creation (Rom. 8:18, 21-22). In Colossians 1:19-20 he states, “...God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him [Christ], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (NIV). Thus, from a New Testament perspective, restoration of humanity is inseparably linked with the restoration of other creation. Every creation needs redemption because of the universal effect of the fall of Adam.

Having considered the role of humankind in environmental care, God’s concern for his creation and his redemptive plan for all creation, the paper continues to consider the concept of human flourishing from a biblical perspective, with particular reference to the pre-fall human society.

## **Human Flourishing and the Fall of Humanity**

This section presents a biblical view of human flourishing with reference to life in the Garden of Eden before the fall of humanity. The theological discoveries in this section will serve to correct misconceptions about human flourishing and then help to formulate a biblical view of humankind’s relationship with nature. The term “flourishing” was introduced into contemporary philosophical and theological discourses by Elizabeth Anscombe in her 1958 article “Modern Moral Philosophy” (Hurka, 1999). The concept of flourishing concerns human good based on certain theories of human nature. By nature, every human wants to flourish; there is an inherent passion to enjoy life to the fullest. Etymologically, “flourishing” relates to “flowering,” that is, the state of blossom (Hurka, 1999). A plant flourishes when its natural constituents are fully developed. Similarly, the human nature has some key attributes (moral, psychological, physical, and spiritual, among others) whose development leads to flourishing and fulfilled life. Human flourishing refers to a state in which all aspects of a person’s life are good.

The flourishing nature of the Garden is evident in the following ways. First, the Eden environment in which God placed Adam and Eve was a flourishing society that had enough resources to maintain its flourishing state. According to Christie (n.d., p. 4) human flourishing requires right relationship “with God, with fellow humans, and with other creatures.” The human-divine relationship was perfect before the fall. God, having created humankind in his own image and likeness, began an excellent fellowship with them. There was no barrier between God and humankind. The environment in which God placed humankind produced its bounty and human beings had excellent relationship with the environment as well. Again, Adam and Eve were in a perfect loving husband-wife relationship with each other (cf. Gen. 2:23).

Secondly, human flourishing has a relationship value (Christie, n.d.). Human beings are social/relational beings who enjoy communal life. Therefore, the flourishing of a society cannot be achieved without achieving common goods. In other words, a flourishing society must not only have individual wellbeing at heart but communal wellbeing as well. Christie (n.d.) rightly argues that individual happiness has a limit in a wider social and ecological context where others are struggling to flourish and where common goods are in danger. Before the fall, the human society shared a common good. Sinful attitudes such as selfishness and pride which make people search for happiness at the expense of others' wellbeing were absent. One may even infer that it was this communal good that made Eve convince Adam to eat of the forbidden tree to also acquire the supposed knowledge (Gen. 3:6). She had discovered a supposed means of gaining knowledge and she wanted the entire human community to access this means. The African communal lifestyle was probably at play here, though for an ungodly end.

Thirdly, work and responsible resource management (or stewardship) are essential to human flourishing (Christie, n.d.). As noted earlier, God made Adam and Eve the stewards of the entire creation. As stewards, they were to make proper use of what God had provided them with and then multiply it. Human beings are by nature working beings as evident in the mandate God gave Adam to work and care for the land (Gen. 2:15). In working the land, human beings are expected to apply their God-given creative and intellectual abilities to the use of natural resources to make the society a better place to live. Stewardship and tilling of the earth should not be understood as domination and separateness (Christie, n.d.). As noted earlier, the concept of dominion is founded on the principle of stewardship of God's creation and forbids tyranny and plunder (Christie, n.d.).

Fourthly, human flourishing requires other-centered virtues such as justice and benevolence (Hurka, 1999). Human beings are enjoined to act justly and mercifully. Injustice downplays human responsibility toward God and toward one another. A society that does not have justice flowing constantly like a stream cannot flourish (Amos 5:24). Justice is a social concept, not an individualistic one. Therefore, for a society to flourish, its relationship with God must impact its social relations. A flourishing society attends to the needs of the poor and makes everyone feel part of the society. The pre-fall human society was one that exhibited justice, benevolence, equity, respect for human dignity and other qualities of a flourishing community.

The fall of Adam is recorded in Genesis 3. A literal interpretation of the story is preferred by most biblical scholars. In the story, Lucifer acted through a serpent (3:1ff.; Rev. 12:9) to lure Eve to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. The serpent first of all made Eve doubt the truthfulness of God's assertion that eating the forbidden fruit will lead to death. The serpent suggested, on the contrary, that the forbidden fruit has the potency of making human like God, knowing good and evil (Gen. 3:4-5). Knowledge of good and evil in this sense refers to experiential/practical knowledge rather than intellectual one. When Eve saw that the fruit "was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it" and later gave some to Adam to eat as well (3:6 NIV). Consequently, their eyes "were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves" (3:7 NIV). Later, when God approached them, they hid themselves in the bush (3:10). This underlines the effect that the fall had on human-divine relationship.

Responding to Adam's disobedience, God cursed the serpent, increased the birth pain of the woman, and cursed the environment as well (3:16-17). Adam and Eve were also banished from the Garden so that they would not have access to the tree of life (3:23). In addition, the fall of Adam resulted in the pollution of his descendants with sinful nature (Rom. 5:12-14). Since the fall, no human society has attained an excellent flourishing state. The restoration of the human society is expected to occur at the *Parousia* when the people of God will live the new heaven and earth which has no anti-flourishing attribute (Rev. 21:1-5).

The paper continues to consider selected environmental issues that impedes Ghana's chances of attaining an environmentally-flourishing state.

### **Selected Environmental Challenges Facing Contemporary Ghana**

As mentioned earlier, the human environment in the pre-fall era serves as an excellent example of a flourishing society. No human society has attained a full state of flourishing after the fall. Ghana has rich and diverse natural resources which are harnessed to meet the growing demand of the populace. An assessment of Ghana's environmental situation shows that the country is nowhere near a flourishing state. The West-African country is facing a number of ecological challenges that threaten the lives of her citizenry. The uncontrolled and improper utilization of the country's resources lead to environmental problems which hinder its progress toward a flourishing state. In the next section, the paper examines selected environmental issues that hinder Ghana's progress toward attaining a flourishing state.

#### **Air Pollution**

Ghana generally enjoys "good" atmospheric conditions (Tamakloe, 2000). However, gaseous emissions from such sources as vehicles, motor bikes, industries, and dusts from untarred roads, pollute the air within the immediate environments (Tamakloe, 2000). Carbon dioxide gas is the most abundant greenhouse gas produced and emitted by these sources. The green plants in the country help to reduce the pollution caused by carbon dioxide as they use this gas for respiration. However, with the decreased number of green plants in recent years due to deforestation and the increased number of vehicles and industries, the amount of carbon dioxide gas in the atmosphere keeps increasing, thereby endangering the health of the citizenry especially those in industrial areas (Tamakloe, 2000). Tema, being Ghana's most industrious city, has its industries always polluting the air.

The smoking of tobacco products also promotes the pollution of air in Ghana. People are found smoking publicly and polluting the air with large amount of harmful gases. Among the gases that pollute the air, Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) from compressed cans and sprays are the most hazardous in terms of their ability to destroy the ozone layer (the layer that protects the Earth from the harmful Ultra-violet rays of the Sun) and hence causes the Ultra-violet rays from the Sun to reach the human body and cause skin cancer. Illegal mining activities (known as Galamsey) also pollute the air with dust. The use of pesticides and mosquito spray also pollutes the air.

#### **Loss of Forest**

The second environmental challenge relates to forest resources (Tamakloe, 2000). Ghana is a country with fertile soil and large forest vegetation. The forest vegetation in the country not only helps to reduce air pollution caused by carbon dioxide but also provides food, meat, timber and traditional medicine for people. To maintain the country's forested regions, it is important to plant tree regularly to replace those which are cut down.

Unfortunately, the country keeps exporting its timber without deliberate and effective attempts to replace them (Tamakloe, 2000). People also cut down tree for charcoal or fire wood and eventually deforest a large area. Writing in the year 2000, Tamakloe (2000) indicated that about 90 percent of the country's forest has been logged since the late 1940s with a deforestation rate of deforestation rate is about 22,000 hectares (ha) per annum at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Obviously, the country stands the chance of losing all her forest reserves if the situation is not checked. The loss of trees and other vegetation makes the land prone to devastating floods which some parts of the country experience these days.

## Air Pollution

Contemporary Ghana is full of noise. Every morning most societies in Ghana awaken to the sounds of twittering birds, the rhythmic *shww shww shww* of brooms sweeping the streets and concrete compounds. The prayers, preaching and songs of devout Christians and preachers also fill the air every dawn. One gets out of the house and is confronted with the cacophonous sounds of busy traffic and public transport. In Accra, for example, the mate/conductor of one *trɔtrɔ* keeps shouting *sek, sek, sek* to get passengers traveling to Kwame Nkrumah Circle; another mate shouts, *Akraa, kraa, kraa*, to get passenger travelling to Accra; another shouts *Madina ooro, ooro, ooro*, to get passengers travelling to Madina through the old road. In Kumasi, one hears mates shouting *Keetia, Keetia, Keetia* to get passengers travelling to Kejetia. At the Bus station in Sunyani, one is bombarded with “One man, one seat, one man one seat, *wootena mu a na eetu, lelele lelele* (“immediately you take your seat the bus will start off the journey, it is nice”). In the bus people stand and talk for about an hour advertising one product or the other. At the Nana Bosoma Market (in Sunyani) one is bombarded with a loud: *Wonyi no low na wɔnhɛ no high* (“buy it at low price and wear it to important functions”).

*Trɔtrɔ* mates signal their drivers to stop at the next bus stop or to stop immediately and pick a passenger by beating the iron body of their cars, *guan, guan, guan*. Drivers keep blowing their horns repeatedly as they look for passengers to fill up the seats. Passengers keep shouting to alert mates of their destination. Traders around the *trɔtrɔ* and taxi stations add to the overall noise in the city. People selling items such as pens and panties, handkerchiefs, batteries, radios, books, meat pies and others keep shouting to seek customers. The high-pitched “*iiiiiiiice wata*”, “*boofrot*”, “*ankaaaa woɔ*”, “*paste waa brush waa*”, and “*graphic, graphic*” make the environment noisy. Shoe shine boys tap their wooden tool boxes (shouting “*shine, shine*”) and tailors snip their scissors (shouting, “*ye adee yie*”) to attract customers to their trade.

In addition, one hears music, singing, laughter, wailing, and chattering from social gatherings like funerals, parties and church services. The public address systems used by road side preachers is usually opened loud above the acceptable range. Churches make unbearable noise during services and so disturb the people in the neighboring environment. The noise from an all-night church service is enough to keep one awake throughout the night. Worshippers are bombarded with all sort of noise with health implications. In contemporary society, spirituality is related to noise making. Churches that are full of noise are considered more spiritual than those with low level of noise. Worshippers who shout and do all sort of gymnastics during player sessions are more spiritual. The level of spirituality of pastors is determined by the level of noise they can make during worship services. This is one of the main reasons why some churches make unbearable noise. In the night, the noise from nightclubs, drinking spots, and funerary wake-keepings becomes a source of disturbance for city residents.

Information centers are also a major source of noise pollution. In many communities, information centers have become means of making local announcement. They have really replaced the beating of gong-gong. These centers operate from a point and cover long distances. They are so loud that people in the neighboring environment find it difficult to even communicate to one another when the centers are operating. Additionally, there is noise from mad people roaming the streets. The health implications of noise pollution on people are obvious.

In spite of the negative health implications of the polluting activities on the community, many people feel comfortable undertaking them. This means that people are ready to use any means (good or bad) to make it in life or at least to get their daily bread. The explanation of human flourishing, given above, makes it clear that it is unethical to achieve life success at the expense at the wellbeing of other people. As a remedy to the situation, the paper proposes, in the next section, theological principles for



correcting misconceptions about human flourishing and for dealing with Ghana's environmental challenges.

### **Theological Principles for Ecological Sustainability**

This section considers three theological principles that may contribute to achieving ecological sustainability and hence, maintain the society on her path toward a flourishing state. The principles are environmental stewardship, prioritizing communal interest and restoring the land.

#### **The Principle of Stewardship**

The principle of responsible stewardship is the most dominant evangelical emphasis. Earlier the point was made that God created humankind in a flourishing state and placed them in a flourishing environment. All that God created was very good (Gen. 1:31) and suitable to provide humankind with material, aesthetic, intellectual needs. Thus, George Kinoti (2006, p. 74) asserts, "God's creation fulfils human needs, including material needs for food, shelter, medicine and clothing (Gen. 1:29-39; 3:7, 21), aesthetic need for beauty (Gen. 2:8-9), and our intellectual need for stimulation (Gen. 2:19). Study of creation satisfies our desire for knowledge and provides solutions to practical problems such as hunger and disease." The spiritual needs of humankind were catered for by their relationship with God. The Ghanaian environment, like the Eden environment, is full of natural resources required for sustainable development and human flourishing. However, due to mismanagement and unethical ways of harnessing these resources, the resources pose a lot of challenges to the society. Given the above understanding, it is clear that the principle of stewardship forms a significant aspect of eco-theology for Ghana.

When God created humankind, he made their relationship to other creatures very clear (Gen. 1:28; 2:15). Human beings were appointed to care for the universe and maintain its state of flourishing. This is a great honour and privilege that God gave to human beings, having created them in his own image and likeness. As noted earlier, the idea of dominion in Genesis 1:28 gives humankind responsible authority over other creation, an authority that does not abuse but maintains. The concepts of "working" and "tilling" (in Gen. 2:15) underline humanity's responsibility in nurturing what has been entrusted to them. The roles of responsible authority and nurturing must be balanced to maintain the equilibrium within the ecosystem. This requires developing love for the environment and working toward its sustainability, bearing in mind that human existence on earth depends on the state of the environment.

The biblical concept of stewardship, therefore, differs from mere management and dominion of natural resources. McDaniel (cited in Darko 2014, p. 60) rightly argues that "a healthy and biblically nourished idea of stewardship will not see nature as an alien substance from which we are detached and which we can manipulate at will. Rather...it will recognize that humans are a part of, rather than apart from nature." This means that nature is part and parcel of human life. Nature is, therefore, not something to be manipulated. Nature is part of human life because (as noted earlier) human life cannot exist apart from nature. It is said that when the last tree dies the last human being will also die. This is true because the oxygen that humans breathe is supplied by plants as the by-product of photosynthesis. Also, humans depend on nature for food and other life necessities. McDaniel (cited in Darko 2014, p. 60) further states that environmental stewardship must "begin with the assumption shared by biblical perspectives and processes of theology; namely that humans are united with their fellow creatures in being part of a single ontological order: an order named 'the creation.'" This fact agrees with the African communal worldview.

According to Appiah-Opoku (cited in Darko, 2014, p. 60) "the stewardship ethic, as an environmental and theological position regarding human relationship toward natural resources, carries with it certain moral responsibilities and attitudes including an obligation to preserve and protect these resources in ways that reflect benevolent care and concern for the environment." Environmental stewardship, therefore, requires the responsible and accountable use of the natural resources through

conservation and sustainable practices to enhance ecosystem resilience and human flourishing. As stewards of God's creation, each person must be mindful how he/she relates to the environment because each person is accountable to God in their relationship with God's creation. Those in authority should be mindful what they do to the environment or what they allow other people to do. Any action that does not promote the wellbeing of all creatures is unethical. As stewards, human beings must serve the land, and not destroy it.

## The Priority of Communal Interest

From the definition of human flourishing given earlier, it is clear that Ghana's environmental situation is not conducive for human flourishing. To avert the situation, certain principles need to be noted. First, it is ethically wrong (from the Christian perspective) to undertake activities that destroy the environment no matter how much one benefits from it. People who cut down tree for charcoal and those who pollute the air with noise in the name of church services must regulate their activities because they end up polluting the environment and causes serious health problems. From the Christian ethical perspective, the effect of one's activity on the society is very important because God is interested in the community as well as the individual. The African communal worldview is important in this regard. The Zulu of South Africa express this communal sense of life in the statement: *Ubuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* ("I am because of who we all are"). Tutu (1991, p. 31) explains Ubuntuism as follows: "My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in what is yours... A person is a person through other persons."

The following implications may be drawn from the concept of Ubuntu (Gleaned from Boaheng, 2021). First, one's humanity cannot exist without the humanity of others. That is, a human being cannot be human without the existence of other human beings. This point is expressed in the Akan saying *baakofoɔ nkye damfoɔ* ("One person alone does not catch a mad person"). This saying expresses the fact that one person cannot do it all alone. It emphasizes the need for a collective effort in dealing with the ecological problems Ghana is facing. The church, those in (democratic) political leadership position, the academy, traditional leaders and the entire citizenry have a role to play in dealing with the crises. At the same time, *Ubuntuism* underlines that one person cannot exist without others existing too. Secondly, the *Ubuntu* philosophy underscores that life must be prioritize over wealth, power, and fame. The Akan saying *wowɔ nkwa a wowɔ adee nyinaa* ("If you have life, you have everything") highlights that the value of life. It means wealth, power and fame have no value without life. Therefore, for the Ghanaian society to flourish, all activities that are detrimental to the health of the populace must stop. The third implication is that leadership can only be exercised if there are followers. In Ghana, political leaders are sometimes accused of engineering environmentally unfriendly activities such as overgrazing, deforestation, illegal mining, and illegal fishing, among others. Based on the African communal sense of life, leaders who are behind environmental pollution should know that their leadership cannot exist without the existence of their followers. Such leaders will be no leaders if they wake up one day and realize that all their followers have died due to the harmful effects of the leaders' commercial activities.

Therefore, the idea that one's life is inextricably intertwined with the lives of others is key to achieving human flourishing. Achieving human flourishing requires people to consider the effect of their actions on the wellbeing of the entire society. A society in which people's means of living end up polluting the air for nearby communities cannot flourish because the pollution of the air adversely affects the wellbeing of other people in the society. True human flourishing does not give room for egocentrism and selfishness. Of what value is wealth if one ends up killing other members of the community through the pollution of the air people breathe?

## Restoring Land

The size of the land God gave to humankind remains the same even as population increases. The land-restoring approach to dealing with ecological issues aims at maintaining the ancestral land handed

down from generation to generation. It also aims at improving the living conditions of less endowed communities in the country by addressing problems of deforestation, overgrazing, soil erosion, desertification and pollution of air and water bodies through human activities. Water harvesting, sustainable agriculture and tree planting projects are some of the practical steps that can be taken in this regard.

This approach requires the retrieval and implementation of traditional Ghanaian wisdom on environmental care. There is great wealth of Ghanaian traditional wisdom about the environment that can be used in promoting environmental care. Most of these traditional values can be traced to pre-colonial and pre-Westernization era when traditional leaders were in full control of societal leadership. Environmental care as a concept relates to the responsibilities of humans in relation to our surroundings. These traditions emphasize the need to ensure harmonious relationship between humanity and nature. For example, indigenous Ghanaians consider the environment, including humanity, as belonging to God (the Supreme Being). Days are traditionally reserved for the land and the Sea to rest. These days are meant to allow the natural resources to have “rest” and to replace what they have lost. This is the traditional equivalence of the biblical requirement of the Sabbath rest for ancient Israelites. The Sabbath rest is not only for humanity but also for the rest of God’s creation. The traditional practice of giving the land and Sea the needed “rest” can be promoted in modern times without making the practice superstitious. The theology of environmental care must incorporate this and other traditional principles for dealing with environmental issues. African theologians must, however, address the question of the continuity between African Traditional Religion and culture and the Christian faith. This will help to avoid syncretic tendencies while formulating African-brewed theology and ethics for the African society.

### ***Concluding Implications***

Human damage to the environment has devastating effects on human health and wellbeing both now and in the future. This paper examined three key activities that destroy the Ghanaian environment. The solution to Ghana’s ecological crisis requires collective effort from the church, the academy and the society. Environmental issues can be addressed by the church in various ways. The church should lead the campaign for responsible stewardship of the environment both in words and action. The church must reduce her noise levels during services, ensure proper land management system and sensitize her members on environmental issues. The findings from this paper show that Christian theology of salvation must go beyond its traditional focus on the human condition to include creation as a whole. It was argued that true human flourishing cannot be achieved in an environment that cannot sustain human life. Therefore, the salvation of humanity from the penalty and power of sin should in effect result in the salvation of the environment from any condition that threatens the survival of its inhabitants. The academy must facilitate eco-theological discourses geared toward finding solutions to the ecological challenges the country is facing. Various seminars, and conferences can be organized to brainstorm the best approach to deal with the issue. The academic discussions must provide practical and pragmatic steps for addressing the challenge. Various theological institutions and universities in the country should also develop courses on eco-theology, drawing from such areas as biblical studies, history, philosophy, sociology, economics and psychology. The theological formulation must also cater for African wisdom on environmental care. Such a multidisciplinary approach to dealing with ecological crisis would yield the needed results. The society—including the different spheres of politics, state administration, business and industry, law, education, media, sports and civil society—needs to actively contribute to the search for solution to Ghana’s ecological challenges. Here, one requires law enforcing agencies to enforce the laws governing human interactions with the natural environment. Policy makers are also urged to make ecological friendly policies and ensure environmental justice. By exploring the principles espoused in this paper and putting them into practice, it is believed that ecological sustainability will be achieved to pave way for the achievement of a flourishing society.

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