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THE GROANING EARTH AND THE GREENING OF NEO-PENTECOSTALISM IN TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY GHANA

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ABSTRACT

From the angle of theology of mission it is imperative for the Christian faith to respond to the complex environmental challenges facing Africa. In this article, I explore the attitudes and responses of Ghana's Charismatic churches, as a case study of neo-Pentecostal responses to Ghana's environmental challenges. I further explore some theological and ethical imperatives that require neo-Pentecostals to integrate environmental protection into their missions agenda in today's Ghana, in order to become environmentally friendly, as their "mission of reconciliation" requires of them. I argue that, as required by their theology of mission, Ghana's neo-Pentecostals must reconcile with the earth and "be of the earth" through a re-interpretation of their "mission of reconciliation". Source data for this work are both secondary and primary, utilizing both participant observation and analysis of interviews with selected neo-Pentecostal members and leaders in Ghana.

Keywords: Ghana's neo-Pentecostals, neo-Pentecostal environmentalism, environmental challenges, groaning earth, mission of reconciliation, environmental mission.

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Introduction: Environmental Challenges and Faith Communities in Ghana

In Ghana, as in most parts of Africa, the crisis of the environment is typified by the plethora of climate change markers, such as erratic rainfall patterns, other unpredictable patterns of weather and season, deforestation and de-vegetation, and various forms of land, air and water pollution. When one considers the endemic nature of poverty in Ghana (and Africa), identified as underlying most environmental problems in Africa (Conserve Africa, 2010), coupled with the enduring nature of other factors generally categorized as social, institutional, economic and environmental (UNEP, 1997), environmental challenges are clearly issues of grave concern to humanity. At the risk of oversimplification, environmental challenges result in drought and famine, low agricultural productivity, declining household income, rural–urban migrations, and general impairment of well-being of both humans and other living forms.

However, the international nature of the environmental challenges facing Africa demands that African countries alone may not be required to respond to the challenge. As a challenge that raises moral questions that cut deep into the conscience of the international community, the environmental problem of Africa brings into the debate the complicity and responsibility of the international community. For instance, the problem of electronic waste (e-waste) trade and dumping, which is a major environmental problem facing Ghana, especially her urban areas (Oteng-Ababio, 2012; Lundgren 2012), cannot be tackled in isolation from the originating countries of these e-wastes. This “globalization of e-waste” (Lundgren, 2012), even if illegal, typically originates from the European Union and the United States (Oteng-Ababio, 2012; Lundgren, 2012), with the UK identified as the dominant European exporting country (Lundgren, 2012).

Responses to global environmental problems by faith communities are not uncommon today, as exemplified by ecotheological ethical researches and religious environmental activism globally.² In Ghana the need for

2. Readily coming to mind are the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN) and the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation in the US; the very recent Religious Bodies Environmental Network (RELBONET) spearheaded by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Ghana; the Arbour Day Project initially initiated by the Roman Catholic Church in Ghana; and the South African Faith Communities Environmental Initiative (SAFCEI). There are also research groups all over the world such as Forum for Religion and Ecology (FORE) based at the University of Yale, the

these responses has been underscored by both Christian groups and the wider community. This assertion is corroborated by the communiqué by the Ghana Catholic Bishops Council on the environment at the end of their 2010 Annual Conference. Similarly, the environmental focus of the 2011 Annual Conference of the Ghana Association of Biblical Exegetes (GABES)³ further reflects the Christian environmental concern, both at academic and some faith community levels of Ghanaian society.

Furthermore, in Ghana, it is commonplace for individuals and civil organizations to question what the responses of the Christian communities are to a host of social, political and economic issues. Such questions indicate the society's expectations of the Church as a stakeholder in issues of national concern. This further underscores that by their nature, mission and associations, the role of the Church within the community and society towards meaningful and sustainable progress cannot be over-emphasized. Against this background, in the following pages, I examine the attitudes and responses of Ghana's neo-Pentecostals to environmental challenges, discuss some theological ethical foundations and obligations for neo-Pentecostal environmentalism, draw their implications for neo-Pentecostalism in Ghana and finally conclude with some suggestions. I acknowledge that while this work is not a ground-breaking work in Christian responsibility for creation care, it certainly adds a new dimension and context to the discussion, which is that of neo-Pentecostalism in Ghana and its environmental responsibilities.

Neo-Pentecostalism and the Groaning Earth of Ghana

That Africa's natural environment (creation), which is also the creation of God, has been groaning in pain (Rom. 8.14) is evident. Consequently one would think that Christians, who are concerned about God and the things of God, should be concerned about the problem of the environment, at least for the sake of God. In this paper, the focus is on a particular form of Christian expression which has portrayed itself as authentically committed to God and responding faithfully to the human service to God: neo-Pentecostalism. Generally, Christianity in Ghana attracts the largest following; as much as 71.2 percent of the Ghanaian population, according to the 2010

International Society for the Study of Religion and Nature (ISSRN), the European Forum for the Study of Religion and Environment (EFSRE) based at the Department of Archaeology and Religion of the Norwegian University of Science Technology, and the Christian Faith and the Earth Project that was based at the Department of Religion and Theology, University of Western Cape, South Africa.

population and housing census (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). As a religious group, which undoubtedly has influence not only on its followers but also on public policies and governance of the realm, much is expected of the Christian faith with regard to the environment. Methodologically, while this researcher is a regular attendee of one of the largest neo-Pentecostal churches in Ghana and is therefore privy to the issues raised in this work as a participant observer, this article is further grounded in empirical data gathered through interviews from leaders and members of three purposively selected neo-Pentecostal churches in Accra, as well as informal discussions with some leaders and members of these churches.

Generally, there has been an initial dearth of Christian theological intrusions into issues of environmental care and the relations that exist between humankind and the natural environment. This was as a result of what Mante (2004) considers African theologians' thoroughgoing indigenization of theology.⁴ However, a later study on the response of the Christian community to environmental problems in Ghana reveals that there has emerged, albeit belatedly, some level of Christian concern over environmental care in Ghana.⁵ For instance, the Christian Council of Ghana (CCG) collaborates with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in environmental activities, such as the annual Arbor Week activities,⁶ with the Christian Council acting as a facilitating body.

However, this positive response relates mostly to the mission-related churches and member churches of the Christian Council of Ghana, as well as the Catholic Secretariat. This can hardly be said of the neo-Pentecostal churches as a whole,⁷ which undoubtedly have become the most

3. See also GhanaWeb (2011).

4. By thoroughgoing indigenization, Mante (2004) refers to the preoccupation of earlier African theologians with the task of indigenization in which attempts were made to adapt the Christian message to African categories. Mante notes that although the natural environment plays part in this endeavour, it is neglected when it comes to Christian theology; the underlying reason being Western-borrowed theological traditions and methodologies. K.C. Abraham (1994) earlier made similar remarks about Christian theology in India, when he noted that, with some notable exceptions, there has for a long time been little attention paid to the natural environment, at least by Protestants, courtesy of Western missionary influence.

5. See Golo (2006) on the response of the churches in Ghana.

6. The Arbor Week is an environmental week set aside by the Roman Catholic Church and CCG member churches, for tree planting activities and public education on the challenges of climate change. See, for instance, Modern Ghana (2008).

7. This conclusion is based on data gathered as part of an earlier study (see Golo, 2006).

vibrant, visible and burgeoning forms of Christian expression in Ghana, if not Africa, today. Pentecostals and Charismatics alone constitute about 28.3 per cent of Ghana's population (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). By neo-Pentecostal churches, I refer to a category of churches that have radically redefined the gospel message and the task and mission of evangelism as a core part of their activities, in response to the Great Commission (Mt. 28.19-20). Consequently, I use the term neo-Pentecostalism to define those churches popularly called Charismatic and neo-prophetic churches in Ghana. According to Larbi (2001), these churches emerged in the aftermath of the Evangelical and Charismatic renewals of the 1960s and 1970s within the social and economic difficulties that faced the country, with their message reflecting the situation of the time.⁸ One remarkable thing about these neo-Pentecostal groups is the large following they command in Ghanaian Christianity. On their number, growth and prevalence, Omenyo (2008: 43–4) writes:

A major characteristic of the growth of Christianity in Africa is the fact that although growth is experienced in all traditions/denominations, the Pentecostal churches are generally making more gains than the older traditions either through "sheep stealing" or through the aggressive evangelistic activities of the Pentecostal churches themselves. ... The explosion, subsequent growth and expansion of the Pentecostal movement are increasingly making Pentecostalism the predominant characteristic form of Christianity on the African continent. Indeed African Pentecostalism is fast gaining the reputation as the most significant development that has taken place on the African religious landscape.

Historically, the inattentiveness of the Christian faith to environmental problems has been generally due to factors such as splitting the world between the natural and the supernatural where the concern are for souls rather than bodies, the spirit rather than the flesh, and the acquiescence with consumerism and materialism (Hill, 1998). In Evangelical theology,

8. See also the roots of and/or relationship between these neo-Pentecostal churches, especially the Charismatic ones, with earlier Evangelical witness movements laid by international Christian student organizations, in this case in Nigeria, in Ojo (2008: 88ff.). I consider this connection informative, reasons for which I, at times, use the term neo-Evangelicalism to brand these groups. Omenyo (2008) and Anderson (2008) would rather refer to these brands of Christian flavour as "African Pentecostalism". The popular use of the term Pentecostal churches presuppose the existence of the classical Pentecostals which are the Church of Pentecost, Assemblies of God and the Christ Apostolic Church (Larbi, 2001), although these three churches have similar theologies of salvation and display the same tendency of anti-environmental consciousness in Ghana.

and more importantly Pentecostal spirituality, this dualism is rather prominent due to the radical distinction and discontinuity between common and special grace/revelation, in which common grace has nothing to do with saving grace (salvation) (Studebaker, 2008). The result is that the natural world and human activities fall within the category of common grace, which is a nonspiritual and secular category (bodily) and, “if not properly subordinated to the arena of special grace, can be a distraction to the activities pursued under the category of special grace” (*ibid.*: 948). However, the theological turn to the environment has rendered ecological issues to be at the heart of concerns about God and human well-being in general. It is therefore disconcerting that the concerns of Ghana’s neo-Pentecostals are far from creation care. Two reasons for Ghanaian neo-Pentecostal inattentiveness are apparent. The first is the definition that neo-Pentecostals have of their existence, which is defined in terms of the spiritual salvation of man and preparing “saved souls” for the *parousia*. Second, the majority of neo-Pentecostals are preoccupied with concerns about economic liberation, material prosperity and opulence as a benefit of spiritual faithfulness.⁹

In a survey on neo-Pentecostal responses to environmental problems in Ghana, all the respondents, including highly placed leaders within the neo-Pentecostal fraternity, acknowledged their awareness of the environmental problem and its consequences. It is rather interesting to note that some of the believers interpreted environmental problems rather as “signs of the last days”. Similarly, all respondents acknowledged that the Christian faith has not only a duty but the resources to respond to the problem. Asked whether their churches have what it takes to respond to the problem, respondents were generally positive. Some of the views they shared were: “Yes, in fact everybody does, but my faith seems reluctant because of the focus on economic breakthroughs”; and “Yes, we have what it takes to deal with that, but currently our focus is very much on prosperity.” One pastor noted:

as a leader, I think I can organize my people to clean up the environment and also educate people through the media,” while another pastor concluded

9. At the risk of oversimplification, it suffices to assert that this has been a trend blazed by neo-Evangelicals throughout Africa, if not the entire globe. This is evident in Pillay’s (2011) concerns about prosperity preaching and consumerism when one considers the number of American Christians who identified with prosperity preaching. I share similar concerns here, in the case of Ghana, where a growing middle class identifies with prosperity preaching and consumerism.

“as a pastor, I can organize the youth of the church to take up clean-ups and educational talk shows on the need to preserve the environment.

When questioned whether they thought care for the creation was the responsibility of the church, two pastors responded “stewardship of the earth’ means that God created all things and he asked us to oversee these things” and that “man has been charged with the task to take care of God’s creation, the earth”. Asked what must be done to avoid further degradation of the earth, one striking answer from a pastor was that “individuals must stop pollution and all other forms of irresponsible acts that threaten the sustenance of the environment”. One member also indicated:

the idea that Adam was charged by God to take care of the earth. A steward therefore should maintain the earth to the best of your ability. There is also the teaching on the parable of the talent. Man has been given the earth to keep, if it cannot be improved upon, it should be left as it was created.

When specifically asked about the responses of their churches, in terms of activities, to the environmental challenge, all informants, including the leaders, answered that there were no such activities; not even teachings on the environment. For instance, one member said, “no, not that I have heard of. We only talk about this when there’s an outbreak of disease like cholera where members are admonished to clean their environment.” However, one member’s response, although distantly related, was remarkable when she noted that:

Not specifically that I know of. But especially our senior pastor in his preaching, he brings out these teachings. Usually he is concerned about the place of Africa in the world and how we can make ourselves better. And he mentions some of these things and the fact that as Christians and as human beings it’s our responsibility to ensure that things go on well, and that, I believe, includes the environment.

Asked whether they believed God was concerned about the earth, one pastor answered, “That is why when he created the earth he gave us lots of instructions. If he wasn’t concerned about the earth, he wouldn’t have created it in the first place.” Another pastor indicated: “He created the earth and asked man to take care of it. Because he is concerned about the welfare of man, he naturally is concerned about the earth since man depends on it for survival.”

The above responses ground the inattentiveness of Ghana’s neo-Pentecostals in the problems of the environment. From the responses, it becomes evident that a dualist conception of salvation underlies the neo-Pentecostal inattentiveness to the natural environment – the first is

spiritual salvation of the individual and the second is physical liberation from poverty and mediocrity. A pastor respondent indicated:

Although we are aware of the environmental problem and its consequences we have been generally concerned with issues of eschatology and pneumatology. Our priority has been to save souls and prepare them for the coming of the Lord, and we neither preached nor talked about the environment.

This, the pastor explained, is the result of holding firmly to the promise of the early return of the Lord and the belief in the workings of the Holy Spirit in perfecting human beings towards that return. This informant, however, lamented that this has resulted in the church neglecting what it should be doing with God's creation on earth while waiting for the next coming of the Lord. In a nutshell, it is evident that the priority of Ghana's neo-Pentecostals is to fulfil their mission of reconciling human "others" (2 Cor. 5.19) who are oppressed and suffering from the forces alien to them, unto the Lord. Consequently, they have lost their sense of being connected to the neighbour earth, one of the suffering "others".

Also noteworthy is the neo-Pentecostal emphasis on economic prosperity and materialism, which is the focus of the now popular prosperity gospel. The prosperity gospels are teachings which emphasize that "God has met all the needs of human beings in the suffering and death of Christ, and every Christian should now share the victory of Christ over sin, sickness and poverty. A believer has the right to the blessings of health and wealth won by Christ" (Gifford, 1998: 39). Known also by many other names such as the "wealth and health gospel" and "name it, claim it gospels", this gospel emphasizes God's blessings of material prosperity and abundance unto those Christians who faithfully trust in God, by virtue of their salvation wrought through Christ. With reference to several portions of the Bible (such as Deut. 8.17-18; Deut. 28; Jn. 10.10; and especially 3 Jn. 2), neo-Pentecostals argue that it is God's will that the righteous prosper, with prosperity basically defined as fiscal wealth and accumulation of material. This emphasis not only exposes their inattentiveness to the environmental challenge, but also has the tendency of creating further problems in the environment (Golo, 2013). When asked of their views whether they thought the environmental challenge has a correlation with their beliefs in terms of causes, a pastor had this to say: "When it comes to the Charismatic circles, these teachings¹⁰ don't

10. Here the respondent was referring to teachings about safeguarding the natural environment.

really matter to us a lot. All we think about is prosperity basically. We ministers within the Charismatic domain, we don't really think about these." Another said: "Personally, I think it is high time we start preaching on the preservation of the earth. Maybe, the desire to acquire wealth due to the abundance of the prosperity message has a role to play."

The penchant of majority of these neo-Pentecostals towards profligate consumerism and materialism¹¹ is rather bewildering. While I do not intend to demonize wealth and prosperity, my contention is that considering the growing numbers of Ghana's neo-Pentecostals, their quest for a runaway materialism and opulence may practically work against efforts at attenuating further environmental degradation. Neo-Pentecostal informants themselves were aware of the impacts that such prosperity teachings could have on creation care. A pastor responded:

Since we pastors hardly preach on the responsibilities that accompany wealth possession, a member who fells a tree would not know that it is expected of him or her to replace it. With time, this may cause deforestation.

Although not all members interviewed saw this link, some of them had this to share:

I think so, if you have to buy a car to show that God has blessed you but you can't afford a new one, you would have to buy the one that release fumes to destroy the air. Yes, this is because members are not cautioned to be responsible in their pursuit of wealth.

One significant response indicated:

The implications are more indirect than direct. As a result of the messages, members would have to do things which would bring them wealth and some of these things have an effect on the environment, for example illegal mining and illegal logging. Thus the implication is not directly because of the messages, because other people listen to the same message and do not acquire wealth illegally.

11. See discussion about this in the work of Pillay (2001), who laments the penchant of these groups towards prosperity and consumerism, a known culprit of environmental despoliation. As also indicated by McFague (2001), it is important to note that the assertion is not to underscore that consumption is a bad word, because as occupiers of the earth who strive for our well-being, we will definitely consume. The kind of consumption we demonize as ecologically devastating is the excessive amassing and consumption of luxury goods to the detriment of the earth's ability to cope with it.

Thus, for Ghana's neo-Pentecostals their salvation and invitation to mission is seen in terms of personal evangelism and the reconciliation of sinful humanity to God, as well as the grace to be liberated from all forms of challenges, especially those orchestrated by demonic schemes and of poverty. Against the background that these churches command large followings and continue to expand to the extent that they are visibly becoming the face of Christianity in Ghana (or Africa as a whole?), they could make a difference in efforts at offsetting further environmental degradation, if the environmental agenda is vigorously pursued within these groups. It is in light of the above that I explore the theological and ethical dimensions of the environmental challenge towards a neo-Pentecostal environmental mission in Ghana.

Towards Greening Neo-Pentecostalism in Ghana: A Constructive Theological Ethic

Religious environmentalism itself is the resurgence of religious concerns and activism with regard to the challenges of climate change and environmental degradation generally. Neo-Pentecostal environmentalism would therefore mean neo-Pentecostal concerns about creation care and its attendant activism on protecting the environment. Several theological and ethical arguments require this, with the most identified being the Christian claims to their earth-keeping stewardship.¹² However, three immediate arguments for neo-Pentecostal environmentalism come to the fore. First, if the concerns of Christians, and neo-Pentecostals for that matter, are based on reasons for their invitation by Jesus Christ and the beliefs they hold about reality in relation to the creator God, then the beliefs and values they hold about the natural environment impresses upon them concerns about the natural environment. Second, when one

12. This is one of the most popular and enduring foundational concerns usually held by Christian environmentalists. A prominent defendant of this position is Robin Attfield, as is clear in his *Ethics of Environmental Concern* (1991) and *Environmental Ethics* (2003). One could also mention the Christian affirmation of the intrinsic goodness of creation, the Christian teaching on the sacramental nature of creation, the Christian's invitation to justice and liberating life (eco-justice), and the concerns that women raise about the linkage between their marginalization and that of the natural environment, as other claims. The vast literature on Christian environmental ethics and theology largely reflects and treats these foundational theological and ethical beliefs upon which a Christian engagement of the natural environment is established.

considers the reasons why ethics is very central to the Christian faith in general, which has to do with the faith claims that Christians make about God, the created world and humanity (Fedler, 2006), then Christians cannot overlook environmental problems.¹³ Third, as argued by Conradie (2011), the very fact that the Church is situated in the environment opens up several possibilities and opportunities for the Church to have its distinctive place in the household of God – the earth or the creation.

Generally, Christians who have accepted the invitation of Jesus have accepted an invitation to his liberating mission, and must be concerned about the material and physical well-being of people, including food, clean air, non-polluted water and good health, the very things environmental challenges deprive people of. Accepting Christ's invitation therefore implies responding to an invitation to work towards transforming justice – eco-justice ministries. In the words of Steuernagel (2008: 68):

Transforming justice becomes so much of a reality in the world of mission because it is so much a part of what God desires for us and of what Jesus lived out in his time and modelled for us to live out in our times. Human and social transformation is a result of mission and becomes a reality in the discipleship journey. It is transformation towards a new way of life and model of society, as an experience, as a value, and as a gift to be shared with others. It is an integral part and outcome of the mission and life of the church.

Consequently, it is required of Christians (in this case Ghana's neo-Pentecostals, who are committed to the invitation and mission of Christ) to be most visible in the Christian (religious) shift to environmental activism, just as Jesus did not walk away from blind Bartimeus of Timmaeus (Mk 10.46-52) and its parallel of the two blind men of Jericho (Mt. 20.30-34), and just as the Good Samaritan could not walk away from the wounded traveller (Lk. 10.33-34). Ghana's neo-Pentecostals cannot turn away from the groaning and disfigured earth. This assertion is forcefully grounded on the theological claim that the earth is our neighbour too.

Within the larger drama of the Old Testament, the eternal covenant which God established with Noah and his descendants extends to that of the creation (Gen. 9.9-10). This stems from God's concern for

13. Fedler (2006) underscores that irrespective of the fact that sin is endemic in the world, the created world itself is not evil. She notes that because God loves and cares about the world and whatever that happens in it, and about our material created bodies (and not only our spirits), it is enough for Christians to focus on the spiritual well-being of themselves.

people, the land and its creatures, which is the environment we inhabit (Snyder and Scandrett, 2011). This underscores that the earth exists in a covenanted relationship with God and humankind. The notion carried by Isaiah 44.21, Ezekiel 6.3 and Romans 8.14 suggests that the earth is not only our neighbourhood but our neighbour. It is therefore crucial to acknowledge that “the nature of the created order is *interrelationship* between God, humans and the earth” (Snyder and Scandrett, 2011: 121). It is also important to admit that “humans exist in a dynamic interpenetrative relationship with their environment. This relationship with the environment is not a choice on the part of the human, but a fact of life. Nothing in the world exists without an environment” (Mante, 2004: 157). We are mixed up with the earth in every way imaginable, notes McFague, because “it is what has made us who we are and what sustains our every second of existence” (McFague, 2001: 101). It is therefore unsurprising that, in the New Testament, the redemption of the groaning creation is tied up with the final redemption of humankind (Rom. 8.14).

Fundamentally, therefore, a re-orientation of neo-Pentecostal belief and theology towards the groaning creation becomes legitimate in this context. This entails a renewed redefinition of the “other” as those sharing in God’s love and gift with us. Within the context of the discussion, this is the earth which God loves and is involved in, and God is committed to its liberation from further decay. Consequently, Christians cannot opt to recklessly estrange it from the Church. Our mission of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5.19-20) is not limited to that of fellow human beings alone. Oduyoye (2004: 46) avers: “With the awareness of ecology, human vision of neighborliness has begun to expand to include all creation seen and unseen. Loving our neighbor has come to mean recycling, reforestation and cleaning up the waters around us.”

Furthermore, a radical re-orientation of the traditional neo-Pentecostal belief and theology, as well as inherited Jewish traditions and notions of the mission of Jesus Christ, who was God manifest in concrete “earthed” form and an archetype of relationships, deepens the theological ground for creation care. This is because Christian spirituality is a way of life modelled after Jesus Christ (Hill, 1998). As it were, “Christians believe that God has entered into creation and has been fully manifested in the person of Jesus Christ. For the Christian, salvation consists of becoming both personally and communally one with Christ” (*ibid.*: 242). Consequently, Christian spirituality demands living out the gospel message and applying them to the demands of life, in relation to creation care too.

Jesus was a concretized person of God; an indication of a relationship with God and of God with him. Through this, God has been brought into the realm of the body, thereby placing nature not only within the divine reach but also affirming the scope of God's power and love as cosmological (McFague, 2001)¹⁴. Sacramentally, the concreteness of Jesus Christ affirms the immanence and indwelling of God in nature, and the filling of everywhere with the presence of God, through Christ (Eph. 1.23b). It also suggests that God considered the physical or concrete earth as worthy of relating with, as typified by the covenanted relationship between God, man and creation as discussed above. If Christ was God and vice versa, and the Church is the body of Christ (that which has been made concrete – earthed), and if the Church is to imitate the Christ which has been made concrete, then the church of Christ cannot distant itself from the concrete earth.

A core enduring Christian knowledge about Jesus is his redemptive work achieved not only through his death but also his incarnation, teaching and the life he lived generally; a life that was oriented towards total restoration and the healing of all forms of brokenness. As reflected in Ephesians 1.10 and Colossians 1.20, salvation is pictured as a plan (economy) of God whereby “God may glorify himself by reconciling all things in Jesus Christ” (Snyder and Scandrett, 2011: 99), with the biblical vision being of all earth's people and creation. It is suggested that a key idea and dynamic in this plan is reconciliation – a reconciliation that heals earth's multiple alienations due to sin, and this includes alienation from God, from ourselves, between persons, and between us and our physical environment (*ibid.*).

Therefore, Christ and his redemptive work represent a holistic vision and mission by which God redeems and transforms the entire creation. With these understandings of the relationship between Christians and the earth, Christian activity and mission today without an ecological face only qualify as impoverished and scandalous to the creation of God and human society. Such a theology of mission would obviously have lacked deep theological, ethical and ecological orientations. It is therefore disquieting that data from Ghana's neo-Pentecostals suggest a limitation of the vision and mission of reconciliation to, first, spiritually reconciling sinful humanity out of this earth to God, and, second, immersing saved humanity into materialist and affluent lifestyles that have the tendency of alienating humanity further from the creation. Even from a typically

14. See also McFague (1993).

anthropocentric perspective, if it is argued that the Church exists to meet the needs of people, it must also be underscored that environmental goods and services are essential to human survival. As it were, it remains that the fear of losing environmental goods and services is, to a large extent, the root reason why human communities are concerned about environmental problems.

Just as Christ enlarged his vision and mission, and was engaged in a mission that culminated in transforming initiatives, Hill notes:

Christian spirituality must once again focus on the belief that God loves the world and sent the Son to be part of it and to save it. It must be a vigorous spirituality which seeks union with Christ in his mission to transform the world into a new creation and bring it into wholeness and salvation. (Hill, 1998: 245)

Implications for Neo-Pentecostal Mission in the Twenty-First-Century Ghana

The main objective of mission, according to Baeta (1968: 13), is “simply to make God known wherever He was previously not known”. However, such a definition has the tendency of reducing mission to evangelism. Although crucial, the mission of the Church extends beyond evangelism and generally is “an expression of a deep commitment to the truth of a particular message, interpreted as good news for all people” (Kirk, 2000: 20). Furthermore the mission of the Church is congruent to the mission of God, *missio Dei* (Ott, Strauss and Tennent, 2010; Kirk, 2000). Within the context of this paper we have identified the mission of God for the entire creation as “to bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head” (Eph. 1.10, GNB). This is the healing of all forms of alienation and the reconciliation all of creation – reconciliation with God, with ourselves, with others and with the earth. The liberation and healing of creation is therefore key to mission. If so, then Ghana’s neo-Pentecostals would have to be committed to this truth and consequently find a place for the natural environment in their theologies and activities. This is much more so when one considers the essence and purpose of the Church – to carry the good news to every creature (Mk 16.15), which means bringing people to come to faith in Jesus Christ. This will require the development of an elaborate theology of mission which is useful for “validating, correcting and establishing on better foundations” (Kirk, 2000: 21) for the Church and its activities (i.e. mission).

It is said that the foundation of the mission of the Church is salvation, the kingdom of God its centre and reconciliation its fruit (Ott, Strauss and Tennent, 2010). Therefore, neo-Pentecostals in twenty-first-century Ghana have the theological and ethical duty to reconcile not only fellow human beings to God but also the earth of the Lord. Clearly what neo-Pentecostals need is “to recognize their participatory responsibility to two kingdoms: the Kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of earth” (Swodoba, 2011: 28). This is because a faithful and holistic mission is that which “encompasses not only personal evangelism, compassion, and social justice; it includes proclaiming and living out God’s intent for all creation” (Snyder and Scandrett, 2011: 96). This lends credence to the five essential marks of mission in the twenty-first century identified in *Mission in the 21st Century*, a work edited by Walls and Ross (2008), which I find insightful and relevant for a holistic and radically environmentally focused neo-Pentecostal mission in twenty-first-century Ghana. The five marks are:

- the proclamation of the good news of the kingdom of God;
- the teaching, baptizing and nurturing of new believers;
- responding to human need by a loving service;
- seeking to transform unjust structures of society; and
- to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth (*ibid.*).

Obviously, Ghana’s neo-Pentecostals have taken up the first three marks seriously, and the fourth in a somewhat veiled and theologically controversial manner, but the fifth is noticeably absent. However, it is important to note that the context within which the first four tasks of mission take place is the fifth, which is nature, “which is the context for all we do and are” (Bookless, 2008: 95), including the mission of the church. Does the church want people to come to the saving grace of Christ? Then it is important to remind ourselves that people’s responses (negative or positive) to the communicated message (by word or deed) and people’s testimonies of God depend largely on their contexts. Consequently, contexts within which people are constrained by environmental problems have the tendency to be unyielding to the means of communicating the gospel and to the efficacy of the message itself. This is bound to be the case where there is overemphasis on the mission mandate of Matthew 28.19-20, without “mission to and on behalf of the earth” (Snyder and Scandrett, 2011: 155).

Neo-Pentecostal (Christian) mission in Ghana therefore is theologically and ethically faced with an apparent danger if the current environmental crisis continues. This is already evident in most parts of Africa, where neo-Pentecostal churches are not only overwhelmed by their numerical growth, but are also overwhelmed by the needs, aspirations and challenges that some new converts bring along into these churches with expectations of “miracles”. This is revealed in the frustrations of a pastor respondent when he said that “at times I wonder if God really created the earth to sustain man. If so, why all these environmental problems?” Whether questioning God’s purpose for the creation is the issue at stake is another question space and time may not permit to be dealt with here. What is evident, however, is that within the context of environmental challenges it is theologically and ethically indefensible to embark on mission without the environmental agenda, because it simply reflects an “equation of mission with humanity which does not stand up to biblical scrutiny” (Bookless, 2008: 97). It is therefore important, according to Bookless (*ibid.*), to understand that the mission Christ set before the Church is preceded by a first mission which is embedded in Genesis 2.15, which he calls the first “Great Commission”. Bookless (*ibid.*) submits that “mission that excludes the non-human creation stems from a biblically deficient definition of God’s mission for humanity”. One then understands why neo-Pentecostals elsewhere engage in environmental mission,¹⁵ and thus underscores why neo-Pentecostal environmental mission is crucial in Ghana (and Africa) as well.

Thus, the purpose of neo-Pentecostal mission in twenty-first-century Ghana will be to work towards a flourishing humanity and non-human creation through human ingenuity, and the exercise of responsible and censored stewardship. This becomes essential because the Christian has received not only salvation from God through Christ, but also a message and mission of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5.18-19). This is reconciliation with the earth from which humans have been estranged and that which the human being has subjected to groaning through his estrangement from God. The invitation to work towards transforming structures which underpin environmental problems, and also towards the flourishing of humanity and the creation, underscores the need for missions to be modelled on what Steuernagel (2008: 65) calls the “path of transforming discipleship”. This has at its core the building of relationships and the nourishing of a sense of belonging, healing, restoration and celebration;

15. See for instance Bookless (2008).

and this includes the need to “discover other aspects of the very mission of God, in whose footsteps we search to understand the mission of the church” (*ibid.*: 67). This task is clearly incompatible with the incessant and thoroughgoing prosperity project and preaching of Ghana’s neo-Pentecostals, which do not take stock of the limits of humanity and the responsibility of persons to other persons, and to the creation.

Practically, this will mean Ghana’s neo-Pentecostals working actively towards creation care. This they can do through means such as the following:

- the provision of environmental care services such as litter bins;
- reducing energy consumption and noise pollution, which have become hallmarks of neo-Pentecostalism in Ghana; and also
- the formation of environmental groups and clubs within their churches, to proactively embark in environmental activities, seminars and awareness creation.

They may also engage in environmental awareness creation using both their pulpits and the possibilities provided by media technology and several other resources available to them. At a more organized level, neo-Pentecostals in Ghana need to develop a theologically sound ecotheology, and, with such theologies, lobby governments to formulate pragmatic and sustainable environmental policies that are liberating and which enhance life in community.

Conclusion

In the preceding pages I have argued for a radical neo-Pentecostal environmentalism in the light of theological and ethical obligations that require this. Swodoba (2011) suggests that a formal Pentecostal ecotheology, if pursued, has the power to sustain and protect human and non-human life on earth. This, I argue, is possible through an in-depth neo-Pentecostal understanding of their invitation to partner with God and their mission, which is largely a mission of reconciliation.

Generally, the submissions of Christian environmental ethicists are that what the Christian community and world need, in response to the ecological problem, is sound and faithful acceptance of and adherence to the Bible’s teachings, which are the foundational resource for all good works for the Christian community. However, it also remains that some traditions of the Christian faith “need to go through a recycling process so that they can be re-appropriated for the contemporary

world” (Pui-lan, 1994: 109). The growing environmental challenges in Africa, and the theological and ethical dilemmas of these challenges, should impress upon the theological and moral consciousness of Ghana’s neo-Pentecostals to attend to the degradation of non-human creation. Thus, Ghana’s neo-Pentecostals will have to develop a much more far-reaching and holistic approach to understanding their invitation to partner with God. This approach will entail seeing things differently in the light of the problem at hand. It will also mean that Ghana’s neo-Pentecostals are willing to better orient themselves to the non-human creation and establishing sound relationships with it as a divine and moral duty, which hitherto had hardly been the case.

Two main conclusions are obvious. First, Ghana’s neo-Pentecostals will have to embark not only in search for “lost” human persons (bodies) in order to reconcile them with the saving grace and presence of God. Neo-Pentecostals will have to also listen to the groaning creation, which is another neighbour and “body” in crisis and being oppressed by the other. This “body” has been beckoning those who value the creation of the Lord to come to its aid. The groaning of the earth, typified by its inability to provide the safety net and others that humanity hitherto benefitted from it, is a call to the church to take a look.

Second, and at a deeper theological level, for neo-Pentecostals to grasp a far-reaching view of their environmental responsibility will require a re-orientation to their inherited Jewish traditions and notions of Jesus Christ. Until neo-Pentecostals re-orient their theology of the “Christ”, whose invitation they have accepted and whose mission of reconciliation they have received and embarked upon, the tendency not to understand their mission as mission to all creation remains obvious. However, if the mission of the church is understood as a mission to all creation, then engaging the natural environment becomes the fulfilment of our theological and moral duty as required of (neo-Pentecostal) Christians generally. This is because Ghana’s neo-Pentecostals would have developed an ecological orientation to the biosphere, and this, I believe, will drive neo-Pentecostal mission in twenty-first-century Ghana towards being of the earth.

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