

**UNIVERSITY OF GHANA  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES**

**THE DESTINY OF THE EARTH:  
AN ECOLOGICAL READING OF 2 PETER 3:1-13**

**BY**

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## ABSTRACT

The second letter of Peter contains a statement which not only has greatly influenced the Christian eschatological and apocalyptic visions, but also is central of the current ecological debate: "...but the heavens that now are, and the earth, by the same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the Day of Judgment and destruction of ungodly men" (3:7). Contemporary scholarship has offered two main interpretations of the verse: 'destructionist interpretation' and 'transformationist interpretation'. Against this background, the research proposed an ecological reading of the text in order to discover its call to action. In the awareness that the hermeneutical cycle is not complete until the text is contextualized for the contemporary readers, the research further examined the relevance of the text in the eschatological preaching and ecological sensitivity of the Baptist Church in Ghana.

The communicative approach proposed by Ossom-Batsa was employed as the theoretical framework. The approach consists of three steps — the analysis of the reality, the analysis of the text and the engagement between the reality and the text. Interview, personal observation and focus group discussions were the tools utilized for the analysis of reality, the Accra North Baptist Association of the Ghana Baptist Convention. The Rhetorical Analysis as proposed by Moller was employed for the analysis of 2 Peter 3:1-13.

The analysis reveals that the text does not justify the destructive exploitation of the earth. Instead, the pericope focuses on the moral conduct of the real readers. Contrary to the narrow Baptist concept of morality, the text offers a call to holistic morality, that includes 'ecological ethics'. The engagement with the text challenges the Baptist Church in Ghana to an 'ecological conversion,' to pattern its moral doctrine after the

holistic approach proposed by the text. This in turn demands a form of holistic evangelism and social justice aimed at saving the entire community of creation.

Finally, the study recommends further research into ecological reading of apocalyptic and eschatological texts of the New Testament for better understanding of the concept from the Baptist perspective. It further recommends that environmental issues be made part of Baptist preaching and catechesis at all levels and that ecological consciousness should inform building and organization of activities of all Baptist congregations.

## **DEDICATION**

To my grandmother Hudzenkor Gadri-Nyonator who sent me to school as a child because of her confidence in me.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTORY ISSUES

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

Ecological issues are rated among the greatest challenges facing the contemporary world. Due to their critical nature and the threat they pose to human life, they attract the attention of many stakeholders including theologians, ethicists and biblical scholars.<sup>1</sup> The concern is equally present among the Ghanaian populace. Many, from all facets of life, identify the ecological crisis as a threat to the very existence of the Ghanaian people. Some maintain that unless drastic actions are immediately taken to address the menace, the ecosphere is at risk of total destruction. The assertion seems to have strong support of several reports from both local and international organizations.

For instance, global organizations, such as World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) reports placed Ghana as “Africa’s fourth dirtiest nation, and the second worst of the 15 countries that make up the West African region.”<sup>2</sup> The report further added that there is a severe short fall of what WHO describes as improved sanitation — waste disposal systems that separate human excrement from human contact.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, the wanton destruction of the Ghanaian natural resources is captured in the Environmental Analysis Report of the World Bank. According to the report, Ghana’s natural resources that form the bedrock of the country’s economic activity and population’s livelihood, are suffering depletion at alarming rate. The report reveals that,

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<sup>1</sup> David G. Horrell, *The Ecological Hermeneutics* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2010), 122-126.

<sup>2</sup> World Bank, “Ghana: Country Environmental Analysis,” 1 (November 2007): 122-124.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

more than fifty percent of the reserved forest area has been converted to agriculture lands by clearance for perennial or annual cropping and slash-and-burn cultivation practices. Crop yields, fish, timber and non-timber product stocks are decreasing rapidly. Coastal towns are facing severe water shortages during dry season. Wildlife populations and biodiversity are in serious decline. Health — related pollution — indoor and outdoor air pollution, and water sanitation issue have emerged as serious health threats for the majority of the population.<sup>4</sup>

Besides, the report also discloses the misuse of the nation's land mass which is identified as a critical resource for economic growth. The document shows that the country's land space forms the bedrock of its economy by creating the majority of the country's income and employment, both directly and indirectly. The World Bank Document records that,

the agricultural sector which contributes 38 percent of the GDP, employs 45 percent of the active population (about 60 percent of the rural workforce), accounts for about 75 percent of the export earnings, and contributes to meeting more than 90 percent of the food needs of the country, has led Ghana's economic growth in the past. On the basis of present projections and the priorities set in the country's strategy for growth and poverty reduction [GPRS (Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy) 11, GoG (Government of Ghana) 2005], the agricultural sector will continue to be the key driver for growth for Ghana in the near future.<sup>5</sup>

The report, however, reveals that the mismanagement of the Ghanaian environment is progressively affecting land resources in the country, thus undermining the projected economic growth. Making allusion to past studies, the report estimates,

that 69 percent of the total land surface is prone to severe or very severe soil erosion, the main manifestation of land degradation in Ghana. A recent study perked the cost of soil erosion around 2 percent of the national GDP (Gross Domestic Product) thus eroding some of the past successes of the country in terms of economic growth, and this reduces the capacity of Ghana to realize its full potential for growth. This points to the fact, therefore, that economical utilization of country's land resources is prerequisite for achieving and maintaining the economic growth rate necessary for Ghana to reach its main development objectives of attaining the status of middle-income country.<sup>6</sup>

Presently, the phenomenon known in the Ghanaian parlance as 'galamsey'<sup>7</sup> appears to present the greatest danger to the country's natural resource. The Mineral and Mining

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<sup>4</sup> World Bank, "Country Environmental Analysis," 128.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 128-130.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel Adjei, "The Impact and Effect of Illegal Mining (galamsey) towards the Socio-economic Development of Mining Communities: A Case Study of Kenyasi in the Brong-Ahafo Region," *International*

Act, 2006 (Act 703) which is a continuation of the Small-Scale Gold Mining Law, PNDC L 218 passed in 1989 contains the procedures of issuing a license to small-scale firms. According to Adjei, the law yielded no results, because in 2008 Ghana Chamber of Mines (GCM) reported that illegal mining activities (galamsey) have been increasing with an estimated number between 300,000 and 500,000 artisan miners comprising one of the largest groups of illegal miners on the continent. People now do not even operate on ‘hit and run’ operation but in daylight.<sup>8</sup>

What then accounts for the present destructive exploitation of the environment? Many factors are considered as accountable for the menace. Some of them include poverty, lack of education, lack of monitoring and corruption.<sup>9</sup> Besides, Christianity is often accused of contributing to the problem. Some environmentalists argue that key Christian concepts — anthropocentrism, dualism and apocalypticism— are against environmental care and are fundamentally responsible for the destructive exploitation of the environment.<sup>10</sup>

The negative impact of the anthropocentric view preached by Christianity is under scrutiny since 1967. In fact, in a famous article published in that year, Lynn Whyte Jr. blamed the Christian worldview that placed the humankind above the rest of creation (Gen. 1:26-28) for the present ecological crisis. He maintains that the “dominion man-

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*Journal of Modern Social Sciences* 24, no. 1 (2012): 12-20. Adjei describes ‘galamsey’ as “Small-scale mining which is mostly a poverty-driven activity, typically practiced in the poorest and most remote rural areas of a country by a largely itinerant, poorly educated populace with few employment alternatives”. He explains small-scale mining in Ghana to include both exploitation of mineral deposits using fairly rudimentary implements and /or at low levels production with minimal capital investment. While the large-scale mining particularly gold has become predominant, small-scale mining, which predates such operations have, however, varied, depending on methods and the scale of operation.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>9</sup> World Bank, “Country Environmental Analysis,” 128-130.

<sup>10</sup> Edward Adams, *The Stars Will Fall from Heaven: Cosmic Catastrophe in the New Testament and Its World* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 109-118.

date” introduced a dualism between humanity and nature, and supports humanity exploitative use of nature, hence giving legitimacy to aggressive destruction of the earth.<sup>11</sup>

He traced the concept to the writing of St. Augustine about the creation of humanity described in Genesis 1—2. Augustine summarizes the creation narratives as follows;

...what we need to understand is how a man can be called, on the one hand, the image of God and, on the other, is dust and will return to dust. The former relates to the rational soul which God by breathing or, better, by inspiration communicated to man; but the latter refers to the body such as “God formed it from dust into the man to whom a soul was given”. The soul is not the entire man, but only his better part; nor is the body the entire man, but merely his inferior part.<sup>12</sup>

By his assertion, Augustine suggests the superiority of ‘soul’ over ‘body’; of spirit over matter, an idea that became a central part of Christian worldview.<sup>13</sup>

Many scholars are now concerned about the impact of this view on Christian behaviour and practice. For instance, Wendell Berry states that the concept gives Christians a distorted perception about the Scripture and the environment.<sup>14</sup> He describes this problem clearly when he posits: “This separation of the soul from the body and from the world is no disease at the fringe, no aberration, but a fracture that runs through the mentality of religion continues to characterize the modern mind, no matter how secular or worldly it becomes.”<sup>15</sup>

The second element, apocalyptic vision, concerns the final state of humankind. For instance, Pauline eschatological writings, e.g. 1 Thessalonians 4:13—5:3 and 1 Corinthians 15, discuss the resurrection of the dead. The apostle states that at the Parousia, both the dead and the living will be changed into imperishable bodies and live forever with

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<sup>11</sup> Adams, “The Stars Will Fall,” 109- 118.

<sup>12</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, R.W. Dyson ed. and trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 13-24.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Berry Wendell, *Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community: Eight Essays* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 20-26.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

Christ.<sup>16</sup> Paul, however, is silent over the fate of the environment (Rom. 8). Second Peter 3:12, on the other hand, intimated that the “present heaven and earth” is preserved for fiery destruction. The destructive vision of the author of 2 Peter about the material world has become the central theme of the apocalyptic doctrines. Many Christians who believe in the promised Parousia consider themselves as ‘strangers’ of the present world and envision heaven as their eternal home.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, they do not feel the need to care for the ‘present’ world or the environment.

The hypothesis seems to find a validation in the Ghanaian landscape. The belief in the “dominion mandate”, dualism and apocalyptic theologies results in little or no interest in caring for the environment. Unfortunately, the Christian Community is unable to present a unified front in dealing with the problems of the environment. Whiles some churches are fostering ‘ecological conversion’ and are actively involved in ‘the care for our common home’; some on the other hand, are not only indifferent to the problem, but justify the exploitation of the earth as the fulfilment of God’s mandate to humanity to ‘master’ over creation (Gen. 1:26).<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, they interpret the worrisome phenomena linked with the material world as signs of the approaching end, that they believe will be attended with the destruction of the ‘present’ earth (2 Pet. 3:1-13).

Besides street preachers, whose apocalyptic theologies are ‘self-made’, there are some denominations of global reputation who are also involved in eschatological preaching. One such denomination is the Baptist Church of which the Ghana Baptist Convention

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<sup>16</sup> Lovemore Togarasei, “Paul and the Environment: An Investigation of His Christology and Eschatology,” *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 3 (December, 2008): 143-146.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>18</sup> Nicoletta Gatti, “Setting the Agenda for an Inclusive Development: Biblical Texts for Ecological Crisis,” in *Religion and Sustainable Development: Ghanaian Perspective*, eds. G. Ossom-Batsa, N. Gatti, R. D. Annah, Grandi Opere, 7 (Rome: UUP, 2018): 147.

is a member.<sup>19</sup> Commenting on the Baptist beliefs on ‘Heaven and Hell,’ Shurden posited:

according to Christian teaching, heaven is both a place and a state. The emphasis in the New Testament is everywhere upon the character that fits a person for heaven rather than the exact locality or precise teaching as to the activities of heaven. The place and the environment fit the character, but the character is more determinative of the environment than environment is of the character.<sup>20</sup>

It is evident from Shurden’s assertion that even though the Baptist eschatological belief speaks of an environment, in this context it refers not to the natural one, but to the ‘environment of heaven’. The ecological question to ask, therefore, is what fate awaits the present environment? What becomes of the emphasis that the New Testament places on the character of believers who are considered ‘qualified’ for the heavenly environment? Is it a sound argument then to imply that the character requirements contained in the New Testament writing are working in favour of the present environment?

Whatever the answer may be, the impact of the apocalyptic message within the Ghanaian landscape is tremendous. Eschatological preaching in the country has resulted to over concentration on saving souls to the detriment of the environment. Some pastors even liken “preaching about the environment by preachers of the gospel to a medical doctor who leaves the theatre to clean the gutter.”<sup>21</sup> Subsequently, ecological issues are secondary or have no place on the church’s pastoral agenda: the present earth is going to be destroyed; therefore, there is no need of caring for it.

To sum up, the major question, therefore, is whether the responsibility of the present ecological crisis can be put on the biblical text.

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<sup>19</sup> J.A. Boadi, *Christianity or Traditional Beliefs and Customs* (Accra: Humble Gate Publications, 2005), 48-49.

<sup>20</sup> Walter B. Shurden, *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 1993), 87.

<sup>21</sup> Peter C. Phan, “Eschatology and Ecology: The Environment in the End-Times,” *Dialogue & Alliance* 9, no. 2 (1995): 100-105.



## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Against this backdrop, the thesis focuses on apocalyptic texts and its impact on the environment. Particular attention is given to 2 Pet. 3:1-13 considered as the most problematic New Testament text to the ecological discourse, because v. 7 envisions “fiery end of the present world”.<sup>22</sup>

However, the question is: does it really speak of destruction or transformation? The interpretation of 2 Peter 3 falls in line with other passages that speak of universal destruction and cosmic catastrophes. In the interpretation of ‘fundamental eschatologists’, nature has no place at the Parousia and is destined for total destruction. The concept presents a gloomy picture about the final status of the material world and contains no incentive for environment care. Instead, the idea appears to create a platform for destructive tendencies against nature.

In the awareness that the interpretative process is not complete until the text is contextualized in a specific context, the communicative approach proposed by Ossom-Batsa is adopted for appropriating the text in the Accra North Baptist Association, an umbrella organization of the Ghana Baptist Convention.

## 1.3 Research Questions

This research addresses three questions — the main question, and two sub-questions.

The main question is, what is the call to action of 2 Pet. 3 as regards the environment?

The subsidiary questions are:

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<sup>22</sup> Rossing, “Hastening the Day,” 362.

1. What does ecological reading of 2 Pet. 3:1-13 contribute or otherwise to the present ecological crisis in Ghana?
2. What impact does the Baptist Ministers' reading of the text have on the environment?

## **1.4 Literature Review**

### **1.4.1 Introduction**

Literature review related to this work is organized in three parts: the first part focused on the range of scholarly perspectives on the subject — biblical eschatology and the environment. The second part concerned biblical hermeneutic and the third part dealt with the rhetorical analysis — the approach employed in the exegesis of the text.

### **1.4.2 Biblical Eschatology and the Environment**

As stated earlier, environmental problems are ranked among the pressing problems of the world today. Recently, many leaders in the areas of politics, religion and morality have showed concern about the phenomenon.<sup>23</sup> Enumerating the factors responsible for menace, the Christian anthropocentric view that permits humans to engage in destructive exploitation of the earth is mentioned as a major factor contributing to the problem. Christianity, it is argued, contributed to the destruction of the environment, especially through what it is termed as the 'mandate' to dominate nature in order to satisfy human insatiable needs.<sup>24</sup> Whyte, cited the creation narratives, and the apocalyptic texts as

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<sup>23</sup> David G. Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment: Towards an Ecological Biblical Theology* (London-New York: Routledge, 2014), 104-109.

<sup>24</sup> Phan, "Eschatology and Ecology," 108.

heavily influencing the Christian thought towards this end.<sup>25</sup> His assertion confirms the position of scholars like Santmire<sup>26</sup>, Wright<sup>27</sup> and Gerhard von Rad.<sup>28</sup>

Taking into consideration the focus of the thesis, literature review focused on the eschatological worldview of Christianity on the destiny of the earth. Particular attention is given to 2 Pet. 3:1-13, the only text that speaks of destruction of the earth in the entire New Testament.<sup>29</sup> Writing on the subject of the end, Rossing states that the apocalyptic discourse of the New Testament contains a strong sense of the end-time.<sup>30</sup> According to her, the early Christians believed they were living at the end of the age, or the end of the world. With respect to ‘the world’ that early Christians view as coming to an end, Rossing underlines that only 2 Peter, refers to the destruction of the created world. In other writings, the ‘end’ indicates the dawning of a new age in Christ, that brings an end to the Roman imperial world of oppression, sin, and injustice — an end to the οἰκουμένης.<sup>31</sup> Rossing draws a further distinction between several different Greek words for ‘world’. The author of the book of Revelation, according to her, unveils not the end of the physical created world (κόσμος, γῆ) but the end of the imperial world, the οἰκουμένη.<sup>32</sup>

For example, in Revelation, the earth (γῆ), the world (κόσμος), and the entire creation (κτίσις) belong to God. Despite all its imagery of destruction, Revelation continues the biblical tradition of affirming the fundamental goodness of creation as declared by God in Genesis 1. Commands to “worship the one who made the heaven and the earth, the

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<sup>25</sup> Horrell, *Bible and Environment*, 15

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>27</sup> Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 72.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>29</sup> Adams, “The Stars Will Fall,” 109.

<sup>30</sup> Rossing, “Hastening the Day,” 367.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 370.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

sea and springs of water” (14:7) make clear that it is God who created heaven, earth, springs of water, and the sea. The use of creation-oriented terminology, the Greek verb κτίζω, in Revelation is overwhelmingly positive (Rev. 3:14, 5:14) and especially the emphatic declaration of 10:6 — that God “created the heaven and what is in it and the earth and what is in it, and the sea.” Rossing strongly believes that “God does not consign the creation to destruction in Revelation.”<sup>33</sup>

Rossing considers Rev. 11:18 as a key text “not the time has come to destroy the earth” but “the time has come ... to destroy the destroyers of the earth” — that is, the Roman Empire.<sup>34</sup> The verse offers a different perspective to that of 2 Peter 3, a chapter that most scholars have come to view as the most ecologically problematic chapter in the entire New Testament.<sup>35</sup> Second Peter makes repeated references to God's plan for a fiery end to the planet, declaring that “The present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire” (3:7) and that when the day of the Lord comes the “heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire” (3:12). This epistle draws an analogy between end-times fire and the Genesis flood, and states that just as the world (κόσμος) that existed at the time of Noah was deluged by water and destroyed, so too the present heavens and earth (γῆ) are destined for fire and destruction (3:6-7).<sup>36</sup> Most problematic ecologically, is that 2 Peter actually calls on believers to participate in “hastening” (σπεύδοντας) the day when the creation will be set ablaze:

since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? (2 Pet. 3:11-12).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Rossing, “Hastening the Day,” 375-378.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 375-379.

<sup>35</sup> J.N.D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (London: A&C Black, 1990), 341-344.

<sup>36</sup> Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter*, 350.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 353.

The call to the reader to hasten the day functions rhetorically to bring the future burning into the present, giving an active role to the reader. This makes the pericope difficult to ignore in the eco-eschatological discourse. The question that many scholars posed is whether 2 Peter should become the lens through which the rest of the New Testament eschatology is read.

In an attempt to find answers to the question, Adams in his major work entitled “Retrieving the Earth from the Conflagration: 2 Pet. 3:3-15 and the Environment” seems to offer some insights. Relying upon works previously done by other scholars, he employed exegetical and interpretative approach to examine the passage in question to see whether or not its vision can be considered destructive or reformatory.<sup>38</sup> Adams in the article evaluates five-point argument that supports non-destructionist’s interpretations and another five in favour of pro-environmental interpretations.<sup>39</sup> The researcher gives a brief overview of these arguments below.

Firstly, the analogy with the flood in Noah’s time, for pro-environmental scholars render the argument for total destruction invalid, since the flood did not destroy the entire earth.<sup>40</sup> For Heide, comparing the flood in the Genesis narrative with the ‘fiery judgment’ suggest “cleansing of the creation from unrighteousness”, but not complete destruction since the Genesis flood did not entirely destroy the earth.<sup>41</sup> Kelly, however, rejects the argument. He points out that “Jewish apocalyptic and speculations that are dependent on the story read the destructive meaning into it.”<sup>42</sup> Kelly affirms that the

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<sup>38</sup> Adams, “The Stars Will Fall,” 112.

<sup>39</sup> Edward Adams, “Where is the Promise of His Coming? The Complaint of the Scoffers in 2 Peter 3:4,” *NTS* 51 (2005), 113-114.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Horrell, *Bible and Environment*, 118

<sup>42</sup> Kelly, *Commentary Peter and Jude*, 355.

author of 2 Peter goes beyond Genesis and imagines the flood as bringing about the destruction of the whole universe.<sup>43</sup>

Secondly, Moo, Lucas and Heide think that fire from the biblical perspective, primarily is not destructive agent.<sup>44</sup> Moo, for instance, states that “fire in the OT is a metaphorical way of speaking of judgment or non-destructive physical fires.”<sup>45</sup> Moo and Heide, therefore, perceive fire as ‘cleansing agent’ that purifies the earth from all evil. Bauckham, however, holds a contrary view. He reveals that fire used in relation with the flood cannot be taken as metaphor but as instrument of judgment against the wicked.<sup>46</sup>

The third transformational argument looks at the original reading of v. 10. From transformational perspective, Finger read the verse in contention as “the earth is discovered, not destroyed.” In his interpretation, Finger thinks that v. 10 speaks of judgment of human works upon the earth not the earth itself.<sup>47</sup> From the destructionist perspective, Bauckham thinks the phrase ‘all these things’ (τοῦτων πάντων) make references to the heavens, the elements and the earth in v. 10. The dissolution of the earth, Bauckham believes is also implied in vv. 7 and 10.<sup>48</sup> On the word στοιχεῖα (element), Horrell and Finger see double reference to the cosmic bodies and spiritual powers controlling them but argued the author of 2 Peter 3 at the time of writing had the physical elements; earth, air, water and fire, in mind.<sup>49</sup>

The word ‘dissolve’ (λύω) in vv. 10, 11 and 12 forms the basis of the fourth argument. According to Heide, the word expresses the thought of “breaking down into component

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<sup>43</sup> Kelly, *Commentary Peter and Jude*, 360.

<sup>44</sup> Adams, “The Stars Will Fall,” 116.

<sup>45</sup> David Moo, “Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment” *JETS* 49 (2006): 468.

<sup>46</sup> Moo, “Nature in New Creation,” 468.

<sup>47</sup> Adams, “The Stars Will Fall,” 118.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

parts” or “release from bondage.”<sup>50</sup> In the reflection of Moo the word expresses the idea of dissolution or radical change in nature not annihilation.<sup>51</sup> From the destructionists’ interpretation, the word λύω, annihilate or obliterate from existence. Adams refers to the Greco-Roman debate on whether the cosmos will perish or endure forever, in which ‘destruction’ was understood as resolution. According to Adams, the author of 2 Peter borrowed the concept from the Greco-Roman eschatological vision that was well known at the time of the church fathers. He relates that the idea envisions a new creation — ex nihilo. The proponents of the destructive approach take note of παρελεύσονται; pass away, καυσούμενα; ‘burn up’ καύσων ‘set ablaze’; take; ‘melt’ as portraying violent destruction.<sup>52</sup>

Finally, the pro-environmentalists like Finger and Lucas interpret the word ‘new’ not as νέος, previously non-existent; but καινός, new in quality. For them the text speaks of ‘new state’ not as ‘created entirely from scratch’.<sup>53</sup> But destructionist interpreters translate the word ‘new’ to connote νέος, and not καινός. They believe the phrase “the present heavens and earth” in v. 7 present the thought of ‘a new created order’ not transformation.<sup>54</sup>

In summing up the thought expressed by destructionist’s interpreters, Adams observes “the author of 2 Pet. 3:1-13 presents a picture of violent destruction of the present heaven and the earth and a new one created; contrary to Pauline thought in Rom. 8:18-

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<sup>50</sup> Adams, “The Stars Will Fall,” 115.

<sup>51</sup> Moo, “Nature in New Creation,” 468.

<sup>52</sup> Benjamin Aldous, “Burning up or Being Renewed? An Exegetical Study of 2 Peter 3:10-13 and Revelation 21:1-5 from an Environmental/Ecological Perspective” *Encounter Mission Journal* 37, no. 4 (June, 2011): 2-4.

<sup>53</sup> Adams, “The Stars Will Fall,” 113.

<sup>54</sup> Adams, “Promise of His Coming,” 109-114.

25.”<sup>55</sup> He cited passages such as Psalm 102:25-27; Isaiah 51:6; Mark 13:31 and Revelation 21:1 as supporting the fiery vision of the pericope. The assertion concurs with the positions of the fundamentalist Christians and literalist readers who hold the belief that biblical texts such as Mark 13; Matthew 24-25; Luke 21 and 17 speak of universal destruction of the created world.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, Adams asserts that the Greek rendering of the word ‘new’ by transformationist interpreters as *καινός* and not *νέος* is not strong enough to support transformational view. He argues that the vv. 7, 10 and 11 of the pericope do not back their interpretation of the word.

What then is the position of the text? Can the text, 2 Peter 3 be considered as pro or anti-environmental text? Scholars like Adams goes for a compromised stance. He thinks that even though 2 Pet. 3:1-13 cannot be considered a pro-environmental text, certain considerations, even in a destructionist interpretation of the passage, appease its apparent anti-environmental thrust.<sup>57</sup> In the light of Adams’ consideration of the text, the destruction and re-creation of the cosmos is a positive action of God because the judgment of the earth establishes righteousness as fulfilment of divine promise.<sup>58</sup> He argues further that the writer of 2 Peter sees “dissolution of heaven and earth as part of renewal process which bring about a new heaven and a new earth in continuity with what has gone before.”<sup>59</sup> He explains that the author of 2 Peter 3 speaks not of creation *ex nihilo* but a *creation ex vetere* (creation out of the old). In vv. 11 and 12, the writer makes a moral appeal precisely on the basis of the coming end and renewal.

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<sup>55</sup> Adams, “Promise of His Coming,” 116.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>57</sup> Adams, “The Stars Will Fall,” 118.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-32.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*



On the text's exhortation to 'hasten' the day of the Lord, Adams reasons that the position does not encourage exploitation of the earth and its resources so as to accelerate inevitable demise of the present creation. From the author's viewpoint, to hasten the day of the Lord is by living godly, holy and peace-seeking lives.<sup>60</sup> He considers the attitude that has no regard for God's creation as inconsistent with such lifestyles.

On the issue of imminence as expressed in vv. 3, 12 and 13, Adams reflects the thought put forth in such verses must be given equal attention. He adds that there is acknowledgement in the text that the end may be a long way off. For him, the passage seems to suggest to its readers to live in expectation of the end whiles at the same time recognizing that the present world may continue to exist thousands of years to come.<sup>61</sup> The ethical question, therefore, is what do we do with the material world if it is going to house the humankind thousands of years to come?

The debate suggests the need of a further analysis of the text, to evaluate its ecological stand and how it should be employed in the eschatological preaching of the Ministers of the Accra North Baptist Association of the Ghana Baptist Convention.

### **1.4.3 Biblical Hermeneutics**

Hermeneutics generally concerns itself with the principles of interpretation. For the purpose of this research, the researcher focuses on biblical hermeneutics. Scholars offer different definitions of the subject. Osborne sees hermeneutics as a field of science that outlines principles or methods for interpreting an individual's author's meaning.<sup>62</sup> Tate considers the subject as a task that basically involves mediating between the text and

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<sup>60</sup> Adams, "Promise of His Coming," 116.

<sup>61</sup> Adams, "The Stars Will Fall," 26-28.

<sup>62</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 318.

present situation.<sup>63</sup> Klein on the other hand refers to hermeneutics as the task of explaining the meaning of the Scripture.<sup>64</sup>

Focusing on biblical hermeneutic, Tate states it studies the locus of meaning and principles of biblical interpretation. He describes biblical hermeneutics as bipolar — consisting of exegesis and interpretation.<sup>65</sup> For Tate, exegesis is set of varied activities performed on a text in order to make meaningful inferences, while interpretation is the task of drawing the implication of that understanding for contemporary readers and hearers.<sup>66</sup> Tate identifies three main approaches that are employed in the hermeneutical task. He categorises them as author-centred, text-centred and reader-centred.<sup>67</sup>

Brown clarifies the author-centred as an approach that underscores the historical dimensions of the author as the locus of meaning. She added that the development of theory of hermeneutics and theological endeavours in the nineteenth century embraces the philosophies underpinning the development of the approach. She acknowledges Friedrich Schleiermacher as the conventional father of modern hermeneutics who classifies the method into two aspects; technical and psychological.<sup>68</sup> For Schleiermacher and Wilhelm, the goal of biblical interpretation was to reach through the text to the personhood of the author. They believe the task is possible if the interpreter is able to ‘transpose’ into the author’s circumstance.<sup>69</sup> Reactive critics, however, question the interpreter’s supposed ability to “get into the heads” of the author.

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<sup>63</sup> Randolph W. Tate, *Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 287.

<sup>64</sup> William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 5-8.

<sup>65</sup> Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 289.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

<sup>68</sup> Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 59.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 63

The reaction against the goal of accessing the mind of the author leads to an approach that focuses on the text. Laying foundation for the approach, Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley argue, therefore, that a search for author's intention is "intentional fallacy."<sup>70</sup> The proponents of the text-centred approach think that meaning resides in the structure of the text, independent of the author. Their argument is, therefore, grounded in the theory that divorces the text from its author.<sup>71</sup> For instance, Ricoeur in providing the philosophical basis for a biblical hermeneutic of textual autonomy cites the metaphorical nature of the biblical language. He explains that the method gives rise to "surplus of meaning" that is not limited to the authorial meaning. Ricoeur also uses the radical distinction between the spoken and written communication as one of the reasoning that accounts for his stance for textual autonomy. He points out "with writing, the verbal meaning of the text no longer coincides with the mental meaning or intention of the text."<sup>72</sup> These ideas support the notion that meaning is polyvalent. This brings to the fore the question if the reader plays any part in determining the supposed meaning of the text.

Reaction, therefore, to an objectified text was a number of factors that underlined the generation of the hermeneutical theory that stresses the reader as generator of meaning, in part or in whole.<sup>73</sup> Other influences include philosophical movement that put emphasis on presuppositions in interpretation as well as methods beyond historical criticism in biblical studies. Prominent among these philosophical debates is the work of Martin Heidegger. For Heidegger, "presuppositions precluded any kind of objectified knowledge of the text."<sup>74</sup> His disciple, Gadamer, argues that "foundational insight is

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<sup>70</sup> Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 64.

<sup>71</sup> Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 288.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>74</sup> Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 64.

the universality of hermeneutic”<sup>75</sup>, that is, all human knowing is mediated. For Gadamer, understanding occurs in the fusion of the horizon of the text with the horizon of the interpreter. He believes that “all reading involves application, so that a person reading a text is himself part of the meaning he apprehends.”<sup>76</sup> Meaning, therefore, in Gadamer’s view, is inevitably determined by the reader of the text.

Gunn and Fewell think that “texts are multivalent and their meanings radically contextual, inescapably bound up with their interpretation.”<sup>77</sup> From their viewpoint, reading communities determine proper boundaries of interpretation rather-or more-than the text. In an attempt to give further explanation, Brown added that “every reader has an interpretive ‘location’ that influences his or her understanding of the biblical text.”<sup>78</sup> This location, according to Brown includes the reader’s theological tradition, cultural and social location, and pre-understandings brought to specific text and Scripture in general.<sup>79</sup>

Among the different approaches explored, the researcher opted for a text-centred method. Taking into consideration the nature of the text rhetorical analysis was chosen.

#### **1.4.4 Rhetorical Analysis**

From the analysis above, it might be said that the three different approaches, namely, the author-centred, text-entered and reader-centred, have the potential of helping us to bridge the gap in the hermeneutical enterprise. However, the critique received by each of these approaches from the other shows that each of them is deficient in providing the best locus of meaning.

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<sup>75</sup> Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 66.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 69

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

For this reason, scholars like Moller and Tate advocate for a method that integrates the three approaches. To them, meaning can only be realised when the interpretative value of the author, the text and the reader's world are given the necessary attention they require. Therefore, integrating the three approaches can increase our understanding and appreciation of the biblical text. In the researcher's opinion, the rhetorical criticism can be considered an integrated approach, because it offers a text-centred approach to meaning; which engages the speaker, the audience, and the form of the discourse.

The use of rhetorical criticism in biblical studies in recent times is closely associated with James Muilenburg. He was a form critic whose interest in the particular compositional structure of individual Old Testament texts led him to look beyond what he perceived as limitations in the practice of form criticism.<sup>80</sup> In his 1968 presidential address to the *Society of Biblical Literature*, he called for programmatic study of Hebrew literary composition. According to Clifton Black, what was of great interest to Muilenburg was, "understanding the nature of the Hebrew composition, exhibiting the structural patterns that was employed for the fashioning of a literary unit, whether in poetry or in prose, and discerning the many and various devices by which the predications are formulated and ordered into a unified whole."<sup>81</sup>

This enterprise is what he describes as rhetoric and the methodology as rhetorical criticism. Muilenburg, therefore, defines rhetorical criticism as "the study of the characteristic linguistics and structural features of a particular text in its present form, apart from

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<sup>80</sup> Patricia Tull, *Rhetorical Criticism and Intertextuality* (Oxford University Press, 1996), 122.

<sup>81</sup> Clifton Black, "Keeping up with Recent Studies: Criticism and Biblical Interpretation," *Expository Times* 16 (1990): 253.

its generic root, social usage, or historical development.”<sup>82</sup> By the definition, Muilenburg insists that texts be taken seriously, giving attention to the shapes, styles, structures, and literary contexts.

In the field of New Testament studies, Duane Watson reveals that the introduction of the method occurs particularly when the New Testament books were analysed in their entirety as rhetorical discourses. He points out the works of Bertz on Galatians and that of Wuellner are very relevant to the introduction of rhetoric into the study of the New Testament.<sup>83</sup> In spite the major contributions of these scholars, Kennedy, however, is accredited as the first to provide a methodology for rhetorical criticism of the gospels and epistles of the New Testament. Patricia Tull brings out clearly the thought of Kennedy on New Testament rhetorical criticism when she states,

George Kennedy summaries the task of New Testament rhetorical criticism as follows; Rhetorical criticism “takes the text as we have it, whether the work of a single author or the product of editing, and looks at it from the point of view of the author’s or editor’s intent, the unified results, and how it would be perceived by an audience of contemporaries”<sup>84</sup>

Work done by Watson on rhetorical criticism described Kennedy’s methodology into six interrelated steps as follows;

The first step seeks to determine the rhetorical unit, either a self-contained pericope or an entire book. The second step concerns the rhetorical situation, that is, a situation in which the persons, events, and exigence necessitate a verbal response. The third step looks at the rhetorical problem or stasis and the species of rhetoric, whether judicial (accusation and defence), deliberative (persuasion and dissuasion), or epideictic (praise and blame). These are identified as rhetoric of the courtroom, political forum and public

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<sup>82</sup> Black, “Criticism and Biblical Interpretation,” 254.

<sup>83</sup> Duane F. Watson and Alan J. Hauser, *Rhetorical Criticism of the Bible: A Comprehensive Bibliography with Notes on History and Method* (New York: E.J. Brill Leiden, 1994), 109.

<sup>84</sup> Tull, *Rhetorical Criticism and Intertextuality*, 132.

ceremony respectively. The fourth step examines the arrangement of the parts into a unified discourse. Step five analyses each part for its originality and style. The sixth step evaluates the rhetorical effectiveness of the rhetorical unit in utilizing invention, arrangement and style in meeting the exigence.<sup>85</sup> This six-step approach to rhetorical analysis is reframed by Moller in his method of exegesis. According to him rhetorical-critical analysis seeks to determine the limits of the rhetorical unit, the rhetorical situations, the specific manifestation and application of rhetorical genre, the style and strategy used by rhetoricians and the process of persuading the unit audience.<sup>86</sup>

Among the few biblical books that were earlier subjected to the comprehensive method proposed by Kennedy were 2 Peter and Jude. Watson's rhetorical analysis of 1988 supports the "literary integrity of 2 Peter and the literary dependence of that letter upon Jude."<sup>87</sup> Since the pericope under study is from 2 Peter, the researcher followed the contemporary rhetoric proposed by Moller that allows us to engage the text, the author and the reader.

#### **1.4.5 Conclusion**

Examining the various arguments in the literature review, the researcher concludes that the text cannot be interpreted straightforward as a pro - or anti-environment. Even though the pericope presents a vision of the present earth that appears destructive, the researcher thinks that the effect of this literal interpretation can be appeased if the text is read in its context. The researcher, therefore, proposes a rhetorical analysis of the pericope in the context instead dealing with mere words, phrases or verses. The exegesis of the text must also take into account the apocalyptic and eschatological visions of

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<sup>85</sup> Watson and Alan, *Rhetorical Criticism of Bible*, 111.

<sup>86</sup> Karl Moller, *A Prophet in Debate: The Rhetoric of Persuasion in the Book of Amos* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 16-20.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

both the Old and New Testament. Using rhetorical critical analysis, the research explores the concept of eschatology and apocalypticism as discussed by the author of 2 Peter in order to discover a call to action for the Ghanaian Baptist preacher in Ghana.

### **1.5 Theoretical Framework**

This research employs the communicative approach proposed by Ossom-Batsa as its theoretical framework. The model proposes a three-step approach to interpretation: exegesis of the text, exegesis of the reality and the engagement between the text and the reader's context.<sup>88</sup> Adhering to the text, Ossom-Batsa argues, we accord the text the respect due it. The process involves paying particular attention to the text by examining the linguistic and non-linguistic elements of the text as signals placed therein to help the reader on his/her journey of interpretation. Using exegetical tools, the text is read from plurality of perspectives, "to discover its organization, as well as its semantic and communicative force."<sup>89</sup> According to Ossom-Batsa the 'functional organization' that underpins the text's call to action, can be achieved by studying the organization of the text and communicative force of other elements of the text.

The second point is the exegesis of reality. Ossom-Batsa suggests that with the first step accomplished, the reader is challenged to read his life in the light of the text instead of bending the text to suggest answers to one's socio-political and economical life situations.<sup>90</sup>

Finally, there is an engagement between the text and the culture. At this point, a dialogue takes place between the word of God and the human community. It is at this point

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<sup>88</sup> George Ossom-Batsa, "Africa Interpretation of the Bible in Communicative Perspectives," *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 2 (2007): 91-104.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> George Ossom-Batsa, "Christological Issues. Stumbling Block or Meeting Point for Muslim-Christian Dialogue?" *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 1 (2006): 91-101.



that the text shapes the culture for the purpose of change. In the end, the reader's life is transformed leading to a change of his/her environment.

## **1.6 Methodology**

Ossom-Batsa's communicative perspective guides the methodological choice of the research. The research, however, starts from the exegesis of reality. The purpose is to ensure that the needed data for the research is secured before proceeding with the study. In order to understand the eschatological preaching/teaching in the Ghanaian landscape, the Accra North Baptist Association of the Ghana Baptist Convention is employed as our context. The reason for the choice is based on the eschatological and apocalyptic vision of the Baptist Church. The Church believes that the present world will pass away at the Parousia and be replaced by a new heaven. According to the Church, the new heaven will be the home of the faithful believers. Hence, messages about the new heaven often characterize the catechesis and preaching of the Church's ministers.

The Ghana Baptist Convention consists of about 1100 local churches. The churches are grouped into thirty Associations, divided into four Sectors. Two of the Association namely Accra North and Accra South are within the Greater Accra Region. The research interacted with Ministers and Church Leaders in Accra North Baptist Association. The Association consists of over fifty local churches with ministers numbering well over two hundred.

The 'reality' is exegeted using three main research tools: personal interviews, focus group discussions and personal observation. In all twenty-five selected ministers were interviewed, and twenty were randomly observed while preaching or teaching. In addition, five focus group discussions were held. Each group consisted of five or seven persons with varied backgrounds. The period of discussion for each group was from

thirty minutes to one hour. Besides, the researcher also studied sermons, doctrines, articles and other documents of the Accra North Baptist Association or the Convention.

The second step focuses on the exegesis of the 2 Pet. 3:1-13, employing the contemporary rhetorical criticism proposed by Moller. The aim is to discover the call to action, the perlocutory effect the author intends to have on his readers. From the call to action, the preaching/teaching of the selected Baptist Ministers are scrutinized in light of the text which is expected to ultimately lead to changed lives, and as result transformed environment.

Finally, the two contexts — reality and text — engage in dialogue to understand the call to action for the community under study.

### **1.7 Organization of the Research**

The thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter one deals with the introductory issues, which include the background of the study, statement of the problem, the research questions, literature review, the theoretical framework of the study and research methodology. Chapter two examines the apocalyptic/eschatological preaching of Ministers of the Accra North Baptist Association of the Ghana Baptist Convention, and its relevance to the present ecological crisis in Ghana. Chapter three explores the rhetorical analysis of 2 Pet. 3:1-13, with the aim of discovering the call to action and the relevance for the environment. Chapter four focuses on the engagement of the text with reality and proposes a call to action for the Baptist community living in Ghana. Chapter five contains the summary, conclusion and recommendations for future research and pastoral practice.

## CHAPTER TWO

### EXEGESIS OF REALITY

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the apocalyptic preaching/teaching of Ministers of Accra North Baptist Association of the Ghana Baptist Convention, and its impact on environment. The chapter firstly offers an overview of the history of the Baptist Church in Ghana and its structural organization. This is followed by the Ghana Baptist Convention's eschatological beliefs and its perspective on the environment. Finally, it focuses on the critical analysis of data collected through personal interview, focus group discussions and personal observation.

#### 2.2 Historical Overview of the Baptists

The purpose of the work is to explore how Baptists' eschatological teaching attribute towards the environment. Since Ghana Baptist Convention is the context of the study, some space is devoted to trace its beginning in Ghana.<sup>91</sup>

The present-day Baptist denomination began in England and Holland in the early seventeenth century. It is believed that Baptists emerged out of a strong reform movement, shaped by such radical dissent as Puritanism, Separatism, and possibly Anabaptism. The reformation theology by Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin, and the English Bible deep desire for spiritual reforms was greatly influenced by these Separatist groups.

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<sup>91</sup> Some sources the researcher consulted on the History of the Baptist Church: Horton Davies, *The History of the English Baptists* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2002), 504; Harry Leon McBeth, *English Baptist Literature on Religions Liberty* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 207; Shurden, *The Baptist Identity*, 49; R. G. Tobert, *A History of the Baptist* (Valley Forge: Tudson Press, 1973), 34; S. G. Pinnock, *Yoruba Baptist Association Year Book* (1915), 62; M. Jones, *Black Eagles* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1967), 21.

Some of these Separatists adopted baptism for adult believers only, and later applied that baptism by total immersion and were nicknamed “Baptists” for the practice.<sup>92</sup>

Two major groups of Baptists emerged in England in the early 1600s. Even though the groups shared some commonalities, they differed in their views of the atonement and church organization. The earlier group was known as the General Baptists because they believed in a ‘general’ atonement. They held the view that Christ’s death has general application; that is anyone who voluntarily believes in Christ can be saved. The General Baptists were influenced by Jacob Arminius, whose theology made room for human free will. The General Baptists, like any other “Armenians” taught the possibility of “falling from grace.” Their church structure gave little room to congregational autonomy, but more power to the associations. John Smyth and Thomas Helwys were considered as primary founders of the General Baptists, and the earliest church of these beliefs was formed in 1609.<sup>93</sup>

A later group, known as Particular Baptists, surfaced by the late 1630s, led by men like Henry Jessy, William Koffin and John Spilsbury. By the influence of Calvin’s theology, they taught a ‘particular’ atonement. They believed that Christ died not for all humankind, but only for ‘particular’ ones. With views similar to that of Calvin, the Particular Baptists believed that ‘God had elected some to salvation’. The elects inevitably would be saved, and that the saved could never become ‘unelected’ or lose their salvation. Particular Baptists were destined to become the larger of the two groups. The earliest

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<sup>92</sup> Crosby Thomas, *The History of the English Baptist* (London: Kingsgate Press, 1990), 164.

<sup>93</sup> W. T. Whitley, *The Minutes of the General Assembly of the General Baptist Churches in England* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 2001), 3-4.

church of this belief dates back to 1663. Their church organizational structure gave the local congregation churchly power, while associations had only advisory functions.<sup>94</sup>

Both groups had steady growth in England and by 1650, the General Baptists had about forty-seven churches. The churches were grouped into associations, issued several confessions of faith and had the rudiments of national organization. The Particular Baptists, being fewer in number, had seven churches by 1644. Both the General and the Particular churches acted together to offer confessions of faith that same year. This First London Confession wielded vast influence upon the future shape of Baptist life and thought.<sup>95</sup>

Baptists' work on the African soil began after the slaves in Britain and America were set free, and some African-Americans, who were Baptists, returned to Africa as missionaries. For instance, Rev. David George returned to Sierra Leone and established the first Baptist church in 1872; Lott Carey started the Baptists' work on the Liberian soil in 1821, and Thomas Bowen set up the first Baptist church in Nigeria in the year 1850. The work in Ghana, however, can be traced to Nigerian traders who came to Ghana in the early twentieth century to engage in petty trading.<sup>96</sup>

### **2.3 The Overview of Ghana Baptist Convention Origins**

The largest umbrella organization of the Baptists in Ghana is the Ghana Baptist Convention. The genesis of Baptists' work in Ghana (the then Gold Coast), is traceable to the Yoruba people of Nigeria whose trading activities in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was predominant along the West Africa coast and other parts of the country.<sup>97</sup> The work of

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<sup>94</sup> Champlin Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters in the Light of Recent Research* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2002), 176-177.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Boadi, *Ghana Baptist Convention History*, 24-26.

<sup>97</sup> Ghana Baptist Convention, *Golden Jubilee Brochure* (Accra: GBC, 2013), 10.

Rev. Mark Hayford, a son of a Ghanaian Methodist Minister based in Nigeria is also believed to have played significant role in the early beginning of the work, even though much of his work did not last after his death. However, his vision to build schools and churches outlived him because some of the properties he acquired for this purpose still stand to his memory. The Mark Hayford Baptist Church, in Accra and the Redemption Baptist Church in Cape Coast are the two most notable landmarks.<sup>98</sup>

The Yoruba traders who were mostly Baptists, travelled along the coast of West Africa and wherever they went they met together to either pray, hold Bible study or worship as a Church. Consequently, by the early 1920's there were Yoruba congregations in different towns and cities in Ghana. Cape Coast, Sefwi-Bekwai, Tarkwa, Techiman, Dunkwa, Accra, Konongo, Tamale and Sekondi were some of the notable towns and cities where these churches were found.<sup>99</sup>

The Nigerian Baptists organized themselves into local churches, acquired church properties, and worked under a cooperative name, Yoruba Baptist Association. Their services were, however, conducted in Yoruba language and hence could not attract the indigenous people. In an effort to reach out to the Ghanaian people, the Yoruba Baptist Association sent a request to both the Nigerian Baptist Convention and the Nigerian Baptist Mission (of the Southern Baptist Convention) to send missionaries to facilitate a new Baptist work among the indigenes of the Gold Coast. In response, the Nigeria Baptist Mission sent Rev. and Mrs. H.R. Littleton to the Gold Coast (now Ghana) in 1947 to start Baptist churches among the indigenous people. The effort of the Littletons

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<sup>98</sup> Ghana Baptist Convention, *Golden Jubilee Brochure*, 11.

<sup>99</sup> Boadi, *Ghana Baptist Convention History*, 24-26.

and Mr. Tanoh led to the establishment of the first Baptist Church at Boamang in the Ashanti Region in 1952.<sup>100</sup>

The churches established by the missionaries among the indigenes worked under the corporative name, Gold Coast Baptist Association while the Yoruba churches operated under the name Yoruba Baptist Association. These associations were later merged into one, named 'Gold Coast Baptist Conference in 1947. After Ghana's Independence in 1957, the association was renamed as Ghana Baptist Conference. The Conference remained under the Nigerian Baptist Convention until 1963 when it was granted autonomy. In January of 1964 the Conference was reorganized and renamed the Ghana Baptist Convention.<sup>101</sup>

In 1969, the Government of Ghana passed and enforced the Alien Compliance Order that expelled from the country expatriates whose residence in the country were not regularised. This resulted in the departure of most members of the Yoruba Baptist Association Churches, leaving the churches in the association almost empty. The empty churches brought to the fore the need of the Ghanaian Baptists left in those churches to intensify their drive for evangelism. The move resulted into rapid spread of Baptists' work all over Ghana in the early 1970 and 1980. The Convention registered her Trustees in July 1973.<sup>102</sup>

#### **2.4 Ghana Baptist Convention Organogram**

After many years of operation, the Convention found it expedience to review her structure to enhance effectiveness. During its 46<sup>th</sup> Annual Session, a Restructuring Commit-

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<sup>100</sup> Ghana Baptist Convention, *Golden Jubilee Brochure*, 10.

<sup>101</sup> Boadi, *Ghana Baptist Convention History*, 40.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

tee was accordingly constituted to come up with proposals in order to address weaknesses of the existing structure.<sup>103</sup> Baptists all over the world practise congregational polity. The polity grants all Baptist churches autonomy in their operation. “The ‘autonomy’ within the context of the Baptist polity implies that every local church is a complete body of Christ because of His presence in the church.”<sup>104</sup>

The polity, therefore, by application conferred on every local church the requisite competency to pursue the Great Commission on its own, however, at the same time must cooperate with other local churches to achieve the Great Commission (Acts 13:1-3; 15:1-23; 1 Corinthians 12:12-20; Ephesians 4:1-13; 2 Corinthians 8:1-5).<sup>105</sup> Article 17 of the Ghana Baptists Convention takes care of the institutional framework of the Ghana Baptist Convention of which the local church is part.

The Annual Session is the highest organ for decision-making in the Ghana Baptist Convention. It is the annual gathering of the delegates of the Convention churches to review the progress of work and set new goals for the coming year. It could be likened to a General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church where denominational policy issues are discussed and made.<sup>106</sup>

Next in this hierarchical order, is the Ministers’ Conference. It is the umbrella body for all the Ministers of the Gospel and Foreign Missionaries with ministerial experience recognised by the Convention. The fundamental mandate of the Conference is to ensure ethical standard and welfare of its Ministers.<sup>107</sup> Following the Ministers’ Conference is the Sector, which is an administrative organ of the Convention consisting of more than

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<sup>103</sup> Ghana Baptist Convention, *Draft Constitution* (2013), 3.

<sup>104</sup> Ghana Baptist Convention, *Constitution of the Ghana Baptist Convention* (Kumasi: GBC, 2013), art. XIX, Sec., (a & b), 17-18.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ghana Baptist Convention, *Church Guide* (Accra: Ducor Press, 2007), 30.

<sup>107</sup> Ghana Baptist Convention, *Constitution*, art. XXIV, 52.



two Associations within a contiguous geographical area of the country.<sup>108</sup> Association consists of Zones and Zone comprises of local churches within its area of jurisdiction for easy administration, cooperation and fellowship.<sup>109</sup>

The President is the topmost officer of the Ghana Baptist Convention. He is assisted by two Vice-Presidents in charge of Ministries and Administration. The Vice-President (Ministries) oversees all activities of ministry. S/he has jurisdiction over the President of Ministers' Conference and all heads of department of Church Ministry, Ministerial affairs, Evangelism and Missions, Christian Education and Auxiliaries (Men, Women, Youth and Children) and Students' Ministry. The Vice-President (Administration), on the other hand, has oversight responsibility over the departments of Finance, Socio-Economic, Non-Theological Education, Human Resource, Public Affairs and Research, and Legal and Estates.<sup>110</sup>

Like the Particular Baptists, the church structure gives churchly power to the local congregation while the Convention only plays the role of advisory body. In recent times, there were calls from some stakeholders, particularly the current president Rev. Dr. Ernest Adu-Gyamfi, for a shift to what he labelled as "corporative autonomy" where the Convention will be given some powers to control the activities of local churches.<sup>111</sup>

On doctrine of salvation, Ghana Baptist Convention Churches seem to adopt a blend of General and Particular Baptists beliefs. For instance, while the Convention bought into the belief that election is consistent with the free agency of man as proposed by the General Baptists, it picked the idea of 'once saved forever saved' from the Particular

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<sup>108</sup>Ghana Baptist Convention, *Constitution*, art. XVII, Sec. I, 43.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., art. XVII, Sec. II & III, 45.

<sup>110</sup> Ghana Baptist Convention, *Constitution*, art. XII- XIV, 27-38.

<sup>111</sup> Ernest Adu-Gyamfi, *Welcome Address at the 54<sup>TH</sup> Annual Session of the Ghana Baptists Convention at Ejurah*, Kumasi.

Baptists.<sup>112</sup> For the purpose of this research and its scope, however, the researcher focuses on the Convention's doctrine on the end-time and the environment.

## **2.5 Ghana Baptist Convention Beliefs on the End-times and the Environment**

Article 6 of the Ghana Baptist Convention constitution outlines the Church's message and faith. The section explains the doctrinal stance of the Convention. It covers doctrinal topics that include doctrine of Scripture, God, man, sin, salvation, grace, perseverance, Satan, last things and stewardship among others. Sections (15) and (18) speak on the Last things and Stewardship respectively. Article 6 (15) states:

God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all human beings in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and dwell forever in heaven with the Lord.<sup>113</sup>

The Article provides background for Baptists' teaching on eschatology. The doctrine has an important place in the preaching/teaching of the Church in Ghana, particularly the Ghana Baptists Convention. Generally, it is believed that all believers have eternal home rather than the present earth and most preachers in Ghana are engaged in encouraging all Christians to strive towards earning their place therein.

Section 18 explains the responsibility of those who will benefit from the Parousia. It posits:

God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual, all that we have and are, we owe to Him. Christians have a spiritual debt to the whole world, a holy trusteeship in their possessions. They are, therefore, under obligation to serve Him with their time, talents and material possessions; and should recognize all these as entrusted to them to use for the glory of God and for helping others. According to Scripture, Christians should contribute of their means cheerfully, regularly, systematically, proportionately

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<sup>112</sup> Ghana Baptist Convention, *Constitution*, art. VI, Sec, VII & VIII, 6-12.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 6, Sec., 15, 15-16; The drafters of the Section draw their inspiration from the following Scriptural passages: Isaiah 2:4; 11:9; Matthew 16:27; 18:8-9; Mark 8:38; 9:43-48; Luke 12:40, 48; John 14:1-3.

(tithe) and liberally for the advancement of the Redeemer's cause on earth. We believe that Christians should be good stewards of their environment.<sup>114</sup>

From the Section, the status of every believer is that of steward, and the trusteeship extends to all possessions that are considered as gifts from God; among them is the environment. The Section also reveals that humanity holds the Gospel in trust for the "whole world,"<sup>115</sup> which implicitly includes the environment.

As contained in the Constitution of the Ghana Baptist Convention, the environment is seen as a gift from God to humankind, of which humanity has the responsibility of taking care of on behalf of God. The stewardship responsibility, according to the Baptists beliefs, will be judged at the second coming of the Lord, and the placement in the "new heaven" is dependent upon how well one discharges the obligation of managing the material world.<sup>116</sup>

One of the many texts that speak about the end and the destiny of the present earth is 2 Pet. 3:1-13. The interview section of the thesis, therefore, explores the Baptists view on the text, which many scholars think urges believers to destroy the material world as a way of hastening the coming end.

## **2.6. Presentation of Interviews**

Data was collected through three major means: personal interviews, focus group discussions and personal observation. The scope of the study covered the Accra North Baptist Association of the Ghana Baptist Convention. The Association consists of fifty-

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<sup>114</sup> Ghana Baptist Convention, *Constitution*, art. 6, Sec., 18, 17; The biblical texts that underpin the Section are as follows: Genesis 14:20; Leviticus 27:30-32; Deuteronomy 8:18; Malachi 3:8-12; Matthew 6:1-4, 19-21; Luke 12:16-21,42; Acts 2:44-47; 5:1-11; Romans 6:6-22; 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2; 6:19-20.

<sup>115</sup> Ghana Baptist Convention, *Constitution*, art.6, Sec., 18, 17.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, art.6, Sec., 18, 17.

one churches and, has over two hundred ordained ministers. Twenty-five of the ministers were strategically selected for interview. The interviews, focus group discussions and personal observations were conducted from August 25<sup>th</sup> to September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017. The analysis of the data collected was organized under the following themes.

### **2.6.1 Ecological Sensitivity**

Ecological sensitivity expresses the general thought of the interviewees on the environment and their assessment of the Ghanaian ecological situation. All the persons interviewed seemed to have positive attitude toward the ecological agenda. They expressed their consciousness of the present environmental issues. On the question of general thought on the environment, more than two-third of the interviewees think of nature as God's gift to humankind. For Sekyi Yorke, the creation is a gift because most of the things we enjoy from it are free. Water, air and land are numerated as some of the things that nature freely gives us.<sup>117</sup>

On the purpose of the creation, Enoch Thompson the Vice-President (Ministries) of the Ghana Baptists Convention categorizes it into two. First, the creation is for the purpose of human enjoyment. Humankind enjoys nature by virtue of the benefits derived from it. The creation gives water for drinking, logs for construction of houses, and food for nourishment of the human body. Secondly, the creation serves as a tool for worship. It testifies of God, and points to Him as the creator (Psalm 19). Nature contributes to our spirituality by offering a serene atmosphere for worship (Acts 16:3), and also the materials for constructing our worship places.<sup>118</sup> The spirituality of nature, however, as explained by Thompson is quite different from the perception of Samson Aduamah. For

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<sup>117</sup> Sekyi Yorke, President of Accra Ministers' Fellowship of the Ghana Baptist Convention. Interview granted the researcher, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

<sup>118</sup> Thompson, Vice President Ministries (Ghana Baptist Convention). Interview granted the researcher, August 31, 2017.

Aduamah, the creation is both physical and spiritual, and that what is spiritual controls what is physical.<sup>119</sup> He states that good environmental care is a sign of true spirituality of a people. Aduamah reasons, therefore, that the worsening state of the environment reflects the spiritual state of the Ghanaian people.

On the other hand, all the interviewees stressed on the issue of human responsibility toward the creation, and by their assessment lamented that humanity woefully failed in this regard. There was unanimous attestation to the fact that nature is undergoing rapid degradation due to humankind's irresponsibility. On human accountability, George Mallet laments

God gives us very beautiful world that we have destroyed, and continue to destroy. Deep in exploitation but no thought of replenishment. We think the environment will continue to produce and notwithstanding the signs, we continue to behave like Trump who perceives such signs as global warming as hoarse.<sup>120</sup>

The view of Mallet seems to summarize the thinking of all interviewees and also represent the picture of the environmental situation in Ghana. In assessing the environmental attitude in Ghana, Mallet added Ghanaians do not learn from what they see in other countries on their travels. Most of the Ghanaian populace seem to have some amount of sensitivity to the ecological condition but have little to show in their actions.

On awareness of ecological responsibility, Clement Addo explains more vividly when he posited: "The environment is God's gift to us but what we get from it, is dependent on how we treat it."<sup>121</sup> If this assertion is anything to go by, then it can be inferred that humankind is accountable to the present state of the environment. What we are 'harvesting' from nature presently is simply what we have consistently 'sown' into it. Felix

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<sup>119</sup> Samson Aduamah, Director of Evangelism and Mission of the Accra North Baptist Association. September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

<sup>120</sup> George Mallet, Former Dean, Baptist School of Theology and Ministry. Interview granted the Researcher, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2017.

<sup>121</sup> Clement Addo, National Coordinator, Baptist Students Union. Interview granted the Researcher, September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

Owusu expresses similar opinion when he argued that it is God's intention that what He created is perfectly managed by humanity.<sup>122</sup> The thinking seems to have some validation when put side by side with Ocloo's view. Arguing from Genesis 1, he states that God had handed over 'organized' creation to humanity but the latter has turned it into a mess.<sup>123</sup>

Commenting on humankind irresponsibility and consequences for the environment, Thompson laments,

with all the benefits we derived from nature, notwithstanding, humans seem not to care much about the creation, and nature is undergoing a process of degradation. Trees are being felled indiscriminately for timber and for unsustainable agricultural purposes; rivers are polluted with dangerous chemicals on daily basis through illegal mining commonly known as 'galamsey', and there is indiscriminate defecation along our beaches and water bodies. Issues of sanitation seem out of control, and government is at a loss as to what to do.<sup>124</sup>

Many of the interviewees strongly share in the sentiments of Thompson. They maintain that the nation's ecology will be irredeemably damaged if nothing is done in the next fifteen years to salvage the situation. It is reasonable then to ask which activities — human or natural — are responsible for the environmental menace in Ghana.

### **2.6.2 Analysis of Factors that Affect the Environment**

From the interviews conducted, many factors — both human-made and natural are enumerated as the cause of the environmental crisis in Ghana. Some of the factors that the interviewees pinpointed include poverty, greed, ignorance, carelessness, lack of political will, lack of planning and improper education. Others are lack of employment, housing, population increase, miseducation on ancestral values, industrialization, corruption, indiscipline, cost, poor enforcement of environmental laws, human irresponsibility

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<sup>122</sup> Felix Owusu, Associate Pastor Calvary Baptist Church, Adabraka. Interview granted the Researcher, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2017.

<sup>123</sup> Eric Ocloo, Director of Finance, Ghana Baptist Convention. Interview granted the Researcher, September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

<sup>124</sup> Thompson, Vice President, G.B.C.

and lack of appreciation of the environment. Few, however, touched on factors that are spiritual in nature. These are breakdown of traditional ethos, conflict between African Traditional Religious taboos and Christian values, ignorance of biblical injunctions on the environment and irresponsibility of faith communities in the country.

According to George Mallet, the woes of nature are attributable simply to humankind irresponsibility. For him, the negligence is as result of humanity's unawareness of his/her responsibility to take care of the creation as a mandate from God. As consequence, s/he pushes the obligation to the government. He explains that the charge of irresponsibility finds pastors, Christians and the government as culprits.<sup>125</sup>

The second factor that the interviewees cited as responsible for the ecological menace is 'ignorance'. The interviewees explained ignorance in two ways. For instance, Enoch Thompson describes ignorance as lack of awareness on part of some actors who are uneducated on the consequences of their actions on the environment.<sup>126</sup> Such actors are only interested in what they get from nature and pay no attention to the cost of their actions on the ecosphere. For these players, nature is to serve their interest by every mean; they engage in such degradative actions without reflecting on the impact on the environment. For some others, ignorance is unawareness of the responsibility of what the Creator bequeaths to humanity concerning the material world. Thomas Ammah<sup>127</sup> and Eric Ocloo<sup>128</sup> argued that the Scripture has in abundance injunctions that speak to humankind responsibility toward the creation (Leviticus 25, 19; Exodus 21:33, 22:6).

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<sup>125</sup> Mallet, School of Theology and Ministry.

<sup>126</sup> Thompson, Vice President, G.B.C.

<sup>127</sup> Thomas Ammah, Director of Evangelism and Mission of the Ghana Baptist Convention. Interview granted to the Researcher, September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

<sup>128</sup> Ocloo, Director of Finance, G.B.C.

They think that the problem, therefore, is either lack of knowledge of what the Scripture says or lack of appreciation of scriptural instructions.

Equally similar in description is the issue of carelessness pinpointed by one of the interviewee. In this vein, the actors may be aware of the impact of their actions on nature but deliberately choose to ignore the consequences of their behaviour even if there are visible signs.<sup>129</sup> It expresses the thought of greed which is cited by fourteen of the interviewees as one major contributing factor to the menace. The factor describes the attempt by many to satisfy insatiable desires at the expense of nature. For them, nature only exists to serve their needs, not to be served. Some cited ‘galamsey’ as practical example. Others, however, attribute the ‘galamsey’ menace and other related exploitative activities either to poverty or lack of employment.

Further, eleven of the interviewees identified poverty as the cause of overindulgence visited on the environment. They state that large section of the Ghanaian populace has no source of income and have to depend solely on the natural resource for their living. Some also linked the immoderate use of nature to unemployment. For them, government has failed in its obligation of providing job opportunities to its citizenry; hence some of the affected persons result to means of living that is injurious to the environment. The view, however, is contrary to public knowledge of the matter presently. On daily basis, there are newspaper reports that point to the powerful and rich people in the society as the brain behind most of the exploitative enterprises that leave negative impacts on the environment. Classical example is illegal mining known in the Ghanaian parlance as ‘galamsey’.

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<sup>129</sup> Thompson, Vice President, G.B.C.



So, where do we draw the line, more-so, when industrialization and housing are also mentioned as among the factors that affect nature? While some think that industrial and construction projects will help alleviate poverty and reduce unemployment, it is also regarded as an activity that is detrimental to the environment. They argued that reserved forests, and virgin lands, that could be used for agricultural purposes, are turned into residential areas. Asante Adjei lamenting on the issue thinks that if nothing is done presently, the nation's forest reserves will be loss soon to these activities.<sup>130</sup> In this regard, Timothy Aidoo pinpoints population increase as another factor contributing to the environmental problem. His reasons are that the desire to create more jobs and build more houses in a conscious attempt to tackling pertinent problems such as unemployment and housing deficits rather impacts negatively on the environment.<sup>131</sup> Though the attempt is geared to solving the problems aforementioned, it also leads to creation of another problem; destruction of the environment.

Concerning government responsibility, many mentioned factors such as corruption, lack of political will and inability to implement environmental laws as some of the ways government contribute to the problem. For instance, Ammah and Adarkwa associate the ecological challenge not only to lack of laws but also to lack of political will to enforce the laws. They elaborate: "the problem of the environment is people's problem. Hence tackling the issues of the environment affects beneficiaries involved, and for political expediency, politicians shy away from touching such issues for fear of losing power."<sup>132</sup> Besides, people who are on the state payroll to make sure the laws work,

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<sup>130</sup> Adjei Asante, Director of Christian Education of the Ghana Baptist Convention. Interview granted to the Researcher, September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

<sup>131</sup> Timothy Aidoo, Head Pastor, Tongues of Fire Baptist Church. Interview granted to the Researcher, September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

<sup>132</sup> Ebenezer Agyapong, Head Pastor, Provident Baptist Church. Interview granted to the Researcher, September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Ammah, Director, Evangelism and Mission, G.B.C.

tend to take money from offenders and let them go scot-free. Apart from individual officers, agencies that are set up purposely to ensure environmental laws are not breached, are more often the brain behind these corrupt practices. Some of the departments mentioned include the Environmental Protection Agency, the Forestry Commission, the Mineral Commission and other related departments. To prove the reality of the problem within these agencies, Asante Adjei cited indiscriminate giving out of mineral concessions by government machineries even to foreigners as practical example.<sup>133</sup>

The religious factor covers the remaining issues, which includes miseducation on ancestral values, break-down of traditional ethos and conflicts between taboos of the African Traditional Religion and Christian values. According to Asante, “the environment is in serious trouble today because of what he termed miseducation of the present generation — a thinking that professes a better knowledge than the ancestors”. The belief, he explains, finds validation in the outright disregard to the wisdom and injunctions of the ancestors on environmental preservation. The ancient measures otherwise known as taboos are easily explained away by modernity with devastating consequences to the ecological ethos. He further explains “there is total break-down of traditional ethos that hitherto serves as safeguard on the environment.”<sup>134</sup>

Rev. Ammah describes the situation as a conflict between the traditional beliefs of the African Traditional Religion and Christian values. For him, the conflict emerges because Christians consider adhering to traditional taboos as synonymous to idol worship. However, Rev. Yorke thinks the issue has more to do with discipline than religion. He

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<sup>133</sup> Asante, Director of Christian Education, G.B.C.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

posits “the Christian lack the discipline that goes into obeying such taboos.”<sup>135</sup> He argues that the Christian Bible contains similar injunctions that speak of humanity’s responsibility towards the environment.

### **2.6.3 Impact of Biblical Interpretation on the Environment**

To solicit the opinion of the interviewees on the impact of Biblical interpretation on the environment, four questions were put before them. First is the question of human responsibility towards nature. All the interviewees, in one way or the other, think that humankind bears a charge of some kind to the environment. The rationale for bearing the charge, however, differs among the interviewees.

For instance, five of the interviewees are of the view that humanity ought to take care of the creation because of his/her relationship with the Creator. Thompson explains the opinion when he reflected “the creation belongs to our father, and we ought to take good care of what is our father’s (Gen. 1; Psalm 24).”<sup>136</sup> Lamenting on the woeful failure in this regard, Leo Owusu-Afriyie accuses humanity of turning God’s garden (the creation) to a desert.<sup>137</sup> For these pastors, the creation deserves our care not on its own merit but because of the Owner.

Some on the other hand, link human accountability to the benefits that humankind enjoys from nature. Axioms such as “when the last tree dies, the last man dies;”<sup>138</sup> “cleanliness is next to godliness,”<sup>139</sup> among others, summarised the thought of some of the interviewees. George Mallet and Asante Agyei reflecting on the view concede that the demand for environmental accountability is for our sake. Mallet explains “nature is

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<sup>135</sup> Sekyi Yorke, President, Ministers’ Fellowship.

<sup>136</sup> Thompson, Vice President, G.B.C.

<sup>137</sup> Leo Owusu-Afriyie, Head Pastor, Love Community Baptist Church, Abensu. Interview granted the Researcher, September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

<sup>138</sup> Aidoo, Tongues Fire Baptist Church. Owusu-Afriyie, Love Community Baptist Church.

<sup>139</sup> Aidoo, Tongues Fire Baptist Church.

such that we must put back what we take from it, for nature has a way of renewing itself.”<sup>140</sup> He adds further that the thinking of many, nevertheless, is what they can derive from the eco-system. Implicitly, humanity constant exploitation of the eco-system without replacement, is the root cause of the present ecological menace.

Furthermore, majority of the interviewees are of the view that human responsibility towards nature is based on the partnership agreement between God and the humankind. Francis Narterh states the concept clearly: “we are partners with God in caring for the creation.”<sup>141</sup> Scripture passages such as Gen. 1:28; and 2:7 were cited by many of the interviewees as the basis of their stance. For them, the Scripture encourages humans to be care-givers and keepers of the creation.

Subsequently, in a follow-up question, the researcher asked the interviewees about the place of the Bible in the ecological discourse. All the interviewees were unanimous in their response to the question, and stated that the Bible occupies an importance place in the environmental agenda. Elaborating on it, Adarkwa opines: “the Bible has answers to all issues including that of the environment.”<sup>142</sup> All the interviewees who think that the Scripture is a force to reckon with in the environmental discourse mentioned passages such as Gen. 1:28; 2:7, 9; Ps. 115:16; 24 and Matt. 25 to support their position.

Relating to how the Scripture connects humanity to the environment, many perceive that the environment as part of God’s creation which the humankind is mandated to rule over. They interpret the terms like ‘dominion’, ‘master’, ‘tilt’, ‘tend’, ‘subdue’ and ‘rule’ to mean God’s command to humanity to take charge of the environment. For Thompson, the language in Genesis 1 and 2 to rule, subdue and master do not mean to

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<sup>140</sup> Mallet, Dean, Theology and Ministry.

<sup>141</sup> Francis Narterh, Chairman, Accra North Baptist Association. Interview granted to the Researcher, September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

<sup>142</sup> Adarkwa, Provident Baptist Church.

destroy. To him, the words carry the concept comparable to business management — take control. He adds that the misinterpretation of what is known as the ‘dominion mandate’ is resolvable if Gen. 1:28 is put in context: the contexts of the book of Genesis and the entire Bible. From these contexts, the mandate in Gen. 1:28 means, “work and take care.”<sup>143</sup> Hence, he thinks the biblical perspective concerning the environment is care and development. In another vein, the mandate “to rule” is explained as exercising responsibility.<sup>144</sup> The view speaks of humanity’s dutifulness and accountability to the creation.

This brings us to the question of relationship, the kind that the Scripture sanctions to exist between the humankind and the creation. Terms such as ‘steward’, ‘manager’, ‘care-taker’, ‘keeper’, ‘friend’, ‘shalom’ and ‘sonship’ are used as appropriate description of human’s relation to the environment. And all the descriptions connote one thing: humankind’s responsibility to the creation. For example, one-third of the pastors interviewed think that we ought to be “good managers”<sup>145</sup> of the environment as our home, because our lives depend on it. They argued that nature’s destruction is direct deconstruction of humankind’s habitat, and indirect annihilation of human life.

Some use the concept of stewardship to describe the biblical relationship that exist between humanity and the creation. The concept pictures God as the Owner of the created world and humankind as stewards of the creation, stewards appointed by God to efficiently master the creation (Gen. 1:28; Matt. 25). Humans are to manage the creation on behalf of God, to whom they are accountable.

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<sup>143</sup> Thompson, G.B.C.

<sup>144</sup> Narterh, Chairman, Accra North Baptist Association.

<sup>145</sup> Asante, Director, Christian Education G.B.C.

In another vein, sections of the interviewees liken the correlation between the human-kind and the creation to the relationship between a gardener and his/her garden. The perspective views humans as care-takers and keepers of the environment. As good gardeners, humans are to keep, tend, tilt and subdue the creation not only for human provisions, but also ensure protection of the environment as a keeper.

Similarly, some think humanity's relationship with the creation can be explained in the light of what the Bible calls 'sonship' status of the humankind. The status of humans as sons and daughters of God who is the Creator of the material world, put humanity in place of responsibility towards the rest of the creation because of their relationship with the Creator. Humans have singular duty to the environment because it belongs to their Father.

Lastly, some others are of the view that the biblical concept of shalom links humanity to the environment. According to Felix Owusu, the concept requires that humans have peaceful relationship first with God, secondly with the earth and thirdly with others.<sup>146</sup> From the viewpoint, the Scripture places peace with the earth above peace with other humans. If this is the importance that the Bible puts on the environment, it is significant to find out how often the topic of the environment features in the sermon-notes of the ministers understudy.

Ironically, environmental issues seem to have no place in content of their preaching notes. All the interviewees admit the failure, but are quick to add that they occasionally make reference to the issue on the pulpit. Majority have no tangible reason for the practice except very few who claim their position as associate ministers put them in 'tight

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<sup>146</sup> Felix Owusu, Associate Pastor, Calvary Baptist Church, Adabraka. Interview granted the Researcher, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2017.

corner' because they have no freedom to choose what to preach. The opinions clearly reveal the position of some churches and the importance they attach to the environmental concern. The churches they serve have no clear agenda for the created world, hence the absence of the topic on their preaching schedules. What then may account for the indifference towards the ecological agenda? Many factors are considered responsible for the attitude. But for the scope of the research, the interview explores views of the interviewees on eschatological preaching and its impact on the environment.

#### **2.6.4 Impact of Eschatology Preaching on the Environment**

The interviewees answer questions bordering on the Baptists focus on eschatology and the consequences for the environmental agenda. There is general consensus among the ministers interviewed that the Baptists put much emphasis on eschatological teaching. Two of them, however, have dissimilar views on the subject. For instance, Asante Agyei thinks that although the Ghana Baptists Convention has well-structured creed concerning the last things, the theology seems to lack uniformity among the ministers of the Convention.<sup>147</sup> Hence what is taught on the subject differ from church to church. In this regard, Asante argues that the Ghana Baptists Convention has no specific theology on the subject.

Rev. Mallet shares similar opinion when he expresses his doubt on whether the Baptists have such theology, because of the present focus on materialism. He laments "we regard the earth as our permanent home but unfortunately we take little or no care of the it."<sup>148</sup> For him, the problem is not about specificity of theology but a shift from the topic by some Baptists ministers to a more popular subject, prosperity.

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<sup>147</sup> Asante, Director, Christian Education G.B.C.

<sup>148</sup> Mallet, Dean, Theology and Ministry.

On eschatological preaching and its impact on the environment, all the interviewees agreed that the preaching has some effect on the creation, but differ in the assessment of the outcome. Thirteen out of the twenty-five of the interviewees think the eschatological preaching influence on the environment is positive. For example, Enoch Thompson believes eschatology speaks basically about “judgment of our deeds whiles on earth.”<sup>149</sup> He adds that the awareness of this fact enhances our consciousness of the duty we bear toward the environment knowing that God will require of us accountability at the end. Most of the interviewees, who share in the view, perceive humans as stewards of the environment. Thomas Ammah’s assertion seems to epitomize the stewardship aspect of eschatology when he states that the good stewardship that is required of humankind includes being good overseers of the environment.<sup>150</sup> To him, eschatology encourages human responsibility. He expounds eschatology as a concept that teaches that every human action will be judged at the Parousia. Good deeds will attract rewards whiles bad conduct will be punished. And for fear of eternal punishment, Christians who believe in the concept are motivated to be ethical in their conducts and that have positive impact on the environment.

Few of the interviewees, nonetheless, consider the influence of eschatological beliefs to the environment as negative. The negative impact, however, emanate not from the concept but from human interpretation and application of it. Literal reading of the apocalyptic text and general misinterpretation of Scripture are the two main factors identified as reasons accountable for the negative application of eschatology. Notwithstanding, the ministers learnt their support to the idea of responsibility towards the environment because it is our home. While they strongly express their belief in the reality of

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<sup>149</sup> Thompson, Vice-President, G.B.C.

<sup>150</sup> Ammah, Director, Evangelism and Mission, G.B.C.



heaven as believers' permanent home, they also stressed the need to care for the present earth, which they believe is our temporary home.

Explaining the essence of caring for the creation, the ministers note that believers are heavenly oriented but live on earth. We, therefore, need, "to take care of the environment that houses us in order to live and share the good news about heaven."<sup>151</sup> Felix Owusu<sup>152</sup> and Leo Owusu-Afriyie<sup>153</sup> seem to share similar view. They argued that we are sent to the world not to the church, and reflect that the Scripture injunction to be the salt of the world conveys the message of working to preserve the environment (Matt. 5:13). Additionally, God who lives in beauty and perfection also resides in the material world (Rom. 8), thus humans ought to take care of nature in order to maintain its splendour fitting the environment that houses God. The command to the Israelites to keep their camp clean (Num. 9), and to sanctify themselves before Mount Sinai visitation (Exod. 19) are typical examples.

### **2.6.5 Impact of 2 Peter 3:1-13 on the Environment**

The final part of the interview focuses on the Ghana Baptists Convention ministers' interpretation of 2 Peter 3 and the implication for the environment. On the issue of interpretation, the ministers appear to have similar views on their understanding of the text. They think that the pericope reveals God's ultimate intent of destroying the present world and a new heaven and earth be created as replacement. Thompson's assertion summarises the ministers' stance. He posits "it is worthwhile to hasten the coming of the Lord because the new earth and the new heaven cannot be compared to the present earth."<sup>154</sup> His position appears to have support from some of the ministers who are of

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<sup>151</sup> Asante, Director, Christian Education, G.B.C.

<sup>152</sup> Owusu, Associate Pastor C.B.C-Adabraka.

<sup>153</sup> Owusu-Afriyie, Head Pastor L.C.B.C- Abensu.

<sup>154</sup> Thompson, Vice-President, G.B.C.

the opinion that the current earth is corrupted by sin, possibly beyond repair, and God has no option but to destroy it and replace with a new one as was the case in Genesis 7 (2 Pet. 3:5-6).

They, however, are quick to point out that the destruction as the text suggests is a divine one, which will be carried out solely by God at His own time (vv. 7-8). Besides, they believe the passage implies that humankind needs to care for the earth as we await the coming of the Lord (vv. 9-10). To them, the holy and godly lives that the text urges its readers to practise include caring for the environment (v. 11). Ammah vividly explains this point when he argues that eschatology is basically responsibility. That is, at the end, humanity will account for what has been entrusted to them by the Creator, and the trusteeship is inclusive of the earth. Ammah maintains further that the earth is our present home, and it makes no sense to destroy or leave your home unkempt because you are promised a new home.<sup>155</sup> On hastening the coming of the Lord, the ministers think the biblical way of quickening His coming is not destroying the earth but preaching the gospel (Matt. 24:14).

On the interpretation of 2 Peter 3 and its implication for the ecological discourse, the view of the interviewees can be organized into three-folds: neutral, negative and positive. Firstly, two of the interviewees believe the text has no bearing on the ecological problems that faces the world today neither negatively nor positively. They attribute the problem to human activities and lustful desires that have no respect for the ecological agenda. For instance, the power struggles between the leaders of the United States of America and North Korean over who has the right to own nuclear weapons and its

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<sup>155</sup> Ammah, Director, Evangelism and Mission, G.B.C.

associate threats from both sides was cited by an interviewee who think that such activities hold much more hazard to the destruction of the world than any biblical text. For the interviewee, human actions will destroy the earth before the time appointed by God.<sup>156</sup>

Only three (3) ministers assume that the passage paints a negative picture for the ecology. They contend the destructive destiny that the text assigns to the earth, affects the environmental attitude supporting the careless disposition towards the environment. They, nonetheless, attribute the disposition to wrongful understanding and application of what the text seems to suggest that the earth will be destroyed, hence no need of caring for the earth. The impetus of carelessness towards environmental issue, according to the interviewees, has more to do with the belief that the world is destined for destruction than a tool of hastening the Lord's second coming.

The majority of the interviewees consider the passage as presenting a case of transformation rather than destruction. Firstly, the interviewees argue that the text's injunction to hasten the Lord's coming (v. 12) is achievable through the preaching of the gospel (Matt. 24:14). The proclaimers and the recipients of the good news are both inhabitants of the earth, and it presupposes that the earth is an essential partner in preaching the gospel. To them, the earth needs care presently to serve as 'the preaching point' of the gospel until the Parousia.

Secondly, the interviewees put forward the claim for what they consider as sound biblical interpretation. That is, every scriptural passage must be place in context — the context of the book and the entire bible — for accurate exegesis. From this perspective, they regard the New Testament believer(s) as the light and the salt of the present earth,

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<sup>156</sup> Mallet, Dean, Theology and Ministry.

not the one to come. And as salt, the believer is presupposed to preserve the earth and show forth God's glory in nature as light (Matt. 5:13-16). The thought of Clement Addo aptly summarizes this view when he opines "we are sent to the world to effect change to the world."<sup>157</sup> As ambassadors, heaven is our home country but we have responsibility to the earth as our mission country.

Thirdly, the interviewees regard eschatology as an opportunity to give account as stewards. They classify the passage in the category of texts that encourage ethical living by offering rewards or punishment as stimulants (vv. 11, 14). On the basis of accountability, the interviewees consider the text as promoting godliness that has positive implication for ecological discourse.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

The sampled ministers of the Accra North Baptist Association of the Ghana Baptist Convention appear to have the concept that sees humans as stewards rather possessors dominating their thought. The Christian stewardship responsibility towards the non-human creatures, according to them, is dependent upon two-dimensional relationships: the relationship with the Creator and the rest of creation. Based on the afore-mentioned relationships, the interviewees consider the humanity's care for the environment as both fulfilling their divine mandate as God's children and also maximizing the benefits that they derive from the ecosphere.

They, therefore, perceive eschatology as an opportunity for rewards or punishment for humankind's stewardship. For them, the end or the Parousia presents to the believer an opportunity to render account as stewards of God over His creation. Again, eschatology

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<sup>157</sup> Addo, Calvary Baptist Church, Adenta.

serves as a motivator for acceptable conduct. According to the ministers, the Baptists preach morality as the basis of accountability at the end. In relation to eco-justice, they believe faithful stewards of the environment will be considered as righteous worthy of rewards, while the unfaithful as unrighteous deserving punishment.

However, focus groups and personal observation have confirmed that the content of the Baptists moral preaching has little or no space for ecological ethos. The focus of the preachers is mostly on the believer's relationship with God, self and partly others, because they are silent on issues of social justice. The result is that most members of the Baptist Church in Ghana have little or no appreciation for the present world, and are living in waiting for the world to come.

Second Pet. 3:1-13 seems to support their attitudes but is this the real meaning of the text? Is the author call to his reader an invitation to a passive attitude toward a provisory home? Using an approach that stresses exegesis of two contexts — the reader and the text, the next chapter, therefore, explore exegetical analysis of the pericope in order to discover its call to action for the reader.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF 2 PETER 3:1-13

#### 3.1 Introduction

The primary aim of this chapter is to present a rhetorical analysis of 2 Peter 3:1-13. The passage is part of apocalyptic texts present in the New Testament. However, while most of the apocalyptic texts are unclear about the destiny of the present world, 2 Peter 3 prescribes a destructive end for it — the “idea of a fiery eschatological conflagration that consumes the entire planet.”<sup>158</sup> According to Barbara Rossing, the author’s view of the end of the world is at odds with the rest of the New Testament’s teaching on the fate of the created world. Other biblical texts use the image of a refiner’s fire or the fire of purification, but no other text speaks of a total world-destroying fire.<sup>159</sup>

The end that the author assigned to the physical world raises concern for many environmentalists. These are of the view that the author’s perception of the material world promotes reckless behaviour and carelessness towards the same. Scholars, however, have divided opinion on the pericope vis-à-vis the ecological agenda. The chapter begins with an attempt to explore the arguments for or against the destructionist’s view of 2 Peter 3 in the environmental discourse. In addition, the section explores the exegetical analysis of the pericope commencing with the delimitation of the text.

Following the road-map of Moller, the rhetorical analysis of the passage begins with the structure. The structure serves as a guiding principle for the reader to navigate through the text step by step in order to arrive at an informed conclusion for decision

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<sup>158</sup> Rossing, “Hastening the Day,” 30.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

making. After the structure has been determined, the analysis of the text follows. Finally, conclusions are drawn from the analysis undertaken.

### 3.2 *Status Quaestiones*

The position of 2 Peter 3 on the created world seems to generate two divergent views among scholars. While some scholars like Dyer<sup>160</sup> give destructive interpretation to the text, others for example, Bouma-Prediger gives interpretation of the same text as being transformative.<sup>161</sup> The section, first of all, examines the argument for destructive interpretation of 2 Peter 3.

#### 3.2.1 The Annihilationist Interpretation of 2 Peter 3:1-13

Even though some scholars argued that the destructionist stance is only found in “hyper-dispensationalism” and is perhaps waning generally in evangelism,<sup>162</sup> there are still a number of scholars in contemporary history with wide range doctrinal backgrounds that hold the belief that 2 Peter 3 foretells the destruction of the earth. John MacArthur summarizes the basis of the destructionist argument as follows:

with the culmination of the final phase of the day of the Lord, the heavens will pass away with a roar — a universal upheaval that Jesus Himself predicted in the Olivet Discourse: ‘Heaven and earth will pass away’ (Matt. 24:35). Heavens refer to the visible, physical universe of interstellar and intergalactic space. Like Christ, Peter foresaw the disintegration of the entire universe in an instant ‘un-creation,’ not by any naturalistic scenario, but solely by God’s omnipotent intervention.<sup>163</sup>

In MacArthur’s view, v. 10 of the text contains some hermeneutical keys that support the position of annihilation. Emerson identifies such words as ῥοιζηδόν (roar) and

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<sup>160</sup> Dyer, *The Earth Story*, 44-56.

<sup>161</sup> S. Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 109.

<sup>162</sup> Gale Z. Heide, “What is New About the New Heaven and New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40 (1997): 40.

<sup>163</sup> John MacArthur, *2 Peter and Jude: MacArthur NT Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 2005), 124-25.

στοιχεῖα (elements) as communicating destruction. According to Emerson, the annihilationist's interpretation of the term ῥοιζηδὸν connotes,

the whizzing, crackling sounds that objects emit as fire consumes them. On that future day, the noise from the disintegrating atoms of the universe will be deafening, ῥοιζηδὸν unlike anything mortals have ever heard before. The word elements (στοιχεῖα) when used in reference to the physical world, describes the basic atomic components of the universe. The intense heat will be so powerful that the earth and its works will be burned up. God's power will consume everything in the material realm — the entire physical earth — with its civilizations, ecosystems, and natural resources and the surrounding celestial universe. Yet even in the midst of that mind-boggling destruction, the Lord will protect his sheep.<sup>164</sup>

He reiterates that the annihilationist interpreters are emphatic about the destiny of the present world — nothing of the physical world will be left after the sweeping judgment of the Day of the Lord. Reflecting on the end-time event, N.T. Wright, the main contemporary activist of the socio-political interpretation of biblical cosmic catastrophe language, acknowledges that the passage presents the cosmic drama that will characterize the end.<sup>165</sup>

Apart from these academic readings of the passage, a number of preachers have understood and popularized the annihilation reading of the text. In addition to their annihilationist reading, they also apply their interpretation to an anti-ecological discourse. For an illustration, Emerson cites the statements of Jerry Falwell and Mark Driscoll, well known charismatic preachers in the United States of America. Taking, for instance, Jerry Falwell's statement, "The earth will go up in dissolution from severe heat. The environmentalists will be really shaken up, then, because God is going to blow it all away, and bring down new heavens and new earth."<sup>166</sup> Mark Driscoll recently report-

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<sup>164</sup> Matthew Y. Emerson, "Does God Own a Death Star? The Destruction of the Cosmos in 2 Peter 3:1-13," *South-western Journal of Theology* 57, no. 2 (2015): 281-282.

<sup>165</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God. Christian Origins and the Question of God Volume Three* (London: SPCK, 2003), 89.

<sup>166</sup> Emerson, "The Cosmos in 2 Peter 3:1-13," 182-184.



edly quipped at a Catalyst conference, “I know who made the environment. He’s coming back, and he’s going to burn it all up. So yes, I drive an SUV.”<sup>167</sup> Driscoll has since stated that he was “just joking,”<sup>168</sup> nevertheless the statement appears to sum up what many Christians believe about the fate of the created order at Jesus’ return.

Returning to scholarly position on the pericope, the researcher explores annihilationist five-point arguments advanced by Edward Adam in his article entitled *Retrieving the Earth from the Conflagration: 2 Peter 3: 5-13 and the Environment*. The arguments are built around biblical events or words used by the author of 2 Peter 3.

The first argument is built around author’s reference to the Genesis flood. Most scholars who believe not in destructionist interpretation of 2 Peter 3 alluded to the fact that the Genesis flood did not entirely destroy the earth, but Kelly argues that the “Jewish apocalyptic and speculation that depend on it read this frightening development into the story (1 En. 10:2; 83:3-5).”<sup>169</sup> Most commentators believe that the author of 2 Peter stretches his argument beyond the Genesis flood and imagines the flood as bringing destruction to the entire universe. For instance, Horrell argued the interpretation is implied by the contrast between the ‘heavens...and earth’ of ‘long ago’ in v. 5 and ‘the present heavens and earth’ in v. 7.<sup>170</sup> Besides the post-biblical flood tradition that perceives the flood as destroying the earth or the whole cosmos, the writer also seems to be influenced by the concept of parallel cosmic annihilations by water and fire, an idea found in Stoicism at the time.<sup>171</sup> Adams explains that the analogy drawn between the flood and the final act of judgment suggests that the latter just like the former can be

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<sup>167</sup> Emerson, “The Cosmos in 2 Peter 3:1-13,” 182-184.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter*, 359.

<sup>170</sup> D.G. Horrell, *The Epistle of Peter and Jude* (Epworth Commentaries; Peterborough: Epworth, 1998), 177.

<sup>171</sup> Adams, “The Stars Will Fall,” 116.

interpreted as cleansing of the present world of sin and evil, but the cleansings take place, for the writer of 2 Peter, by means of destruction not instead of it.<sup>172</sup>

Secondly, Adams acknowledges that fire is sometimes a metaphor for judgment in the Old Testament. For example, Zeph. 1:18 speaks of the whole earth being consumed “in the fire of his passion”; where fire basically functions as a metaphor of God’s wrath. Drawing on the usage of water as literal agent of destruction, Adams contends it makes sense to understand the author’s concept of fire as ‘real’ destructive force in the coming judgment. Adams, however, admits that the background of the author’s expectation of fiery cosmic destruction is strange to the Old Testament.

Similarly, Bauckham in his major work entitled *The Bible and Ecology* notes that in the OT texts where fire is used as instrument of judgment; its function is to consume the wicked.<sup>173</sup> In supporting the view, Adams states that nowhere in the Old Testament is the total destruction of heaven and earth by fire predicted or visualized.<sup>174</sup> At the period of 2 Peter, the expectation of a cosmic conflagration was seen as Stoic concept. Adams notes that the doctrine of conflagration was taught by Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, and subsequently by his two immediate successors — Cleanthes and Chrysippus.<sup>175</sup> He admits that the idea was abandoned by several leading figures of the middle Stoicism but was affirmed by Seneca and Epictetus who were first century CE Roman Stoics. From the Stoic evidence, many scholars who support the annihilationist view of the text, reasonably concluded that the writer of 2 Peter bought into the cyclic dimensions of the Stoic concept, where the cosmos is destroyed and regenerated endlessly.<sup>176</sup> For

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<sup>172</sup> Adams, “The Stars Will Fall,” 113.

<sup>173</sup> Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 300.

<sup>174</sup> Adams, “The Promise of His Coming,” 97.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>176</sup> Adams, “The Stars Will Fall,” 113.

Adams, the author “presses the Stoic conception into a linear scheme and imagines the conflagration as a one-off and final act of judgment.”<sup>177</sup> He further argues that if the Stoic background of the 2 Peter 3 is accepted, an attempt to make distinction between destruction and purification is unnecessary since the Stoic thought of fire that devours the cosmos is both destructive and purifying: consuming all material things and purging the world of evil.<sup>178</sup>

The third destructionist argument is centred on the v. 10 of the text. Adams concurs with the transformative interpreters that, the last line of v. 10, on the best textual evidence, does not speak of the destruction of the earth. He adds that the meaning of the reading, “the earth and all its works will be found,” is difficult to determine, but Finger argues, it most likely relates to God’s judgment of humans. Horrell gives explicit meaning to the point when he states “all the deeds and work of human beings will be laid bare before God.”<sup>179</sup> But destructionist interpreters argue that the clause ought not to be interpreted to mean that the earth is preserved through or protected from fire. They further contend that the opening phrase of v. 11 expresses idea of destruction of the earth along with the heavens. According to Adams, the phrase ‘all these things’ (τούτων πάντων) make unambiguous references to the heavens, the elements and the earth in v. 10.<sup>180</sup>

Bauckham expresses a similar view when he points out that the dissolution of the earth is also implied in v. 7 (‘the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire’) and in v. 13 (‘a new earth’).<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Adams, “The Stars Will Fall,” 115.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Horrell, *Peter and Jude*, 180.

<sup>180</sup> Adams, “The Promise of His Coming,” 114.

<sup>181</sup> Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 324.

In Adams view, the dissolution of the earth is similarly implied in v. 12 with the reference to the elements being melted with fire.<sup>182</sup> Contrary to Emerson's simplistic view of the word, the meaning of στοιχεῖα, translated 'elements' provokes much debates among commentators. Most commentators rendered the word as referring to the heavenly bodies, namely the sun, moon and stars. Some, for example Horrell<sup>183</sup> and Finger<sup>184</sup> think the word makes reference both to cosmic bodies and the supposed spiritual powers controlling them. Adams makes it clear that the reference to the heavenly bodies is not strongly attested until after the New Testament period. He then claims that the most acceptable meaning of στοιχεῖα in 2 Peter 3:10-12, in its cultural context, would have been 'physical elements' that was believed to include earth, air, water and fire.

He, however, reveals that some commentators reject the reference to the four material elements since that would have meant fire consuming fire. Adams further argues that the absurdity of the four-element argument is resolved if the background thought is Stoic cosmology, since "the Stoics distinguished between the element fire and the cosmic fire into which all things are resolved at the conflagration."<sup>185</sup> He added that the author's division of cosmic reality into the heavens and the elements in v. 12, fits with the standard Stoic division of the cosmos (with the four elements comprising all things in the earthly realm, and either constituting the substance of things in the supra-terrestrial realm).<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Adams, "The Stars Will Fall," 114.

<sup>183</sup> Horrell, *Peter and Jude*, 180.

<sup>184</sup> T. Finger, "Evangelicals, Eschatology and the Environment: Evangelical Environmental Network," *The Scholars Circle* no. 2 (1998): 58.

<sup>185</sup> Adams, "The Stars Will Fall," 115.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

The fourth destructionist argument is centred on whether the word, λυθήσεται means more to break down into component parts than to annihilates or obliterate from existence, of which the former has to do with destruction (especially disintegration) to give the latter conceivable meaning at the time of writing. Quoting from Philo, Adams states clearly; “in Greco-Roman discussion of whether the cosmos will perish or endure forever, ‘destruction’ was understood as resolution into some originating principle or breaking down into constituent parts, and as reduction to nothing.”<sup>187</sup>

The thought of total resolution of the cosmos and all matter into nothingness, according to Adams seems to receive much attention largely by the mainstream Church in mid-second century. The idea was considered to be part of Valentinian cosmological teaching, found in certain Nag Hammadi treaties. The concept was popular among the church fathers at the time, and was accepted by Tertullian who, unlike Valentinians and Gnostics, looked for a new creation *ex nihilo*.<sup>188</sup> Horrell, nevertheless, thinks that it is old-fashioned to use the idea of annihilation as the criterium for determining whether 2 Peter 3:3-15 is about destruction of the cosmos.<sup>189</sup>

Adams expounds that the writer of 2 Peter uses the word λυθήσεται in the destructionist sense, and appropriately interpreted ‘dissolve’ or ‘destroy’. Similar to the thought of Emerson, Adams believes that the use of verbs in vv. 10 and 13 (παρελεύσονται, ‘pass away’; καυσούμενα, ‘set ablaze’; καυσώω, ‘burn up’; τεκο, ‘melt’) support the destructive perspective of the pericope. To render the language of the author as a mere rhetorical hyperbole for non-destructive transformation, according to Adams, is to say that the writer lacks the ability to carefully and ‘scientifically’ use the terms listed, and to raid

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<sup>187</sup> Adams, “The Promise of His Coming,” 106-22.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Horrell, *Peter and Jude*, 180

his argument of its force as a response to the assertion that the cosmos is indestructible.<sup>190</sup>

Finally, Adams observes that the word, ‘new’ is *καινὸς* not *νέος* is not all that important since the words were plainly being used interchangeably at the time. The contrast, nonetheless, with ‘the present heavens and earth’ in v. 7 presupposes that the author has the thought of a new created order not just a transformation of the present cosmic order.<sup>191</sup>

### 3.2.2 The ‘Transformist’ Interpretation

On the contrary, some scholars believe the destructionist argument is weak on the ground that the interpretation does not sufficiently support the vision of the text in particular, and the Bible in general. For example, Emerson rightly points out;

even though the annihilationist view may still hold sway in some scholarly and pastoral circles, and especially in conservative evangelicalism, and even though it may have some support in previous scholarship, it does not seem to be the best reading of 2 Peter 3:1-13 for at least the following reasons. Peter does not use the phrase “pass away” to denote annihilation; Peter uses the fire imagery to speak of refinement, not annihilation; Peter uses the flood comparison to speak of purification, not annihilation; and Peter writes within a canonical framework that includes a theology of God’s good creation and his promised redemption of it.<sup>192</sup>

Emerson argues that correct exegesis of the pericope is not in support of the destructive view. He contends that accurate interpretation of the phrase ‘pass away’ and the word ‘fire’ in the context of theology of goodness of the creation is against the annihilationist interpretation.<sup>193</sup>

Similarly Thiede, though silent on the position of the author of 2 Peter 3 vis-à-vis the rest of New Testament writers, contends that the supposed destructionist view of 2 Peter

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<sup>190</sup> Adams, “Promise of His Coming,” 108.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Emerson, “The Cosmo in 2 Peter 3:1-13,” 285.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

3 is contrary to the position of the early church theologians like Irenaeus and Origen, who were in favor of the transformational view.<sup>194</sup> Also, David VanDrunen, in articulating a ‘two kingdoms’ approach to the church’s relationship to culture, argues that “this present world will be completely destroyed at Christ’s second coming, and that the only point of continuity between this world and the new creation will be believers’ bodies (Rom. 8:21).”<sup>195</sup>

Additionally, the researcher also reviews Adams’ five exegetical and interpretative arguments in support of a non-destructionist interpretation of 2 Peter 3. The first argument in favour of the non-destructive position deals with the analogy to the Genesis flood which the proponents of the idea consider less destructive. Though the author of the epistle states that at the time of the flood, the then world ‘perished’ (ἀπώλετο, 3:6), Heide notes that the flood described in Genesis 6—9 did not destroy the earth entirely. He contends that presumably fish and other geological features such as mountains were not destroyed. Also, by virtue of the ark, every species of animal including human beings were spared.<sup>196</sup>

Heide states that much of what previously existed in the creation survived. He further argues that the “comparison drawn between the flood and the fiery judgment suggests that the latter, like the former, is about the cleansing of creation from unrighteousness not its complete destruction.”<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Carsten Peter Thiede, “A Pagan Reader of 2 Peter: Cosmic Conflagration in 2 Peter 3 and the Octavius of Minucius Felix,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26 (1986): 79-86.

<sup>195</sup> David VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 64-67, 81.

<sup>196</sup> Gale Heide, “What is New about the New Heaven and the New Earth: A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and Peter 3,” *JETS* 40 (1997): 37-56.

<sup>197</sup> Heide, “A Theology of Creation,” 55.

Secondly, it is maintained that fire mostly is not agent of destruction in 2 Peter 3. Moo explains that fire in the Old Testament is often a “metaphorical way of speaking of judgment”, and even when the reference is to physical fire, it’s not completely destructive.<sup>198</sup> Similarly, Ernest Lucas notes the use of fire as a metaphor of judgment does not carry destructive meaning but connotes purification (Isaiah 2—26; Malachi 1—4).<sup>199</sup> According to Lucas, the purpose of eschatological fire in 2 Peter 3 is to ‘purge the created order of all evil’. Likewise, Heide proposes that the fire in the text is for the purpose of cleansing the earth of sin, rather than indiscriminate disintegration.<sup>200</sup>

Thirdly, the non-destructionist interpreters further argued that the last clause of v. 10 speaks of conservation of the earth. They note the translations contained in the KJV and other versions, ‘the earth and everything in it shall be burned up’, finds presently little acceptance. In support of the idea of preservation, Bouma-Prediger renders the phrase to mean; “the earth is ‘discovered’ not ‘destroyed.’”<sup>201</sup> Many contemporary commentators, for instance Finger argues that being ‘found’ is in reference primarily to God’s assessment of human beings: he further states that the earth is “found, or ‘discovered; not to be destroyed, but so that the works done upon it may be judged.”<sup>202</sup>

Fourthly, the non-destructionist interpreters note that the word *λυομένων*, translated ‘dissolve’ in vv. 10, 11 and 12 carries no annihilationist connotation. According to Heide, the word carries the thought of “breaking down into component parts” or “release from eradication of all physical substance.”<sup>203</sup> Moo holds a similar opinion when

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<sup>198</sup> Moo, “Eschatology and the Environment,” 468.

<sup>199</sup> Ernest Lucas, “The New Testament Teaching on the Environment,” *Transformation* 16, no. 2 (1999): 93-99.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>201</sup> Bouma-Prediger, “Beauty of the Earth,” 77.

<sup>202</sup> Finger, “Evangelicals, Eschatology and Environment,” 5.

<sup>203</sup> Heide, “A Theology of Creation,” 53.



he opines, “the word points not to annihilation but a dissolution or radical change in nature.”<sup>204</sup>

Finally, the point is also made of the word translated ‘new’ in the phrase “new heavens and a new earth” (v. 13), is not νεος, which means ‘previously non-existent’, but καινός, which means ‘new in quality’.<sup>205</sup> Finger seems to share a view parallel to that of Lucas when he argues that it is needless to consider the new state as ‘created entirely from scratch’ and stresses that the wording of the text is “consistent with the idea of a transformation of the existing heavens and earth.”<sup>206</sup>

### 3.2.3 Summary

The debate for or against destructionist interpretation of 2 Peter 3 is unending one. While some contemporary scholars like Emerson and Thiede think that the interpretation of the text favours the idea of transformation of the present heavens and earth, Adam and Kelly on the other hand give destructive interpretation to the text. Horrell, though not among the destructionist interpreters, is of the opinion that the non-destructionist reading of 2 Peter do not offer enough textual evidence. For instance, he admits that Adam’s interpretation of the text to depict dissolution of the present world, and be replaced by new world is true. However, he adds that the vision is dissimilar to Pauline future expectation for the cosmos in Rom. 8:8-25.<sup>207</sup>

The critical question, then, is whether 2 Peter 3 beyond recovery for biblically informed environmentalism. Is it fair to dismiss the passage as expressing a marginal and extreme

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<sup>204</sup> Moo, “Eschatology and the Environment,” 468.

<sup>205</sup> Lucas, “New Testament and Environment,” 97.

<sup>206</sup> Finger, “Evangelicals, Eschatology and Environment,” 6.

<sup>207</sup> Adams, “Promise of His Coming,” 116.

viewpoint that is not congruent with other biblical voices? The fact points to the contrary view. The pericope is not the only biblical text that speaks of dissolution of the creation (cf: Ps. 102:25-27; Isa. 51:6; Matt. 13:31). Adams, like Rossing, contends that though the text is not alone in this regard, no other biblical text communicates the destruction of heaven and earth so graphically and violently. Adams further instructs those seeking to draw from the bible a positive environmental ethic to take into account the fact the bible has more than one view of the cosmic future, and that the various biblical account cannot be compressed into a singular vision of non-destructive transformation.<sup>208</sup>

On this account, the opinion of Horrell seems to play a significant role in the interpretative enterprise of the text. He argues that although it is almost impossible to consider 2 Peter 3 pro-environmental, the text contains “certain considerations which, even in a destructionist interpretation of the passage mollify its apparent anti-environmental thrust.”<sup>209</sup>

The researcher believes all these ‘considerations’ can receive the needed attention that will ultimately leads to an accurate interpretation if the text in its entirety is exegetically analysed instead of focusing on few words or phrases. For this reason, the researcher undertook a rhetorical study of the pericope that examines the delimitation of the text, its rhetorical situation and rhetorical organization.

### **3.3 Delimitation**

There are number of opinions about the delimitation of 2 Peter 3. The different opinions are about where the pericope commences and where it ends. While some scholars opt

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<sup>208</sup> Adams, “The Stars Will Fall,” 116.

<sup>209</sup> Horrell, *Peter and Jude*, 181.

for long pericope, others are in favour of short one. Adams, Neyrey, Black and Matthew Emerson propose shorter pericope though have dissimilar views on the beginning and the end of the pericope. For example, Matthew Emerson set the pericope at vv.1-13. The reason of the choice is to centre his discourse around the theme, the Day of the Lord. For him, the author's focus is to assure his readers about the certainty of the Lord's Day as foretold by the prophets and to discredit the views of the scoffers who interpret the delay of the Parousia as non-fulfilment of the promise.<sup>210</sup>

Neyrey shares a similar opinion when he explains that the author of 2 Peter sees the scepticism of the scoffers in chapter two as a ploy to discredit God as lacking power to do what He promised. In response, the writer set out in chapter three to offer a strong defence in favour of God. According to Neyrey, the author wants his readers to know that God will honour His Word concerning the Parousia, and that the day of His coming will be attended with cosmic conflagration.<sup>211</sup>

Black, on the other hand limited the pericope at vv. 1-10. For him, the writer of 2 Peter basically concerns himself with the Parousia and aims at communicating its certainty to his readers probably as refutation against the arguments of the false teachers. He sees the theme, the Day of the Lord, begins at v. 1 and ends at v. 10.<sup>212</sup> Adams, on the other hand, begins the pericope at v. 5, that is vv. 5-13. He argues that the discourse on the false teachers in chapter two of the epistle ends at 3:4 and assumes that v. 5 begins a new theme- the Second Coming of Christ and its attending cosmic conflagration.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Emerson, "The Cosmo in 2 Peter 3:1-13," 281-289.

<sup>211</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude*. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, 3 (New Haven - London: Yale University Press, 2008), 2-3.

<sup>212</sup> Lea D. Thomas and David Alan Black, *The New Testament: Its Background and Message* (Nashville: B&G Publishing Group, 2003), 547.

<sup>213</sup> Adams, "Promise of His Coming," 117.

Regarding the end of the pericope, scholars have three main opinions. For instance, Adams, Emerson and Kelly propose v. 13 as the end of the pericope. Though differ at where the pericope begins, they think that the theme that the author discusses ends at v. 13. However, Black and Thomas opt for v. 10, while Gundry and Rossing are in favour of pericope that ends at v. 18 for the same theme.

The researcher follows Kelly and Emerson in considering vv.1-13 as literary unit. Regarding the scope of the research, we consider the literary unit the most suitable for the reason of its narration: First, the text discusses the destiny of the material world in the light of Christ's return (vv. 3-10). The discourse seems to be a defence to those who argued that the end will never come. Secondly, the author in vv. 1-2 discusses the means of refuting the supposedly false teachings, which is to abreast their minds with the teachings of the prophets and apostles. The final part of the pericope, vv. 11-13 describes the ethical demand on those who look forward for the supposedly new earth and new heaven.

### **3.4 Rhetorical Situation**

Rhetorical situation focuses on the background issues of the pericope.<sup>214</sup> Many scholars believe that the first and second epistles of Peter were written to confront two fundamental problems facing the early Christians: persecution and pernicious spread of false doctrine. For instance, Black believes that First Peter provided a message of encouragement for believers in northern Asia Minor who are challenged with incredible opposition and persecution; and Second Peter, subsequently warned and instructed Christians, possibly in the same area, who were taken over by hostile false teachers.<sup>215</sup> Since

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<sup>214</sup> According to Moller, rhetorical-critical analysis seeks to determine the limits of the rhetorical unit, the situations of the unit, the specific manifestation and application of rhetorical genre, the style and strategy used by rhetoricians and the process of persuading the unit audience.

<sup>215</sup> Thomas and Black, *The New Testament*, 525.

rhetorical situation, according to Moller is relevant to the rhetorical-critical analysis of any pericope, the researcher explores briefly the authenticity and canonicity of the epistle, its relationship to Jude and the allusion to Paul's epistles. The research also examines the origin, date, destination and the purpose of the letter.

### 3.4.1 Authenticity and Canonicity of the Epistle

There is no letter in the entire New Testament whose authorship is more questioned than the second epistle of Peter. Two main problems are identified — the use/knowledge of the letter in the early Christian writing and attribution of the same to Peter. Thomas and Black,<sup>216</sup> Carson, Moo, and Morris<sup>217</sup> agreed with Westcott and Green<sup>218</sup> in recognizing that the epistle is poorly attested to in the writings of the early fathers. Even though earlier writers such as Clement of Rome and Irenaeus may likely make allusions to the letter, it is impossible to prove that they used the letter in their references. However, the lack of references to the letter by the early Christian fathers is augmented by its use in the Nag Hammadi texts. Gundry notes that two New Testament apocrypha, the Gospel of Truth and the apocryphon of John dated in the second century, contain probable quotations or allusions to the epistle.<sup>219</sup> The support, however, for its inclusion in the canon is more widespread than any rejected books of the New Testament.<sup>220</sup>

Gundry confirms the widespread doubt that exists among modern scholars on the authorship of the epistle. Some opponents of Petrine authorship of the letter note that the external evidence pointing to apostle Peter is weak.<sup>221</sup> For example Thomas and Black

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<sup>216</sup> Thomas and Black, *The New Testament*, 525.

<sup>217</sup> D.A Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 539.

<sup>218</sup> Gundry, *New Testament*, 443.

<sup>219</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 443.

<sup>220</sup> Carson, Moo and Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 539.

<sup>221</sup> Gundry, *New Testament Survey*, 443.

identify Origen as the first Christian leader to accredit the letter to Peter.<sup>222</sup> Though acknowledged the dispute over the Petrine authorship, he did not think the objections are strong enough to make him reject the book.

An internal examination of the letter seems to suggest the following about the Peter's authorship. First, the author's personal reference to Peter in the epistle is clear evidence. The writer labels himself as Simon Peter, servant and apostle of Jesus Christ. The allusion to his eminent death in 1:14 seems to be reminiscence of Jesus' statement to Peter in John 21:18-19. The author claims to be an eyewitness of Jesus' transfiguration (1:16-18), and makes reference to his previous letter (3:1). He also makes reference to Paul as "our dear brother" (3:15). All these evidences appear to point in the direction of Peter as the author, but majority of scholars think otherwise, and offer other evidences to dispute the apostolic authorship.<sup>223</sup>

They maintain that "the personal references are a literary device to present the appearance of legitimacy in a document that is actually pseudonymous."<sup>224</sup> They indicate that if 1:14 refers to John 21:18-19, it actually rules out the apostolic authorship because of the general tendency to date John's gospel after Peter's death. Also, the allusion to the transfiguration, these scholars argues, is common practice among the pseudepigraphic writers to make reference to known events in order to attest truthfully to what actually happened.<sup>225</sup>

The second question about authorship is based on internal content concerns the author's reference to Paul and "the other Scriptures" (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Many scholars hold the

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<sup>222</sup> Thomas and Black, *The New Testament*, 526.

<sup>223</sup> Gundry, *New Testament Survey*, 540.

<sup>224</sup> Carson, Moo, and Morris, *New Testament Introduction*, 545.

<sup>225</sup> Carl H. Holladay, *Introduction to the New Testament: Reference Edition* (Dallas, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), 735.

view that the reference to Paul's writings covers all Pauline epistles. The scholars perceive the view as being against Peter's authorship since all Pauline epistles could not have been collected during Peter's lifetime. Some noted, however, that the reference by the writer to "all his letters" may refer to those he had read or seen.<sup>226</sup> Some scholars, on the other hand noted that the allusion to Pauline letters as "Scriptures" also raises doubt about the authorship of Peter, since the practice of referring to the New Testament writings as "Scripture" was not common among the Christian leaders at the time of Peter.<sup>227</sup>

A third question about authorship based on internal evidence is the relationship of 2 Peter to Jude. The two epistles are similar in content, and most New Testament scholars argue that Peter quoted or at least used Jude. The evidence seems to be against the authorship of Peter since many date the letter of Jude after the death of Peter. However, it is also a possibility that Jude quoted Peter or that the authors used common source. It is noted that 2 Peter's reference to the future coming of the false teachers (2 Pet. 2:1) and Jude's allusion to their appearance as already underway (Jude 8).<sup>228</sup> Exploring further on the possibility of common source for both 2 Peter and Jude, a parallel argument concerning Matthew and Luke is vital. Yet many scholars argue that there is lack of evidence for a common source — although it is still a possibility. Michael Green, however arguing for a common source hence states: "if both authors drew independently on some standardized form of catechesis denouncing false teaching of an antinomian type,

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<sup>226</sup> Thomas, and Black, *The New Testament*, 541.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> A. M. Helmbold, *The Nag Hammadi Gnostic Texts and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1967), 201.

the similarities and differences between the two presentations will be easy to understand, since neither writes in slavish dependence on his outline.”<sup>229</sup>

Thomas and Black subsequently state that there is no sufficient evidence of dependence of either 2 Peter or Jude on the other, and the use of common source by both authors. They agreed that similarities between the two letters exist but stated it is impossible to be dogmatic about the source of the similarities. They contend, therefore, that “similarities between the two books cannot be used as basis for rejecting Petrine authorship of the epistle.”<sup>230</sup>

In a similar vein, some scholars believe the use of certain distinctive vocabularies support Peter’s authorship. For example, Kelly explains the distinctive linguistic usage as follows;

such personal allusions that appear in 1:12-18 claim eyewitness insight into the events of the transfiguration. The use of the Greek word *exodus* or *departure* (v. 15) to refer to Peter’s death reminds us of the use of the term in Luke 9:31 to refer to Christ’s death. The term godliness (2 Pet. 1:3, 6, 7; 3:11) also appears in Acts 3:12 in a speech given by Peter. This rare word appears elsewhere only in the pastorals. This linguistic evidence maintains that the distinctive usages of Peter in Acts can be found in 2 Peter. Additional linguistic similarities between 2 Peter and other Petrine material can also be identified.<sup>231</sup>

With these evidences, notwithstanding, contemporary scholarship questions and rejects the authorship of Peter. For example, Holladay reveals that most scholars consider the letter as pseudonymous, possibly coming from the followers of Peter in Rome either in the late first or early second century.<sup>232</sup>

The researcher gives considerable space to the thoughts of scholars on the authorship of the epistles of 2 Peter. The exploration of the scholarly opinions reveals that the

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<sup>229</sup> Norman Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude* (NIBC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 73.

<sup>230</sup> Thomas and Black, *The New Testament*, 542.

<sup>231</sup> Kelly, *Commentary on Peter & Jude*, 302.

<sup>232</sup> Holladay, *New Testament Introduction*, 740.



search for the writer of 2 Peter is inconclusive. Majority of scholars according to Holladay, however, are of the view that the letter is authored by an anonymous writer who makes use of Apostle Peter's name.<sup>233</sup> The researcher opts to adopt the opinion that is unfavourable to the authorship of Peter.

### 3.4.2 The Origin, Date and Destination of the Epistle

Scholars generally agreed that the epistle holds no evidence in support of any specific place of writing. However, those supporting Peter's authorship propose a Roman source since church tradition puts Peter in Rome in his latter days.<sup>234</sup> They believe that the writer's

abhorrence of heresy, his irenic picture of the relations of Peter and Paul, his reference to Peter's martyrdom (1:14), the suggestion that Peter collaborated with Paul in instructing the churches by means of letters. The influence of Roman documents such as 1 Peter and Jude on the epistle creates probability of its Roman origin.<sup>235</sup>

But scholars who are against Peter's authorship think that the data provided above are not decisive in determining the place of origin for the epistle.<sup>236</sup>

On dating the document, Thomas and Black claim that the mention of Peter's death (1:4) suggests a date before his martyrdom in A.D. 68.<sup>237</sup> Majority of scholars, however, consider the epistle as one of last letters of the New Testament. Barnett, for example places the date of the epistle in the middle of the second century. He points to historical antecedents and the author's acquaintance with body of Christian literature of the century as supporting the position. For instance, the allusions to the synoptic account of the transfiguration (cf. 1:17), his reference to Jesus' prophecy of martyrdom of Peter

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<sup>233</sup> Holladay, *New Testament Introduction*, 740.

<sup>234</sup> Thomas and Black, *The New Testament*, 543.

<sup>235</sup> Barnett, *Exegesis of Second Peter*, 165-167.

<sup>236</sup> Kelly, *Commentary on Peter & Jude*, 351-368.

<sup>237</sup> Thomas and Black, *The New Testament*, 543.

(cf. 1:14), the supposedly twisting Pauline letters by heretics and the allusions to Paul's letters support the second century date because all these events took place at the time.<sup>238</sup>

On the destination of the epistle, Thomas and Black maintain that second Peter lacks a specific destination as observe in 1 Pet. 1:1. They, however, argued that if the letter referred to in 2 Pet. 3:1 is 1 Peter then it is reasonable to conclude that the author wrote the second letter to the same group of people.<sup>239</sup> Barnett seems to support the view but added that the letter is addressed not to any local church in particular but to the Christendom in general since the issue being addressed is not limited to one particular local church.<sup>240</sup> However, Holladay asserts that 2 Peter is called 'catholic letter' because it has no specific destination.<sup>241</sup>

### 3.4.3 The Purpose of the Epistle

The perlocutionary intention of the author of 2 Peter is to encourage the addressees to adhere to orthodox and traditional beliefs that are sanctioned by the doctrines of the prophets and the apostles. The author appears to be ardent orthodox Christian of the second century and being aroused by the heresies of the false teachers, forewarned his readers (2:1).<sup>242</sup>

For him, prophetic writings and apostolic teaching were the foundations of Christian stability and, therefore, wrote purposely to avert the minds of his addressees to these doctrines. The epistle is basically a refutation to the teachings of the supposed false teachers that rejects the Parousia and makes orthodox and traditional Christianity appear unnecessary. The author writes to a community that is persecuted, not through

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<sup>238</sup> Barnett, *Exegesis of Second Peter*, 163-164.

<sup>239</sup> Thomas and Black, *The New Testament*, 544.

<sup>240</sup> Barnett, *Exegesis of Second Peter*, 163-164.

<sup>241</sup> Holladay, *New Testament Introduction*, 743.

<sup>242</sup> Kelly, *Commentary on Peter & Jude*, 351-368.

‘killings’ but through constant social exclusion because they are ‘different’. One of the reasons of the mockery concerns the belief in the Parousia, and the long wait for its fulfilment. In the midst of the uncertainty, the writer accordingly assures his readers that God will honour his promise concerning the Parousia and judgment of the wicked.<sup>243</sup> The writer, therefore, calls for moral conduct worthy of the coming era.

### 3.5 Rhetorical Organization

Scholars who accept that 3:1-13 forms a literary unit have proposed different divisions for the pericope. The basis of the different divisions is basically thematic or narrative. For example, Barclay proposed the narrative structure below.

- I. The principles of preaching: vv. 1-2
- II. The denial of the second coming: vv. 3-4
- III. Destruction by flood: vv. 5-6
- IV. Destruction by fire: v.7
- V. The mercy of God’s delay: vv. 8-9
- VI. The dreadful day: v. 10
- VII. The moral dynamic: vv. 11-13.<sup>244</sup>

Kelly on the other hand proposes a structure for the pericope that is thematic:

#### A. Certainty of Christ’s Return: vv. 1-13

- I. Certainty based on the promises of the prophets and apostle: vv. 1-2
- II. Denial by the false teachers: vv. 3-4
- III. A certainty based on God’s action in history: vv. 5-7

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<sup>243</sup> Barnett, *Exegesis of Second Peter*, 165.

<sup>244</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 336.

- IV. A certainty based on God's view of time: v. 8
- V. A certainty based on God's character: v. 9
- VI. A certainty based on the promise of Christ: v. 10
- VII. Moral imperative of Christ's return: vv. 11-13.<sup>245</sup>

Similarly, Neyrey also offers thematic structure for the same pericope:

- I. God's powerful Word challenged: vv. 1-4
- II. Divine Word of judgment defended: vv. 5-7
- III. Delay of divine judgment defended: vv. 8-13.<sup>246</sup>

While Kelly and Neyrey's structures seem to concentrate on the subject of the Parousia, Barclay appears not to follow any theme. While Neyrey focuses on the honour of Christ's return, Kelly emphasizes the certainty of the return. Kelly's structure, therefore, appears most suitable to the researcher since it sets the conflagration of the physical world in the context of the eschatological discourse of the author. We believe the structure allows us to thoroughly examine the destiny that the pericope prescribes for the earth not in isolation, but in context of the other sub-themes which we think lure to accurate exegesis of the text.

### **3.6 Rhetorical Analysis**

The aim of this section is to analyse the pericope following the structure proposed by Kelly. As expounded in the methodology, the rhetorical-critical analysis follows the approach proposed by Moller. This allows the researcher to explore how the author used rhetoric as a theological tool to excavate the meaning of the text.

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<sup>245</sup> Kelly, *Commentary on Peter & Jude*, 351-368.

<sup>246</sup> Neyrey, *2 Peter and Jude*, 2-3.

### 3.6.1 The Promises of the Prophets and Apostles as Basis of Certainty: vv. 1-2

Ταύτην ἤδη, ἀγαπητοί, δευτέραν ὑμῖν γράφω ἐπιστολήν, ἐν αἷς διεγείρω ὑμῶν ἐν ὑπομνήσει τὴν εἰλικρινῆ διάνοιαν <sup>2</sup> μνησθῆναι τῶν προειρημένων ῥημάτων ὑπὸ τῶν ἁγίων προφητῶν καὶ τῆς τῶν ἀποστόλων ὑμῶν ἐντολῆς τοῦ κυρίου καὶ σωτῆρος,

This is now, beloved, the second epistle that I write unto you; and in both of them I stir up your sincere mind by putting you in remembrance; <sup>2</sup> that you should remember the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and the commandments of the Lord and Savior through your apostles:

The author begins by providing a basis of his rhetorical argument in support of the certainty of the Parousia. The writer reveals that the inevitability of Christ's Second Coming is anchored on the writings that "contains the orthodox understanding of the matter"<sup>247</sup>, the previous letter, then words (ῥημάτων) of the prophets and the commandment (ἐντολῆς) of the Lord's apostles. Many scholars believe the earlier letter that 2 Peter alludes to is 1 Peter. The author also states that in both epistles he has rebutted damaging heresies using the norms contained in the commandment of the Lord given through the apostles.<sup>248</sup>

The author's use of the word ἀγαπητοί, testifies to the fact that he addresses the faithful community of believers. This, many scholars believe, marks a beginning of a new subject following the discourse on false teachers in chapter two. For example, Holladay asserts that the theme of the chapter is response to the crisis emanating from the delay of the Parousia.<sup>249</sup> The reference to the phrase διεγείρω ὑμῶν ἐν ὑπομνήσει τὴν εἰλικρινῆ διάνοιαν (I stir up your sincere mind by putting you in remembrance) as a way of reminder looks back to 1:13. The object of the reminder is here εἰλικρινῆ διάνοιαν (sincere mind). According to Thomas and Black the διάνοιαν per its usage in 3:1 is the faculty of feeling and desiring as well as understanding (cf. Matt. 22:37; Mark

<sup>247</sup> Neyrey, *2 Peter and Jude*, 2-3.

<sup>248</sup> Barnett, *Exegesis of Second Peter*, 196.

<sup>249</sup> Holladay, *New Testament Introduction*, 736.

12:30; Eph. 4:18; Heb. 8:10; 10:16; 1 Pet. 1:13). They argue that the usage is an equivalent for the inclusive conception of “spirit” (Col. 1:21).<sup>250</sup> The adjective, εἰλικρινῆ appears in the New Testament here and in Phil. 1:10. The noun εἰλικρινεῖα is used by Paul to describe what God brings about in humankind by his indwelling Spirit (2 Cor. 1:12; cf. 1 Cor. 5:8; 2 Cor. 2:17; Phil. 1:10). He thinks of their state of mind as undistorted by damaging heresies and unpolluted by licentiousness. He credits them with having a sincere mind on the basis that they are “established in the truth” (1:12).<sup>251</sup>

For the author of 2 Peter the predictions of the prophets and the commandments of the apostles are sure basis of their faith in the Parousia. Kelly shares similar view when he states that in view of the controversies over the last days Christ’s commandment through the apostles becomes an authoritative rule for the guidance of the thought and action of believers. He believes that the apostles are not carriers of “clearly devised myths” but successors of the OT prophets who dependably passed on the gospel to the church.<sup>252</sup>

### 3.6.2 Denial by the False Teachers: vv. 3-4

<sup>3</sup> τοῦτο πρῶτον γινώσκοντες ὅτι ἐλεύσονται ἐπ’ ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν [ἐν] ἐμπαιγμονῇ ἐμπαίκεται κατὰ τὰς ἰδίας ἐπιθυμίας αὐτῶν πορευόμενοι Ταύτην ἤδη 4 καὶ λέγοντες· ποῦ ἐστὶν ἡ ἐπαγγελία τῆς παρουσίας αὐτοῦ; ἀφ’ ἧς γὰρ οἱ πατέρες ἐκοιμήθησαν, πάντα οὕτως διαμένει ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς κτίσεως.

<sup>3</sup> knowing this first, that in the last days mockers shall come with mockery, walking after their own lusts,<sup>4</sup> and saying, where is the promise of his coming? for, from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

The author begins the section with the phrase, ἐπ’ ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν (in the last days) to connect his discourse to the predictions of the prophets. Barclays perceives that the identical phrase used in 1:20 to introduce the exhortation is a proper appreciation of

<sup>250</sup> Thomas and Black, *The New Testament*, 544.

<sup>251</sup> Barnett, *Exegesis of Second Peter*, 197.

<sup>252</sup> Kelly, *Commentary on Peter & Jude*, 351-352.

prophecy now employed to assert the relevance of the phrase “commandment of the Lord” having to do with the promise of his coming.<sup>253</sup> Bauckham explains the author of 2 Peter partly follows a Jewish apocalypse that “puts a complaint about the failure of eschatological expectation into the mouth of doubters.”<sup>254</sup> However, Kelly reasons that the appearance of ἐμπαῖκται (mockers) in the last days should actually reinforce “their faith, since it has already been divinely foretold and is indeed sure proof of the impending end.”<sup>255</sup>

Characteristics of these mockers are the apparent disdain of the seeming failure of the promised Second Coming of Christ. Literally, their question was: ποῦ ἐστὶν ἡ ἐπαγγελία τῆς παρουσίας αὐτοῦ (where is the promise of his coming?). Barclay reveals that the question was standard rhetorical form used in the OT text that always begins with ποῦ ἐστὶν, connoting that the idea that the thing being asked about did not exist at all (Mal. 2:17; Ps. 42:3; 79:10; Jer. 17:15). The heretics at the time were rejecting the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Concurring with Barclay, Kelly gives three premises for the scoffers’ denial of the promise of the Parousia:

- (a) the belief that the Parousia would be accompanied by a world catastrophe ushering in an entirely new order;
- (b) the conviction of the first century Christians, relying on sayings of the Lord (e.g. Matt. 10:23; Mark. 9:1; 13:30), that He would come again in their lifetime;
- (c) the obvious fact that the people to whom this assurance was deemed to refer had all passed away, whereas neither the Lord’s Advent nor anticipated transformation of the created order had taken place.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Barclay, *Letters of James & Peter*, 338.

<sup>254</sup> Richard J. Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude: Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 8.

<sup>255</sup> Kelly, *Commentary on Peter & Jude*, 355.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 356.

Henry,<sup>257</sup> Scott and Barnett<sup>258</sup> agreed with Kelly when they disclosed that anxieties concerning the Parousia had begun to manifest in Paul's time when a few Thessalonian converts had "fallen asleep," and Paul as a way of assurance writes explaining to the church that those "asleep in the Lord" would not be disadvantage as compare to the majority who would live "until the coming of the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:13-18). But Kelly sought to reject the supposed apprehension by stating that,

the first century church as a whole came to terms with the problem by accepting the tension inherent in the Christian, as a distinct from the OT and the late Jewish, eschatological hope: in one sense the end, i.e. the decisive act of God which gives history its meaning, has already been realized in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ, but in another sense, it remains still to be consummated in His coming as judge.<sup>259</sup>

Scholars generally accept that the supposed concept of the 'end' by the church as expound above appears confused to the Christians at the time. For instance, 1 Clem. 23:3-4 and 2 Clem. 11:2-4 contain quotation of the 'scripture' that rebukes cynics of the Parousia who complain "We have heard of these things in our fathers' lifetime too, and, see, we have grown old and none of them has come about." The scoffers, according to Kelly and Barclay, make matters worse by their conclusion that because the Parousia and Judgment are apparent delusion; they are at liberty to conduct their lives (v. 3) 'according to their own passions.'<sup>260</sup>

According to Neyrey, the false teachers of 2 Peter mock three fundamental teachings about God: first the Lord's coming, the slowness of God's judgment and the very idea

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<sup>257</sup> Matthew Henry and Thomas Scott, *Commentary on the Holy Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1979), 413-414.

<sup>258</sup> Barnett, *Exegesis of Second Peter*, 200

<sup>259</sup> Kelly, *Commentary on Peter & Jude*, 356.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.; Barclay, *Letters of James & Peter*, 338.



of divine judgment.<sup>261</sup> The author of 2 Peter, therefore, writes to show how the skepticism of these teachers about the future affects the Christians' view of the future in the light of the promised Parousia.<sup>262</sup>

### 3.6.3 First Proof: God's Action in History: vv. 5-7

<sup>5</sup> Λαυθάνει γὰρ αὐτοὺς τοῦτο θέλοντας ὅτι οὐρανοὶ ἦσαν ἔκπαλαι καὶ γῆ ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ δι' ὕδατος συνεστῶσα τῷ τοῦ θεοῦ λόγῳ, <sup>6</sup> δι' ὧν ὁ τότε κόσμος ὕδατι κατακλυσθεὶς ἀπώλετο· <sup>7</sup> οἱ δὲ νῦν οὐρανοὶ καὶ ἡ γῆ τῷ αὐτῷ λόγῳ τεθησαυρισμένοι εἰσὶν πυρὶ τηρούμενοι εἰς ἡμέραν κρίσεως καὶ ἀπωλείας τῶν ἀσεβῶν ἀνθρώπων.

<sup>5</sup> For this they willfully forget, that there were heavens from of old, and an earth compacted out of water and amidst water, by the word of God;<sup>6</sup> by which means the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: <sup>7</sup> but the heavens that now are, and the earth, by the same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

In vv. 5-7, the writer responded to the doubts and denials of the Parousia by making reference to what supposedly happened in the past. The author clearly states that the skeptics' arguments are absolutely unfounded; and to refute them he puts forward four arguments. The first argument of the author is based on what he referred to as biblical view of history (vv. 5-7), that challenges the cynics argument that the world is eternally stable. He maintains the scoffers fail to notice that the world was created 'by the word of God', and that instead of allowing it to continue unaltered from the beginning, God has once destroyed it at the flood, and will use the same Word to do it again at the proper time.<sup>263</sup> Kelly, however, adds that though the point made in the passage is clear, it is beset with grammatical, exegetical and syntactical problems which make the analysis tantalizing.<sup>264</sup> In analyzing the text, the researcher explores some of these challenges, and how they contribute to the total meaning of the pericope.

<sup>261</sup> Neyrey, *2 Peter and Jude*, 5.

<sup>262</sup> Holladay, *New Testament Introduction*, 737.

<sup>263</sup> Kelly, *Commentary on Peter & Jude*, 356.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*

The first concern is about the opening clause, *λανθάνει γὰρ αὐτοὺς τοῦτο θέλοντας* literally rendered either ‘it escapes them when they wish this’ or ‘this escapes their notice because they wish [to remain ignorant]’. Some translations (e.g. NEB) seem to adopt the former; which is supported by the position of *τοῦτο* (the) immediately before *θέλοντας* (wish) and at a far remove from *λανθάνει* (‘it escapes notice’) and gives the verb *θέλω* (wish) a rare sense of ‘maintain contrary to the truth of the matter’. Most editors, however, prefer the latter (cf. RSV: ‘They deliberately ignore’). Black and Kelly maintain that the translation has been kept literal and close to the order of the original as possible due to how clumsy the sentence was constructed in Greek.<sup>265</sup>

The adverb *ἔκπαλαι* (long ago) as used in 2 Pet. 2:3 has both the earth and the heaven combined as its subject. Yet, it is not easy to give precise interpretation of the phrase, ‘formed out of water’. In the first place, does the verb ‘formed’ refer to earth only (AV; RV; RSV), or to heaven as well (NEB)? Some scholars argue that the participle *συνεστῶσα* (consist) is feminine singular, and so in strict grammar sense should qualify only the former; but those with contrary view claim that the singular could be the result of attraction to the number and gender of the nearer noun. The second alternatives seem more appealing to most bible commentators since the pericope speaks about the entire universe, comprising both heaven and earth was destroyed by the very element through which they were formed.<sup>266</sup>

The author appears to be adopting cosmology employed in the first chapter of the book of Genesis. The cosmology employed in Genesis 1:2,6-8, according to which water was seen as the sole original existent, before God created the heaven and the earth. By stating that water was the material out of which He fashioned them, Kelly believes that the

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<sup>265</sup> Thomas and Black, *The New Testament*, 546; Kelly, *Commentary on Peter & Jude*, 357.

<sup>266</sup> Barclay, *Letters of James & Peter*, 338.

writer was reading more into the Genesis narrative than it contains, and since the commonly quoted parallels (Ps. 24:2; 2 En. 83:3-5) merely uphold that God ‘established the universe on the water’. He also cited creation myths of Assyria, Babylon and Egypt that portray the ocean as the element out of which the universe originated as some of the references of the author.<sup>267</sup>

If the preposition above is accepted, how then are we to understand the two phrases ἐξ ὕδατος (out of water) and δι’ ὕδατος (by means of water)? Some scholars perceive the former as a fathomable gloss on Gen. 1: 2; 6-8 in the light of a certain cosmological tradition. In the opinion of many, however, the latter seems more rightly rendered ‘amidst water’ (e.g. RSV). The reference concerning this assumption is Gen. 1:6-8, according to which God placed the firmament, which He called Heaven, ‘in the midst of the waters’, and thus there were waters above and below the heavens and the earth is encompassed by water. The prepositions, according to Neyrey are rather unclear. For him, the creation narrative in Genesis 1 describes

how the dry land was separated “out of” the waters above and below, which explains the first phrase here. But it is less clear from Scripture how the earth was made “through” water. The subsequent destruction of the world “through water” (v. 6) balances the creative action and thus probably serves as the rhetorical parallel for interpreting the first phrase.<sup>268</sup>

Nonetheless, Gundry thinks that the rendering of διὰ as ‘in the midst of’ is the most appropriate based on the form of the clause that follows. Hence most versions (e.g. RSV, NEB) accept the translation espoused here and construe the phrase as heavily underscoring the role of water: “it was not only the elemental stuff out of which the universe was formed, but it was the means or instrument of its creation.”<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Kelly, *Commentary on Peter & Jude*, 358.

<sup>268</sup> Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude*, 7.

<sup>269</sup> Gundry, *New Testament Survey*, 446.

However, Homrighausen believes that the next clause is more perplexing, though it looks simple on the surface. He argues that the term (κόσμος) means the ‘ancient world’ as referred to in 2:5: not only humankind or the earth, but the entire universe. This appears as the author’s response to the mockers that the world is far from being stable. He reveals that the world originally created has already been destroyed once and has been replaced by the present one.<sup>270</sup> Again, the author appears to be making reference to the flood story which is also mentioned in 1 Pet. 3:19f. It is not, however, clear whether the author’s source of reference, flood account in Gen. 7 contains no information on what happened to the then heaven and earth. Kelly, however, explains that the Jewish apocalypse and speculation that make use of the narrative read the destructive meaning into it (1 En. 83:3-5; 1 Clem. 4:4; Hom. 4:2).<sup>271</sup>

The problem then is the connotation of δι’ ὧν (through which), where the relative pronoun ὧν is genitive plural. Thomas and Black<sup>272</sup> assume the antecedent might be the water cited twice in v. 5, first as the element and then as the mean of creation. But Kelly argues first, that the use of the plural form of relative pronoun for singular antecedent employed twice is strange; secondly the repetition of by water with deluged in the same short clause appears senseless. He believes a more plausible option is that the plural ὧν refers to both water and the word of God in v. 5, these being ‘the two agents of creation cooperating in destruction’. Concerning the objection raised against the use of water with deluged in v. 6, Kelly thinks it does not really “apply since after the ambiguous

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<sup>270</sup> Elmer G. Homrighausen, *The Interpreter Bible: Exposition on the Second Epistle of Peter* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), 199-201.

<sup>271</sup> Homrighausen, *Exposition on Second Peter*, 199-201.

<sup>272</sup> Thomas and Black, *The New Testament*, 547.

which the writer may have felt it desirable to indicate that it was the water which actually overwhelmed the world.”<sup>273</sup>

The exegesis seems to find support in the subsequent verse, where the word and fire collaborate in their diverse roles in the second devastation. Homrighausen, similarly argues that if  $\delta\iota' \omega\nu$  refers to both water and word of God. Three parallels can be drawn: “by his word and by means of water God created the world (v. 5); by his word and by means of water he destroyed it (v. 6); by his word and by means of fire he will destroy it in the future (v. 7).”<sup>274</sup>

For the writer, the earlier catastrophe described in Gen. 7, forms the basis for believing, against the skeptics’ erroneous sneering of the Parousia. The author assumes that what happened in the past should serve as a sign to his readers of what will happen in the future, and  $\alpha\sigma\epsilon\beta\omega\nu \alpha\nu\theta\rho\acute{\omega}\pi\omega\nu$  (ungodly men) must not be deceived by the seeming stability of things into a false sense of security. In  $\tau\epsilon\theta\eta\sigma\alpha\upsilon\rho\iota\sigma\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\iota \dots \kappa\rho\acute{\iota}\sigma\omega\varsigma$  the author again is making reference to Judges 6. His theory that God’s earlier judgment on the world by water will be paralleled by another by fire has reflections in the late Jewish thought.<sup>275</sup> According to Kelly, the idea that speaks of total annihilation of the universe by fire, appears only in 2 Peter in the New Testament, and certainly in its fully developed form is unbiblical. He adds that the texts commonly cited in support of the idea often prove to the contrary. For example, Isa. 30:30; 44:15f.; Nah. 1:6; Zeph. 1:18; 3:8 indicated fire rather as the instrument of God’s wrath to destroy His enemies (e.g. Ps.

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<sup>273</sup> Kelly, *Commentary on Peter & Jude*, 359.

<sup>274</sup> Homrighausen, *Exposition on Second Peter*, 232.

<sup>275</sup> Barclay, *Letters of James & Peter*, 339; cf. Josephus, *Ant. 1:70* and the late first century *Vit. Ad. Et Ev 49:3*, where in the first case Adam and in the second Eve is represented as prophesying this sequence of catastrophes.

97:3). He observes, however, that the idea was taken from the Jewish apocalyptic, particularly in the Sibylline Oracles that was generally accepted by the Qumran sectaries.

Outside the New Testament, Neyrey reveals that the thought is occasionally found in Christian literature (e.g. Eth. Apoc. Pet. v; Hermas, Vis. 4), although towards the middle of the third century Origen pushes for a debate that looks at the advantages of the Christian version of the final conflagration with the pagan intellectual Celsus. There are obvious similarities, but equally marked differences between this teaching and the Stoic doctrine of *ἐκπυροσις* that held the view that the cosmos is occasionally consumed by fire. Both were greatly influenced remotely by Iranian eschatological conceptions and imagery.<sup>276</sup>

In brief, the author of 2 Peter appears to be a champion on the orthodox doctrine of God using God's basic actions of creation and judgment. According to Neyrey, the writer uses 3:5-7 as his response to 3:3-4 that essentially challenges God's honor. Neyrey rightly opines,

in mockery of the promise of the great state visit of the King, the scoffers shame God by rejecting his divine power over creation, especially power to destroy the world in a purifying fire. In response, the author defends the honourable word of God, noting that as the heavens and earth were created by God's powerful and reliable word, so that same word proclaims the world's end.<sup>277</sup>

The author believes that God's honour is undisputed based on three accounts: his divine power, reliable word, and his ability to judge.

### 3.6.4 A Certainty Based on God's View of Time: v. 8

<sup>8</sup>Ἐν δὲ τούτῳ μὴ λαθάνετω ὑμᾶς, ἀγαπητοί, ὅτι μία ἡμέρα παρὰ κυρίῳ ὡς χίλια ἔτη καὶ χίλια ἔτη ὡς ἡμέρα μία.

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<sup>276</sup> Neyrey, *2 Peter and Jude*, 7.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>But forget not this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

After raising a potent counter-argument aimed solely at the false teachers, the author appears also to appreciate the fact that some Christians themselves were confused with the delayed Parousia.

In v. 8, the writer focuses his argument on reassurance rather than refuting the errors of the heretical teachers. The challenge here, is how the scoffers reckon the ‘slowness’ of the Lord to come and change of addressee is signed by the second recurrence of the term ἀγαπητοί (beloved) as in 3:1, and insist that there is one fact that they must not allow to escape their notice. He uses similar expression in v. 5 but place more emphasis on ὑμᾶς (you) in v. 8 in order to make a clear distinction between you and αὐτοὺς (they) in v. 5. What the false teachers (αὐτοὺς) have wilfully refused to notice, the writer appeals to the faithful (ὑμᾶς), must not allow to escape their minds. The scoffers deliberately ignore the fact that God made and can destroy the earth, but the author insists that one fact that must not escape believers’ mind is the reality of God’s eternity.<sup>278</sup>

Some scholars claim that the sentence ὅτι μία ἡμέρα παρὰ κυρίῳ ὡς χίλια ἔτη καὶ χίλια ἔτη ὡς ἡμέρα μία (that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day) is modification and expansion of Ps. 90:4. According to the LXX version, Ps. 90:4 reads “A thousand years are in your eyes like the day of yesterday which has gone.” Apart from Ps. 90:4, the use of ‘day’ by the author may have other sources. For instance, in the creation narrative in Gen. 1, Adam’s judgment in Gen. 2:17 and the apocalyptic interpretation of the revelation to Abraham in Gen. 15 where a day is eschatologically interpreted as thousand years. It is believed that starting the opening clause with μία ἡμέρα for instance, brings out forcefully, the writer points out that God’s

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<sup>278</sup> Homrighausen, *Exposition on Second Peter*, 199-201.

eternal counsel cannot be construed in temporality of human chronometry. This reiterates the fact that human methods of calculation are unsuitable when guesstimating the sluggishness or speed at which God fulfils His promises.

Kelly, Barclay and Neyrey, however, reveal that 2 Peter is the only epistle that employs Ps. 90:4 to explain the incapacity of humans when it comes to accurate prediction of the end time, but adds that the text was widely used in “apocalyptic and rabbinical circles as giving a clue to the meaning of ‘day’ in the creation story, the messianic age and the duration of the world.”<sup>279</sup>

The rhetorical function of the author in this section is to deal with the challenge posed to the integrity of God’s word because of the way and manner the scoffers calculate the slowness of the Lord to come and judge. This is because the scoffers interpret God’s slowness to come, as failure to come to exercise power and judgment. The stance, according to Neyrey challenges God’s character on two accounts, as powerless in relation to judgment and as the failure of the Lord’s promise or word of honor.<sup>280</sup> For the author, God has the power to judge this world, and will honor His Promise to do so at His own time.

### 3.6.5 A Certainty Based on God’s Character: v. 9

<sup>9</sup> οὐ βραδύνει κύριος τῆς ἐπαγγελίας, ὡς τινες βραδύτητα ἠγοῦνται, ἀλλὰ μακροθυμεῖ εἰς ὑμᾶς μὴ βουλόμενός τινας ἀπολέσθαι ἀλλὰ πάντα εἰς μετάνοιαν χωρῆσαι.

<sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is long-suffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

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<sup>279</sup> Kelly, *Commentary on Peter & Jude*, 360-361; Neyrey, *2 Peter and Jude*, 8; Barclay, *Letters of James & Peter*, 362.

<sup>280</sup> Neyrey, *2 Peter and Jude*, 8



The writer's third counter-argument touches the heart of the matter. The author argues that it is erroneous to assume that the Lord is slow (βραδύνει) about his promise (ἐπαγγελίας) as some imagining (ἡγοῦνται). The author appears to making reference both to the scoffers and some faithful believers converted by them, who were counting the slowness in regard to his promise as suggestive of indifference, carelessness and impotence.<sup>281</sup> According to Holladay, the author proposes a two-way approach of chronometry as a mean of overcoming the challenge that timing poses, that is a theological as against chronological view of time. The "false teachers" have construed the non-occurrence of Christ's Second Coming to mean an instance of God's slowness based on human standard of measuring time. But to the writer, to draw such a conclusion is erroneous since God's plans do not work according to human chronometry.<sup>282</sup>

The author then argues that the true explanation of βραδύνει (slack) is found in His long-suffering and generosity. The mention of God's μακροθυμῆ (forbearance) is probably a further reminiscence of 1 Pet. 3:20. Kelly identifies the human means of estimating God's actions as regards to His promises are a major problem in all religions. For instance, Plutarch's thoughts "On the Delays of Divine Vengeance" points out that "God's slowness (βραδύνει) undermines their belief in providence, argues that He knows best the proper moment to intervene, and further that His delay shows up 'His gentleness and magnanimity', since it enables many to take warning and escape punishment."<sup>283</sup>

The biblical revelation speaks repetitively on His mercifulness, slowness to anger and forbearance (e.g. Exod. 34:6; Ps. 86:15; Rom. 2:4; 9:22; 1 Pet. 3:20). The fact that God

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<sup>281</sup> Homrighausen, *Exposition on Second Peter*, 201-202.

<sup>282</sup> Holladay, *New Testament Introduction*, 739.

<sup>283</sup> Kelly, *Commentary on Peter & Jude*, 362.

desires *μετάνοιαν* (repentance) and conversion of all humans was a common theme preached by the post-exilic prophets and later Judaism (Ezek. 18:23; 33:2), and in the NT it is established or implied in John 3:16f. Rom. 11:32; 1 Tim. 2:4.<sup>284</sup>

Some scholars think the writer borrowed the idea as a rhetorical tool and applied it to the problem of the delayed Parousia. To the author, the tool works in refocusing the Church on its fundamental mission — to proclaim the divine love and lead men and women to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>285</sup>

### 3.6.6 A Certainty Based on the Promise of Christ: v. 10

<sup>10</sup> Ἡξει δὲ ἡμέρα κυρίου ὡς κλέπτῃς, ἐν ἣ ὁ οὐρανὸς ῥοιζηδὸν παρελεύσονται στοιχεῖα δὲ καυσούμενα λυθήσεται καὶ γῆ καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ ἔργα εὐρεθήσεται.

<sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come as a thief; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

The writer's fourth and final argument makes use of the primitive tradition of the Jews, *ἡμέρα κυρίου* (the day of the Lord). According to the OT traditions, 'the day of the Lord' is a prophetic concept that speaks of the time God will act (e.g. Amos). In the apocalyptic literature, it was re-elaborated in a dualistic mode (two ages).<sup>286</sup> Bauckham aptly describes the OT dualistic concept of time as,

this present age, which is completely bad and past remedy; and the age to come, which is the golden age of God. How was the one to turn into the other? The change could not come about by human effort or by a process of development, for the world was on the way to destruction. As the Jews saw it, there was only one way in which the change could happen; it must be by the direct intervention of God.<sup>287</sup>

Barclays explains that v. 10 speaks of the New Testament doctrine of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ in the context of the doctrine of the Day of the Lord.

<sup>284</sup> Barclay, *Letters of James & Peter*, 342-343.

<sup>285</sup> Kelly, *Commentary on Peter & Jude*, 363

<sup>286</sup> Bauckham, *2 Peter and Jude*, 8.

<sup>287</sup> Barclay, *Letters of James & Peter*, 343-344.

The challenge with the supposed divine intervention, therefore, concerns how and when this will happen. There is, therefore, general consensus among scholars that the writer of the epistle is of the opinion that the day will come without warning like a thief coming in the night (Isa. 13:9; Jer. 46:10; Joel 1:15).

The use of ‘the Day of the Lord’ to explain the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is not unique with the author of 2 Peter. For instance, Paul used the ancient term though he makes reference to the ‘Lord’ as the Messiah (1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2) and the synoptic gospel record Jesus Himself comparing the coming of the Son of Man to the surprise break-in of a thief (Matt. 24:43; Luke 12:39).<sup>288</sup>

Moreover, the coming of the day will be attended with cosmic devastation that will presumably affect evil-doers including false teachers. Neyrey reveals that the scenarios of cosmic devastation are elements of the conventional description of the state visit of an honourable sovereign, particularly the God of Israel. He adds that the power and honour status of these persons are expressed using symbolism such as cosmic phenomenon. He cites the birth of Christ (Matt. 2:2) and his death (Matt. 27:45, 51-54) as examples. Kasemann, however, thinks the eschatology lacks ‘Christological orientation’ because it is difficult to tell whether ‘the Lord’ in v. 10 is God or Christ.<sup>289</sup>

However, the author of 2 Peter seems to engage the symbolism, but adds that the Parousia expectation includes new heavens and a new earth.<sup>290</sup> The description contains in v. 10 seems to be an intriguing detail of the chaos and destruction of the universe in v. 7 with parallels in the OT prophecy (Isa. 34:4; Joel 3:15) and primitive Christian apocalyptic (Mark. 13:24-31; Rev. 6:12-17). The writer uses very rich phrase in describing his thought. For example, he says that the heavens will pass away with a crackling roar (ῥοιζηδόν). According to Barclay, “the word is used for the whirring of a bird’s wings in the air, for the sound a spear makes as it hurtles through the air, for the crackling of

<sup>288</sup> Barnett, *Exegesis on Second Peter*, 202.

<sup>289</sup> Bauckham, *2 Peter and Jude*, 33.

<sup>290</sup> Neyrey, *2 Peter and Jude*, 3.

flames of a forest fire.”<sup>291</sup> The usage of ῥοιζήδον portrays the violent destruction that will characterized the Parousia.

The second word that is of interest to scholars in the verse is the noun στοιχεῖα. If στοιχεῖα is rendered as celestial bodies, it connotes: “(a) the basic elements of which all-natural things are composed; (b) the sun, moon and principal heavenly bodies; or (c) the cosmic spirits supposed to be connected with the elements and stars and to dominate human destiny.”<sup>292</sup> But Kelly argues that positioning of στοιχεῖα between heaven and earth suggests it alludes to a third kind of cosmic element; most probably the celestial bodies. He believes this could be the most suitable exegesis since the celestial bodies are locally positioned between heaven and earth and their destruction was common feature of eschatological conjecture (Isa. 13:10; 34:4; Ezek. 32:7; Matt. 24:29; Rev. 6:13).<sup>293</sup>

It is, however, difficult to find appropriate meaning of the next clause, “and the earth and the works it contains — will they be found?” The earth refers to the planet earth, not the inhabitants of the earth as some advocates, while the works alluded to are not human actions (since they follow their actors to eternity, Rev. 14:13), but all the products of nature, human culture, civilization, art and technology.<sup>294</sup> The RSV assumes that the verb is εὑρεθήσεται, that is ‘will be found’. Though most acceptable generally, it is also difficult to read. Commentators who agree with the translation treat it as direct statement (e.g. NEB: ‘will be laid bare’), rendering it to mean that the earth and human accomplishments will be discovered and exposed to divine judgment (1 Cor. 3:13-15; 2 Clem. 14:3). But the subject of revelation in both passages is the true character of

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<sup>291</sup> Barclay, *Letters of James & Peter*, 344.

<sup>292</sup> Kelly, *Commentary on Peter & Jude*, 364.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> Thomas, and Black, *The New Testament*, 547

human deeds by the refining fires of the last judgment. Apart from the difficulty in giving ‘will be found’ the sense proposed, the idea that emerges in the forefront is rather the annihilation of the earth and all it contains; the meaning strongly supported by the two preceding verses and by the opening words of v. 11.<sup>295</sup>

The translation adopted follows the suggestion of Weiss that the clause is in fact a rhetorical question. In the Bible ‘find’ or ‘be found’ often approximates to ‘be’ or ‘exist’, and when used in the negative or put in the form of a question can carry the sense of non-existence (e.g. LXX Gen. 5:24; Exod. 12:19; Deut. 18:10; Rev. 14:10).<sup>296</sup>

### 3.6.7 Moral Imperative of Christ’s Return: vv.11-13.

<sup>11</sup> Τούτων οὕτως πάντων λυομένων ποταπὸς δεῖ ὑπάρχειν [ὑμᾶς] ἐν ἀγίαις ἀναστρῶ φαῖς καὶ εὐσεβείαις, <sup>12</sup> προσδοκῶντας καὶ σπεύδοντας τὴν παρουσίαν τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμέρας δι’ ἣν οὐρανοὶ πυρούμενοι λυθήσονται καὶ στοιχεῖα καυσούμενα τήκεται. <sup>13</sup> καινοὺς δὲ οὐρανοὺς καὶ γῆν καινὴν κατὰ τὸ ἐπάγγελμα αὐτοῦ προσδοκῶμεν, ἐν οἷς δικαιοσύνη κατοικεῖ.

<sup>11</sup> Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness, <sup>12</sup> looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, by reason of which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?<sup>13</sup> But, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Being very interested in the moral dynamic of the Second Coming, the author like other New Testament writers (e.g. 1 Thess. 5:6 ff.; Heb. 10:25; 1 Pet.4:7 ff.), uses the picture of the coming end not to inculcate fear into the hearts of the faithful Christians, but as urgent moral and spiritual challenge. For the author, it is almost impossible to give up hope of the advent without ethical decline.<sup>297</sup> The participle λυομένων (are disintegrating) in present tense either it has future connotation, suggested by the context, or the author intentionally chooses it so as to put emphasis on the fact that the process of

<sup>295</sup> Kelly, *Commentary on Peter & Jude*, 365.

<sup>296</sup> J.N.D. Kelly admits that the exegesis of the verse is a difficult one, but argues that “it has the virtues of making sense of what has every claim to be correct text, and logically setting the cataclysmic disappearance of the earth and its contents alongside the passing away of the heavens and stars”, 366.

<sup>297</sup> Barclay, *Letters of James & Peter*, 345.

dissolution has already started. The Greek ποταποὺς (what sort of) appears more helpful (Matt. 8:27; 1 John 3:1) than what the English conveys; in the context it hints that great things are expected of the readers. The great expectation of the writer of his readers is to live right as they are looking forward to the coming of the day of God, that through their faithful conduct they can be actually hastening it on.<sup>298</sup>

Most versions (e.g. AV; RV) translated the second participle σπεύδοντας as ‘earnestly desiring’ or something similar. But the more common meaning of σπεύδω with the accusative is ‘set going’, ‘urge on’ seems more suitable for the context. It connects the conviction expressed in 3:8 that the Parousia is delayed because of the Lord desire that many more will come to repentance, “which presumably has as its corollary that it may be hastened by the faith and good works of believers.”<sup>299</sup> Bauckham,<sup>300</sup> Barclay<sup>301</sup> and Neyrey<sup>302</sup> agree that ‘hastening’ expresses the writer’s thought. They, however, identify three main ways that the New Testament’s thought on how this can be done. First, the apostolic tradition recognizes prayer as a mean that can bring about earlier coming of the kingdom (Matt. 6:10 cf. 1 Cor. 16:22). Second, the preaching of the gospel to all nations must precede the end, and presumably hasten it (Matt. 24:14; cf. Acts 3:19). Thirdly, it can be done by penitence and obedience. The third idea seems familiar to the view held by later Judaism that finds its way into the Talmud that ‘if only the Israelites could really repent for a single day, the Messiah would appear’ (2 Esd. 4:38f.).

The v. 12 of the pericope contains details of the final devastation that corresponds to that mentioned in v. 10, with additional explanation that the celestial bodies (στοιχεῖα,

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<sup>298</sup> Bauckham, *2 Peter and Jude*, 43.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>300</sup> Barclay, *Letters of James & Peter*, 347.

<sup>301</sup> Neyrey, *2 Peter and Jude*, 8.

<sup>302</sup> Homrighausen, *Exposition on Second Peter*, 203.

as in 10b) will melt with the heat (Isa. 34:4; 63:19). The phrase ‘because of’ connects the cosmic destruction with τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμέρας (the day of God ) instead of the usual New Testament ‘Day of the Lord’; that makes reference to the day rather than the person, God or Christ, whose Coming is awaited. The connection with because of, according to Kelly implies that the universal disintegration will not be the outcome of any natural cyclic process, “like the periodical conflagration of the universe envisaged in Stoic thought, but the direct effect of God’s all-sovereign will.”<sup>303</sup>

The author, however, assures the orthodox Christians that the frightening catastrophic events are to precede a creation of new and perfectly ordered world. The basis of the expectation, according to the writer is το ἐπάγγελμα (God’s magnificent promises, 2 Pet. 1:4a; Matt. 19:28; Mark 14:25; Rom. 8:19-22). These keen eschatological expectations of the early Christians mostly find their root in the expression in Revelation, with its affirmation (21:5) that the risen Christ ‘makes all things new’ and its vision (21:1 f.; 10-27) of a new heaven and earth and a new Jerusalem.

Bauckham notes that the imagery used above is the Christian development and adaptation of old Jewish hopes and yearnings, (as point out especially in Isa. 65:17 and 66:22), that specifically forecast the creation of new heavens and a new earth. The writer of 2 Peter seems to be alluding to these sources to make prediction of his perceived καινοῦς δὲ οὐρανοῦς καὶ γῆν καινὴν. Unlike the writer of Rev. 21, however, he fails to give details description of the re-created world but to state that the new (καινοῦς) creation will be one ἐν οἷς δικαιοσύνη κατοικεῖ.<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Kelly, *Commentary on Peter & Jude*, 367-368.

<sup>304</sup> Bauckham, *2 Peter and Jude*, 45.

### 3.7 Call to Action

The exegetical study of the pericope has brought to light diverse thoughts about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. As a result, this section examines the various views and presents an overview of the issues that dominate the debates on the Parousia.

The first point that the author makes, concerns the faith of his readers — what they believe. For the author, the focal-point of faith in the Parousia is το ἐπάγγελμα (the promise) in the Scriptures. The magnificent promise of God, for the author forms the basis of the certainty of the Second Coming (2 Pet. 1:4a; Matt. 19:28; Mark 14:25; Rom. 8:19-22), despite the seeming delays. Unlike the scoffers who mock the promise of the Second Coming due to its long delay, believers must not. This is because, the writer believes God will make good His promise. In an attempt to reassure his real readers, the author says that the event of the Parousia will happen unexpectedly (like a thief in the night, v. 10). To explain the inevitability of the Coming, the author tries to connect the promise of the Parousia to primitive tradition of the Day of the Lord of the Old Testament. The concept generally speaks of a day when God will intervene in human history and transforms the present world into a perfect one. In the OT sense, this present age is completely bad and past remedy; and must give way to the age to come, which is the golden age of God. How will one turn into the other? The writer and his contemporaries believe the change is only possible through direct intervention of God.<sup>305</sup>

Against this backdrop, the author addresses the minds of the readers to the New Testament concept of the Second Coming, stating that though difficult to explain, yet it is certain. He calls on his readers to remember that there will come a day when God will

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<sup>305</sup> Barclay, *Letters of James & Peter*, 343-344.



break into every life, live or dead; and for that day they must be prepared. They may not entirely comprehend the New Testament idea on the Parousia but one thing is assured, and that is they “cannot escape from the certainty of the entry of God into their own experience.”<sup>306</sup>

In addition, the author calls on his readers to live in trust of the promise of the Coming because of the channel through which it came: the words of the prophets and the apostles. To this author, the vehicle through which the promise was delivered makes it more authentic and trustworthy (v. 1). Here, he appeals to the authority of the word: the words of the prophets and the Lord’s apostles and claims that the present world was formed out of water and by means of water; and was once destroyed by water (Gen. 1:2,6; 7). What the writer seems to suggest at this point is that the world was created out of water and is sustained by water; and through the same element, the ancient world was destroyed (vv. 5-7). By the statement, the author appears to resort to history (as communicated in Gen. 7) to assure his readers that the coming day of God with its attendant destruction is not unprecedented. Also, words of the prophets and the apostles contain predictions concerning the emergence of false teachers, and for the author, readers must view their appearance as an indication that the day of the Lord is near. He, therefore, believes the readers can avoid deceit of mockers by stirring up their sincere minds with the words of the prophets and apostles that provide the basis for trust in the promised Parousia.

Again, the writer takes time to describe how the promise will be fulfilled. Being informed by Jewish and some pagan apocalypses, the author assures his readers that Jesus Christ will come in person to interrupt human history. When he uses the term Second

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<sup>306</sup> Barclay, *Letters of James & Peter*, 343-344.

Coming, the writer appears to be appealing to the New Testament thought, which is the adaptation of the Jewish eschatological hope contained in the ancient tradition, the Day of the Lord. The concept speaks of a new era that will be brought about solely by God. Most New Testament writers construe the first Coming of Christ (the incarnation) to begin the new era and will be consummated at His Second Coming (Parousia). He, therefore, addresses the minds of his readers to the fact that Christ will come again in Person as He did in the past. The author then speaks about the changes that will come with the Parousia: “destruction of the present heaven and earth, judgment of ungodly men” and creation of “new heaven and new earth” (vv. 7, 10, 13). For the writer, readers ought to see these cosmic changes as a motivation for hastening the coming day of the Lord.

To further assure his readers about the certainty of the Coming, the author draws the minds of his readers to the character of the One who has promised: God (vv. 8-9). He calls on his readers to desist from using human standard to estimating the time of His Coming because God’s view of time is entirely different from that of humans. The author views God’s supposedly delay as opportunity for all to come to *μετάνοιαν* (repentance, Ezek. 18:23; 33:2; John 3:16; Rom. 11:32; 1Tim. 2:4). He explains that God desires no human to perish but that all will come to salvation through repentance and conversion. For him, this is what delays His Coming and, therefore, calls on his readers not to only wait for but actually hasten the day of His Coming through their holy and godly lives (vv. 11-12). The author believes a renewal of his readers lives begin the new era.

Finally, the author urges his readers to focus on what is within their means: how they live their lives now. Whiles the readers have no control over the how or when of the

Parousia will come, they do have over their lives. For the author, how the readers conduct themselves as they wait for the Parousia is important (v. 11). He believes the good moral conduct of the reader has the power to hasten or begin the new era (v. 12). The writer adds that the Parousia delays because the readers were slow in repenting, and God wishing that none should perish delays His Coming until all come to repentance (v. 9). According to him, the moral conversion is necessary because the new era will not accommodate sin but will have righteousness as its hallmark (v. 13).

The author, therefore, preaches morality as his readers' contribution to bringing about the transformation that comes with the new era. It is a morality that has the words of the prophets and apostles as its standard (vv. 1-2). It is a morality that is holistic in nature, and covers all human relationships — God, self, others and nature (v. 14). For the author of 2 Peter, the judgment that comes with the Parousia will be based on how the readers handle these relationships.

These broad themes: God's magnificent promise in regards to the Parousia as the reference point of faith and trust, the author's call on his readers to hasten Christ's return through holy and godly living and the relationship between the reading of the text and its ecological use formed the basis for our contextualization in chapter four, where the thesis discusses the encounter between the text and the preaching of ministers of the Accra North Baptist Association of the Ghana Baptist Association.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ENGAGEMENT OF REALITY AND TEXT

#### 4.1 Introduction

According to Loba-Mkole, reading the text is an intercultural process, an interaction between the culture of the readers and the culture of the text<sup>307</sup>. Having analysed the reality (culture of the reader) and the text, the present chapter engages the two ‘cultures’ following the third step of our theoretical framework. From the dialogue of reality-text, a call to action is proposed to Baptist communities living in Ghana to revise the eschatological and ethical beliefs to address the ecological challenges that the world at large, and Ghana in particular is facing.

#### 4.2 Summary of the Culture of the Reality

The idea of stewardship is a common subject in the preaching of the Baptist Ministers in Ghana. As a core doctrine, Baptists believe that human beings are mere stewards, not possessors of nature. They hold the belief that the source of all blessings — both temporal and spiritual — is traceable to God. The Ghana Baptist Convention’s teachings clearly state:

Christians have a spiritual debt to the whole world, a holy trusteeship in the Gospel, and a binding stewardship in their possessions. They are, therefore, under obligation to serve Him with their time, talents and material possessions; and should recognize all these as entrusted to them to use for the glory of God and for helping others..... We believe that Christians should be good stewards of the environment.<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole, “Rise of Intercultural Biblical Exegesis in Africa,” *HTS* 64, no. 3 (2008): 1348-1364.

<sup>308</sup> Ghana Baptist Convention, *Constitution*, art. 6, Sec. 18, 17.

According to this article, the stewardship of the Christians, includes taking care of nature. The rationale of the obligation to the environment is essentially relational: our relationship with the created world and the Creator.

The Baptists elements in their ecological theology, construct mutual relationship between the human and non-human part of the creation. For the majority of the interviewees, the two components of the creation are interdependent, and one cannot survive without the other. Apart from the benefits derived from nature, they also view the earth as their temporal home. Though strong believers in the “new earth and new heaven” (v. 13), they see the present world as ‘home’ until God in his time and power will destroy it, in order to usher humanity in the new era. They assert that just as Christians take good care of their homes, so they must do to the earth as they wait for the Parousia.

The assertion appears to agree with the thought of Emmanuel Asante. The Ghanaian scholar abhors teachings that suggest the present world does not need our care because it is not our permanent home. He argues that even if the earth is only our path to heaven, it needed to be cleared so that we are not bitten by snakes on our journey home.<sup>309</sup> Similarly, the Baptists believe the Christian responsibility towards the environment is paramount because of their relationship with the Creator. The premise of the assertion is based on the status the Scripture accords the believer as a child of God (John 1:12). Being sons and daughters of God, we ought to take care of what belongs to our Father. Some of the Baptist ministers interviewed believe that the coming judgment that accompanies the Parousia will include our actions or inactions involving the environment. For them, eschatological preaching enhances human responsibility. They assert that the theology presents opportunity for accountability. They maintain that every steward

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<sup>309</sup> Emmanuel Asante, Chairman of Peace Council, Ghana. Interview granted on TV 3, April 10th, 2018.

looks forward for a day s/he renders account for his/her stewardship. And the Day of Judgment serves as appropriate stimulus for responsible behaviour in the ‘now’. The observation bears semblance to the view of Rossing that sees apocalyptic teaching as “a moralist usage of threats to instil ethical behaviour.”<sup>310</sup> The ministers believe all forms of unethical behaviour including irresponsibility towards the non-human creation will come to judgment at the Second Coming of Christ.

In addition, the majority of the selected interviewees maintain that the best way to wait for the end is to conduct ourselves worthy of the new world. While they acknowledge that the believers have no control over the future — the Parousia and its timing — they do over the present. That is the Christian has the power to engage in moral conduct that befits the coming era. The ministers believe that such conducts such as preaching the gospel, prayer and holy living are capable of hastening the coming of the Lord. However, morality according to most of the Baptist preachers in Ghana has very little to do with the environment. The emphasis of these apocalyptic preachers is on misdemeanours in the armpit of sexual sins such as adultery, fornication, homosexuality and unacceptable behaviours like indecent dressing. This idea is verified in the focus group discussions with lay members of their congregation who show unawareness of the fact that human misconducts against nature will also be judged at the coming of the Lord.

Consequently, the Baptists’ apocalyptic preaching in Ghana has little or no positive impact on the ecological agenda because the moral thrust of their apocalyptic messages has no place for the environmental issues. On the contrary, their heavenly-focused messages encourage their listeners or followers to neglect the earth because it is not their permanent home. Their misinterpretation of God’s intention to destroy the material

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<sup>310</sup> Rossing, “Hastening the Day,” 370.

world at His coming makes the responsibility of taking care of the earth unnecessary. On this ground, some engage in such activities that are detrimental to the ecosphere, because after all the earth is preserved for destruction.

These and many other issues coming out of the reality understudy show that even though the Ghana Baptist Convention has a doctrine that speaks to the human responsibility towards the environment, the preaching of the individual churches appear to point to different end. In view of this, an Intercultural Reading is suggested as a platform to engage the reality of the Accra North Baptist Association with the idea of holistic relationship contains in 2 Peter 3, to see how the churches of the Accra North Baptist Association can benefit from the idea of holistic ethics presented in the text.

#### **4.3 Summary of the Culture of the Text**

The idea of world catastrophe accompanying the Second Coming of Christ is apparent in the pericope. According to Neyrey, the author of 2 Peter appears to borrow the idea from sources where such phenomenon is befitting description of the royal visit of a king. Neyrey maintains that the author of 2 Peter was preview to the birth (Matt. 2:2) and death (27:45, 51–54) of Christ, and believes His Seconding Coming will be accompanied by the same cosmic phenomenon (2 Pet. 3:7). According to the author the cosmic disaster that accompanies the Parousia will be orchestrated solely by God as in the instances of Christ's birth and death (vv. 5-7). Since humans do not have the authority to determine the fate of the present world, the author does not make the subject the focus of his discourse. Instead, he focuses on the faith of his readers who are expecting the Parousia (vv. 11-13).

On examining the subject of faith, the author sought to distinguish the faith of the scoffers from that of the orthodox Christians (1:1-2). He strongly discredits the scoffers who

seek scientific evidence. For lack of scientific proof and long delay, they deny the promise of the Parousia (3:3-4). On the other hand, the author recommends the orthodox faith that depends on biblical evidence (3:1-2). He encourages his readers to put their trust in the promise, because it comes from the Scripture (3:2). Relying on the Scripture as his main source of reference, the author alludes to the creation narrative and the Noah's flood in Genesis 1 and 7 respectively (3:5-6) as evidence of God's intervention into human history with similar cosmic consequences.

Building on his argument based on faith and trust, the author asks the reader not to use 'human chronometry' as standard for measuring God's delay. He argues that God's timing is different from that of humans because unlike mortals, God lives in eternity and is not limited by time (3:8). Since humans lack the capacity to accurately calculate the time of the Parousia, the author instructs his readers to trustfully wait for their Lord to fulfil the promise concerning the Parousia at His own time (3:10). He then relates how they ought to live as they wait, to hasten the coming of the Lord (3:11-12).

The author then appeals to his readers to focus on what is within their means — how they live. The readers had life to live and they are to focus on how they conduct their lives rather than the event of the Second Coming which is completely out of their control. His readers, therefore, ought to be mindful of their moral conduct as they await the Parousia (3:11). For the author, their manner of life awaiting the end is very paramount. He believes the moral conduct of the readers can either hasten or delay Christ's return (3:12). In v. 9 of the pericope, the writer points out that Christ's return delays because God wants all to come to repentance.

This presupposes that the lack of repentance on the part of the readers hinders the Parousia: the day all who are supposed to be part of the 'new world' repent, the Lord will



come. The basis of the assumption is that “the new heaven and the new earth” promised has no place for the unrighteous. According to the author, the text new world is a place where righteousness dwells (v. 13). Consequently, moral uprightness of the readers actually begins the new era from now (3:12). The author believes right moral conduct of his readers can bring about the transformation that God seeks in the new earth and the new heaven.

But what kind of holiness does the text prescribe to the reader? It is the moral uprightness underpinned by the words of the prophets and that of the Lord’s apostles (3:1-2). In other word, it is holistic uprightness, holiness that covers all human relations. That is being upright in our relationship toward God, self, others and nature (3:14). For the author of 2 Peter, the judgment that comes with the Parousia encompasses how the humankind handles these four-dimensional relationships.

How the Baptist Christian life fits in these moral relations will form the basis of our intercultural reading of the text. A particular attention will be given to the moral obligation to the environment.

#### **4.4 Intercultural Engagement**

The aim of the chapter is to engage two cultures with the purpose of challenging and mitigating the lack of ecological care that emerged out of Baptists’ apocalyptic preaching.

Apocalyptic preaching in Ghana is a common phenomenon, particularly among the Baptist Ministers of the Ghana Baptist Convention. From the data analysed, the focus of these preachers is to remind their audience about the imminent Second Coming of Christ, and how they ought to prepare toward it. As a way of preparation, the preachers

urge their followers to believe in Christ and live a life worthy of His Name. The content of their messages reveals that apart from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, holiness is considered a requirement for salvation at the end.

However, the righteousness that these ministers preach is unbalanced. Their morality appears to concentrate on three-dimensional relationship of the humankind: relation with God, self and others. Even in regard to others, their preaching is limited because 'it does not incorporate' social justice. The Baptist Preachers' moral teaching is silent also on ecological ethics and hence does not promote positive relationship between the Christian and his/her environment. On the contrary, their sermons often prescribe hopeless destiny for the non-human world, and as a result generate negative attitude toward it.

Considering the centrality of the theme of 'morality' in the second epistle of Peter, it is appropriate to deduce that there were problems with the concept that the author seek to correct. Possibly, the concept of holiness that he sought to correct in the epistle is bewildered with some of the challenges similar to the apocalyptic teaching on the subject by Baptist Preacher in Ghana today. Granted that assumption is true, then the concept in 2 Pet. 3:1-13 could be taken as the author's approach of salvaging the situation. The contemporary reader can benefit from these solutions when the concept is carefully considered holistically.

#### **4.4.1 The Dimensions of Holistic Morality**

The concept of morality that the writer of 2 Peter discusses is holistic in nature. The concept touches on the four aspects of relationships that constitute a complete personhood: relationship with God, self, others and nature. According to the author, the kind of righteousness that hastens the coming end must be inclusive of the four levels of

relationships. This section discusses how the author makes use of the different levels of relationship of the humankind to persuade his reader to pursue holistic righteousness.

### **A. Righteousness towards God**

The basis for the call to holiness is the faith of the reader. According to the author, the faith that he shares with the reader is rooted in righteousness, and he identifies God and Jesus Christ as the origin of it (1:1). The nature of the faith that the reader received gives him/her the impetus to live existence holy because God himself is holy. The righteousness to which the reader is called to has the righteousness of God as the standard. Also, by virtue of their faith, the readers received what the author referred to as ‘divine nature’ that demands that they live a life worthy of their new nature (1:3).

The view of the biblical writer is shared by the Baptists faith community in Ghana. Baptists believe that the Christian is set apart for life of holiness by the virtue of his/her relationship with God. This is clearly expounded in the Constitution’s article on sanctification of the believer. It states that “believers by regeneration are set apart to moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit indwelling in them.”<sup>311</sup> Baptists, therefore, view the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as the ‘new or divine nature’ which is acquired by the believer through regeneration. This gives the believer a new status and a new disposition for holy living.

### **B. Righteousness towards Self**

The second dimension of the believers’ righteousness, according to the biblical author, is towards themselves (1:3-4). He argues that the believer by regeneration acquires a new nature that is not affected by the corruptions in this world (1:4). Engaging in sinful

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<sup>311</sup> Ghana Baptist Convention, *Constitution*, art.6, Sec., 6, 11.

lifestyles, therefore, is living against the new-self they received. For the author, the new-self of the believer desires holiness rather than the lust of the world. This is because the new nature grants them everything needed for godly life (1:3). The author appeals to the reader to be diligent in cultivating the moral qualities of their faith, because it makes them useful and fruitful (1:5-8). He adds that moral qualities such as goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, kindness and love are what distinguish them as people who are called and chosen, and the practice of these qualities gives them entrance into the eternal kingdom of Christ (1:9-11).<sup>312</sup>

The point of the author is unambiguous. That is, righteousness gives the believer access to the Kingdom of God because it gives proof of his/her faith which is itself rooted in the righteousness of God and Christ (1:1). The nature of the new world that comes with Christ return is righteousness (3:13). In the view of the writer, the believers resolve to live in holiness begins the new era. He, therefore, requests of the reader to hasten the coming end by their good moral conducts (3:11-12).

The perception bears some similarity with the Baptists' concept of the kingdom. The Baptists believe that the kingdom is the realm of salvation that the humankind access through trustful and childlike commitment to Jesus Christ. The kingdom, for the Baptists, can be access on earth through the labour and prayers of the Christian, and these are able to make God's will a possibility on the earth. The kingdom, they believe, will be consummated at Christ's return.<sup>313</sup>

The belief touches on prayer and 'labour' as means of ensuring that the kingdom comes on earth. The 'labour' in this case takes care of other Christian disciplines that constitute

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<sup>312</sup> Thomas and Black, *The New Testament*, 544.

<sup>313</sup> Ghana Baptist Convention, *Constitution*, art.6, Sec., 14, 15.

a lifestyle that makes the believer a 'replica' of Christ. For the Baptists, Christ's return will bring the kingdom of God in full because at His coming all unrighteousness that opposes the will of God will be done away with, and Christ will establish His kingdom where righteousness will dwell in full.

### **C. Righteousness towards the Other**

Making oneself ready for the coming era requires not only righteousness towards self but also towards others. The author makes this point when he speaks on how his readers ought to conduct their lives in their respective communities as they await the Parousia (3:11). To understand the author's recommendation, we need to be aware of the socio-historical context of the original readers. According to Holladay, the real readers are living in society where they suffer persecution by isolation on the ground of faith and practice.<sup>314</sup>

The author, therefore, urges them to conduct themselves morally for two purposes. First, because the nature of the faith they received both empower and require righteous living (1:1,3). Secondly and more importantly, they employed their good moral conduct as a witness or testimony to non-Christians. The moral witness in the first place according to the author, shows the example of the lifestyle that is approved of God and therefore, generate positive moral transformation in their communities (3:14). It also serves as a testimony against the unbelieving community on the Day of Judgment (2:4-10).

The Baptists concept of the believers' witness to the society through exemplary lifestyles is congruent to that of the author of 2 Peter. Besides the obligation to practice good morals on the basis of his/her status as a child of God and association with the

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<sup>314</sup> Holladay, *New Testament Introduction*, 736.

church, the believer also has moral obligation towards the society in which s/he resides. Most of the Baptist preachers interviewed, believe the righteous practice of the Christian distinguishes him/her as belonging to a different kingdom that has the seal of righteousness, and such holy practices of the believer aid in societal transformation. They believe that righteous lifestyle of the Christian benefits others in the communities s/he resides in. Like the author of 2 Peter, the Baptist preacher believes moral conduct of the believer serves as a mean of witness to the unbelieving community for the purpose of change or as testimony against them on the Day of Judgment if they ignore such exemplary practices as God's call to repentance.<sup>315</sup>

#### **D. Righteousness towards Nature**

The idea of ecological righteousness of the author of 2 Peter can be inferred from his expressions about the heaven and the earth (3:7, 10, 13). For instance, the writer is clear on his stance on the final destiny of the present world, and that destiny is destruction by fire (vv. 7, 10). Interpreting the two verses literally and in isolation, they appear unfriendly to the ecological agenda. They do not encourage environmental care and indirectly promote actions that are injurious to the environment. The literal readers of the text may conclude that environmental preservation is unnecessary because nature after all is 'preserved for destruction' at the end.

The interpretation seems to be the most popular among many Christians all over the world. In the United States for example, some eschatological preachers think that promoting the environmental agenda is ungodly because doing so hinders the coming

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<sup>315</sup> Ghana Baptist Convention, *Constitution*, art.6, Sec., 8, 12.

end.<sup>316</sup> The situation in Ghana is not different. For instance, while Ghana Baptist Convention in its constitution has a clear doctrinal statement that encourages responsible stewardship towards the environment, the Ghanaian Baptist eschatological preaching ignore the issues of the environment.<sup>317</sup>

On the contrary, reading the two verses in their larger context and linking it to v. 13, make it obvious that the author of 2 Peter 3 speaks of the transformation of the present world, and not its destruction. Taking for example, the Greek word, *καινότης*, translated as 'new', does not indicate new as alternative to the old but 'new in quality'. This suggests that what the author imagines for the present heaven and earth in vv. 7, 10, is transformation towards qualitative new existence and not destruction. The assertion agrees with the opinion of most scholars who argue that the v. 7 need to be interpreted as rhetorical statement on the backdrop of the Apocalyptic genre by the biblical author employed and very common in the second century CE. For instance, Moo asserts that the text belongs to the apocalyptic genre that often describes the end in symbolic language. He explains that the use of fire in the OT does not connote destruction but is a metaphorical way of speaking of judgment.<sup>318</sup>

Lucas agrees with Moo when he states that the metaphor of fire as symbolic language speaks of a judgment that brings about purification.<sup>319</sup> By these interpretations it is, therefore, unreasonable to see fire as agent of destruction because it cannot be a tool of purification and destruction at the same time.

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<sup>316</sup> Emerson, "The Cosmo in 2 Peter 3:1-13," 182-184.

<sup>317</sup> Asante, Director of Christian Education, G.B.C.

<sup>318</sup> Moo, "Eschatology and the Environment," 468. In the NT, for example, the writer of Revelation describes the followers of Jesus as in white because they are washed in the blood (7:14).

<sup>319</sup> Lucas, "New Testament and Environment," 54.

How then can the author's concept of morality that results in the transformation of nature be appropriated by the Baptist Church in Ghana? The researcher adopts the autonomous polity that gives the local church freedom to operate without control from the Convention, as a mean of contextualizing the text in the Ghanaian reality. Following the approach, we consider the autonomous local Baptist Church as an 'ecological unit'.

#### **4.4.2 The Baptist Church as Ecological Unit**

The Ghana Baptist Convention unlike other denominations in the country adopts the polity known as congregationalism that gives the local church autonomy. The word "autonomous" comes from two Greek words translated to mean "self" and "law". Autonomy, therefore, means self-governing or self-directing. Autonomy as a church polity adopts a form of church governance, styles of leadership and structure of authority that is entirely different. Autonomy in the context of the Baptist polity implies that "Every local church is a complete body of Christ because of His presence in the church. Every local church is therefore competent on its own to pursue the Great Commission but at the same time must co-operate with other local churches to achieve the Great Commission."<sup>320</sup>

In the context of the polity, the Baptists use the term "church" in reference to the "local congregation of baptized believers and not the Baptist denomination as whole"<sup>321</sup>. The autonomy gives each Baptist church among other things the power to choose its pastoral leadership, determines its worship form, decides financial matters and directs other church-related affairs without outside control or supervision. The polity confers on the Baptist church four-fold mandate: self-governance, self-propagating, self-supporting

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<sup>320</sup> Ghana Baptist Convention, *Constitution*, art.6, Sec., 19, 18 (Acts 13:1-3; 15:1-23; 1 Corinthians 12:12-20; Ephesians 4:1-13; 2 Corinthians 8:1-5; Revelation 1:11).

<sup>321</sup> "Baptists Believe in Church Autonomy," <http://www.baptistdistinctives.org/resources/articles/church-autonomy>.



and self-financing.<sup>322</sup> The researcher explores how the Baptist church can use its autonomy in furtherance of the ecological agenda.

Ecology basically refers to the analysis of the interrelationships between living organisms and their physical environment. The interrelatedness between the living and non-living organism in a particular environment is known as ecosystem. Ojemen believes that “Ecosystems affect human beings, other living organisms and environmental health in areas of politics, development, chemical and biological living, employment, feeding, housing, clothing, culture, economic life and social interactions, population distribution and control, among other aspects.”<sup>323</sup>

According to him, the ecosystem impacts all areas of human life regardless of one’s location. In his view, there must be also theological approach to studying the ecological systems apart from the scientific and political approaches that are normally being used. He, however, noted that though the Old Testament is full of injunctions that draw attention to ecological agenda; theology has not been as fast as the sciences in studying and bringing on board existential ethics on the nature of relationship between humanity and the natural environment.<sup>324</sup> Nwaigbo appears to have strong conviction that the Church’s social doctrine is key to transforming the economic order of the African society. He argues that the social doctrine of the Church entails fundamental ideals that “will save the human race — sense of community, care for the earth, solidarity with the

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<sup>322</sup> “Baptists Believe in Church Autonomy,” <http://www.baptistdistinctives.org/resources/articles/church-autonomy>.

<sup>323</sup> Cosmas A. Ojemen, “Ecological Sustainability of Parishes in Africa: A Canon Law Framework,” *African Ecclesial Review* 55, no. 3&4 (2013): 1.

<sup>324</sup> Ojemen, “Ecological Sustainability,” 2.

physical creation, environmental stewardship and responsibility, and respect for nature and every form of life.”<sup>325</sup>

Nwaigbo ties the salvation of the human race to the well-being of the rest of creation. Similarly, Dennis commenting on the subject contends that the ecclesial community ought to work towards a theology that shows a clear link between “God’s creative act and God’s saving act in Jesus Christ.”<sup>326</sup> The approach seems appropriate for the African context where there is no apparent separation between the sacred and the secular. In explaining the African worldview, Mbiti opines, “the earth and all nature are sacred and energized with the spiritual forces. The African religious views find the presence of the spirits throughout the cosmos, especially, the significance of the spirits of the ancestors, who bring many blessings, fertility, health and life to the human community.”<sup>327</sup>

The proposition does not only show how relevant nature is to the human existence but also perceives it as sacred. This, therefore, means that the African Church in executing its mandate to the humankind cannot exclude the issues of the environment. In our engagement, the researcher re-reads the eco-theology of the author of 2 Peter 3 in the context of the four-fold mandate of the Baptist Church in Ghana.

### **A. The Church’s Self-Propagating Mandate and the Environment**

The Baptist Church takes seriously the command of the Lord Jesus Christ to preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). According to the majority of the ministers interviewed, most of the churches in relation to the afore-mentioned command, channel

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<sup>325</sup> Ferdinand Nwaigbo, “Ecological Sensitivity in the New Evangelization of the Church in Africa,” *African Ecclesial Review* 55, no. 3&4 (2013): 155.

<sup>326</sup> Edward Dennis, “Sublime Communion: The Theology of the Natural World in *Laudato Si’*,” *Theological Studies* 77, no. 2 (June, 2016): 379.

<sup>327</sup> John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), 2.

more than half of their resources to missionary work. The missionary agenda of the church, however, is geared towards the salvation of the 'human soul'. For many of its members, the church's core mandate is to save 'lost souls'. This makes the mandate of the church deficient in nature because it limits the usefulness of the gospel to the spiritual needs of humankind. Consequently, the Baptist preaching of the gospel says very little about holistic development, social justice or cry of the poor/earth. The deficiency is evident in the messages of eschatological preachers where the issues of salvation and judgment of the human soul is overemphasized to the detriment of social justice and ecological agenda. Besides, ecological disasters are often used as signs that authenticate the message of the end.

The author of 2 Peter, however, places the preaching of the gospel in the context of the community. For him, the Christian's witness is to the entire community including the environment. He thinks the reader ought to use his/her good moral conduct and godliness as witnessing tools that must lead to the salvation of the entire creation (3:11). He also believes that the Christian moral witness has the potential of hastening the Second Coming that will ultimately leads to transformation of nature into what he called the new earth and the new heaven (3:13). Making reference to the Pauline writings (3:15-16), it is appropriate to interpret the author's thought in v. 7 to mean transformation. For instance, Paul speaking on God's redemptive plan for the world links the salvation of the humankind to the entire creation (Rom. 8:19-25).

Based on these New Testament writers, contemporary African scholars believe that the evangelization drive of the church must include the environment. For example, Nwaigbo reveals that the African thinks in terms of community, not individual person. The fundamental idea of the African person is that of a community — the whole community of God's creation — not only of individual person. He refers to the earth as

mother with a womb that preserves, protects and reproduces its content. For him, creation as ‘womb of the cosmos’ takes care of not only the human environment but also the family and social life. He reiterates that the African church in presenting the good news either through proclamation, witnessing or service must include the entire ‘mother earth’ and not only to the humankind.<sup>328</sup>

Similarly, Stephan de Beer speaking on our ecological crisis states that our dumping sites reveals what is prophetically erroneous with the society. He reveals that the sites harbor the poor that are discarded with toxic materials, dirty needles and wasted food. Relying on the writing of Paul, he argues that the discarded poor are the chosen of God (1 Cor. 1:27-28), and needed to be reached by the church. He adds that Jesus Christ’s death outside the city discloses His desire to save the neglected of the society. Stephan de Beer unveils three things in the city outside the gate — “vocation, the gift of informality and the quest for justice.”<sup>329</sup>

With reference to vocation, Stephan de Beer explains that the calling of the church is to attend to the crisis at the dumping sites outside the city.<sup>330</sup> To her, salvation of souls is inseparably intertwined with the issues of the environment and any evangelistic program that is holistic in nature must deal with both.

Relying on the work of Gutierrez, Castillo suggests that the concept of integral ecology establishes inseparable relationship between salvation and the historical process of human liberation. In the words of Pope Francis integral ecology is a call for “reordering

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<sup>328</sup> Nwaigbo, “Ecological Sensitivity,” 160-167.

<sup>329</sup> S. De Beer, “Jesus in the Dumping Sites: Doing Theology in the Overlaps of Human and Material Waste,” *HTS Theological Studies* 70, no. 3 (2014): 8.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

of eco-social networks of the world so that they may serve the common good.”<sup>331</sup> Quoting Pope Francis, Castillo states,

we have to realize that a true ecological approach must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. He maintains that strategies for a solution to arrive at an integral ecology demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.<sup>332</sup>

The call for integral ecology, according to Pope Francis is an invitation to enter into the Christian mystery of salvation that speaks to all facets of creation.

### **B. The Church’s Self-Governance Mandate and the Environment**

Contrary to the practice in the other denominations, the local Baptist Church is independent of the denominational controls. It is believed that the ‘local congregation of baptized believers’ is capable of governing itself. There are three key elements that are relevant to the effective administration of the local Baptist Church. These include:

- a) A community of faithful believers who are regularly brought together; though the community is part of the Ghana Baptist Convention, it is independent of control by the Convention;
- b) The Church Council that comprises of heads of various auxiliaries of the church chaired by the head pastor is responsible for the administration of the community;
- c) The head pastor with the assistance of his/her associates, the council and deacons preside over the people on behalf of the council and the Convention as their proper leader and guide.<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Daniel P. Castillo, “Integral Theology as a Liberationist Concept,” *Theological Studies* 77, no. 2 (June, 2016): 364.

<sup>332</sup> Nwaigbo, “Ecological Sensitivity,” 365.

<sup>333</sup> Ghana Baptist Convention, *Constitution*, art.6, Sec., 19, 17-18.

According to Nwaigbo the parish community ecologically bears certain semblance to other human communities. He thinks that each parish in itself is an ecological system and is part of the larger cosmic eco-system. Writing on the Catholic parishes and their relationship with ecology, Nwaigbo describes the parish as community with some definite landed properties cited at one location or several locations within the parish territory. One of such is where the members gather at regular intervals for worship, teaching and other parochial activities. The parish may have other landed properties that could be used for farming, social activities, schooling or socio-economic operations of the parish.<sup>334</sup>

The idea that runs through the discourse on the governance of the Baptist Church is community — that is the faithful members of the church and the properties they own are situated in the community in which the church is sited. However, the attitude of the Baptist Church and its members do not conform to the tenets of ideal community. The members appear to be unconcern about ecological issues and engage in conducts that are harmful to the environment.<sup>335</sup>

With regard to the Baptist Church for example, siting of church buildings and other landed properties does not take into consideration the problems of the environment. There is no or little concern about toilet facilities, tree planting, and the problem of littering. There is no plan for ecological friendly source of energy, no master plan for

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<sup>334</sup> Nwaigbo, "Ecological Sensitivity," 160-167.

<sup>335</sup> Obaji M. Agbiji, "Religion and Ecological Justice in Africa: Engaging Value of Community as Praxis for Ecological and Socio-ecological Justice," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 71, no. 2 (2015): 1. Agbiji puts across the concern explicitly when he writes on how the value of community can be engaged as praxis for ecological justice. Whiles acknowledging some level of awareness among the Christian faith community recently in Nigeria, the Church could not achieve much with regard to developing a strong Christian ecological ideological orientation and activism amongst the faithful community for the ecosphere.

developing church structures and the need to use ecological friendly materials for constructing church projects.

The thought of community bears some similarity with that of the author of 2 Peter when he discusses the governance of the churches who are recipients of his letter (2 Pet. 1:1). The churches are believed to be scattered in communities in the region of Asia Minor. Though the churches do not have complex structures as is the present case, they used homes probably owned by some members as their worship places. With the author's concern for the environment and his call for measures that speeds up its transformation (2 Pet. 3:11-13), he might be appealing to church management system that favors nature. For instance, the allusion to the writings of the holy prophets (v. 2) which in effect is a reference to the Old Testament is full of commands that encourage ecological care. It is, therefore, logical to state that the writer of 2 Peter is calling for moral conduct that is eco-friendly. Therefore, decision on how worship centres and other social amenities owned by the church are built and the general attitude of the church to environmental agenda are his utmost concern.

### **C. The Church's Self-Supporting Mandate and the Environment**

The mandate speaks of support systems of its members and the social responsibilities of the Baptist Church. In other words, the mandate confers on each local church rather than the Ghana Baptist Convention (except in isolated cases), the task of meeting the needs of its members and the church community as a whole. In response to the task, most of the Baptist churches set up welfare funds as a measure to meeting such needs. According to most of the interviewees, the indigents include the sick, the bereaved, the widow or widower, the aged, the disabled and needy students. Neither of these persons

qualify as beneficiaries by mere fact that they have a challenge nor by their membership. Only members who are contributors to the fund in good standing are eligible to benefit from the fund. This defeats the purpose of setting up the fund because the poor most often is unable to meet these conditions.

From the data gathered, the Baptist church, apart from meeting the needs of its members, occasionally engage in activities that impact their communities. For instance, few of the churches get involved in social interventions such as education, clean-up exercises, building of toilet facilities and tree planting as their contribution to the community. Furthermore, these social involvements are most often geared towards ‘winning souls’ from the community rather than tackling a particular environment problem. This is because these actions are often part of evangelistic strategies of the churches and not a well thought out plan to salvage the present ecological crisis. More-so, the Ghana Baptist Convention as denomination has no document on how it intends to tackle ecological issues apart from a mere phrase in its constitution that states “the humankind has stewardship responsibility towards nature.”<sup>336</sup> It is, therefore, fair to conclude that the support system of the Baptist church speaks only to the spiritual needs of the humankind and has no space for the environment.

The idea of social support systems in the church for the benefit of its members and the community at large can be implied from the second letter of Peter. The author reminds his readers of God’s grace for spiritual life and godly living (1:3-4); his encouragement to develop the Christian graces of goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, kindness and love (1:5-7) and his call to witness to people within their communities through acceptable moral conducts (3:11,14)<sup>337</sup> are the basis of the assertion.

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<sup>336</sup> Ghana Baptist Convention, *Constitution*, art.6, Sec., 19.

<sup>337</sup> Thomas and Black, *The New Testament*, 544.



The call to develop and exercise the virtues such as goodness, self-control, brotherly kindness and love conveys the thought of communal life. It is assumed that readers of 2 Peter co-exist with their fellow Christians, non-Christians and other living and non-living organisms in communities that also harbour their worship centres. The author's command to his readers is to exercise brotherly love as a way of calling for social justice that benefits the entire community — humans and non-humans. The concept sees the community as ecosystem where humans, non-human organisms and other physical structures are considered as 'brothers' and must experience divine goodness and love. Pope Francis seems to concede with the author of 2 Peter when he explains the concept "ethic of care" in the encyclical letter entitled *Laudato Si'*. The Pontiff states that *Integral Ecology is a liberationist concept* that defines the relationship of humanity not only to his/her neighbour but also to the earth. According to him, the humankind is made by God to love God, neighbour and the non-human creation.<sup>338</sup> In view of this, it can be implied that the author of 2 Peter advocates for social justice that gives no demarcation between human and non-human creation.

#### **D. The Church's Self- Financing Mandate and the Environment**

The mandate explains the financial management and other economic activities of the Baptist Church. The local church has a singular authority to manage its incomes without any influence from the Convention. The income(s) of the church mainly come from tithes, offertory and other fund-raising activities that are organized from time to time. Twenty percent of the income from tithes and offertory is paid to the head office of the denomination as the church's contribution to support administration and missionary activities. The remaining eighty percent of the ordinary income plus income accruing

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<sup>338</sup> Castillo, "Integral Ecology," 369.

from fund-raising activities remains with the local church. The fund is applied to such things such as salaries of church workers, utility bills, church projects, donations and other things deemed worthy of support.

Besides the means of income afore-mentioned the Baptist Church is also involved in other income-generating activities. According to some interviewees, they include agriculture, education, medical services and other commercial ventures. Though all these economic activities are carried out in the community, the church has no financial allocation dedicated to addressing the problem of the environment though its members, who are the main financiers are residents in the community. More-so, the siting of some of these commercial ventures owned by the members of the church are not properly done, therefore, adds problems to the environment.

The attitude shows a clear disconnection from Agbiji's proposition where he proposes that the 'value of community' as used in the African context should be used as a tool in addressing the ecological menace on the continent. In addition to stewardship and eco-justice he argues that the concept of creation spirituality that rendered all aspects of creation as sacred imposes on the humankind to regard the entire creation (both human and non-human) as sacred.<sup>339</sup> Likewise, Edwards Dennis in analyzing the *Laudato Si's* theology of nature, discovered three strands namely — the value of non-human creatures in themselves before God, the concept of other creatures as revelatory of God, and the theology of the sublime communion of creation — calls for responsible theological orientation. Commenting on the third strand, Pope Francis laments that even though human life is grounded in three threads of relationships — with God, neighbour and the

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<sup>339</sup> Agbiji, "Religion and Ecological Justice," 3.

earth — Christian literature and preaching speaks only about relations with God and neighbour.<sup>340</sup>

The idea of sacredness of the entire creation is traceable in the thinking of the writer of second letter of Peter. Adopting the transformational interpretation of the pericope, the author thinks of a world where the quality of the whole creation will be transformed. The transformation is achievable through the righteous conduct of his readers (3:11-12, 14-15). Therefore, the call on the readers to holy life is to benefit the entire community of creation. This presupposes that the churches to which the author directs his epistle are encouraged to adopt social doctrine that contains plans for environmental care.

#### **4.4.3 A Call to Action to the Baptist Reader**

In the engagement between the text and reality, some gaps are discovered. Both the text and the reality preach morality as what humans can contribute to hasten the coming of the new era, however, the content of what constitutes righteousness differs. The point of departure between the messages of the two cultures is ecological righteousness. Contrary to the text which is rich with ideas that are sensitive to the issues of the environment, the Baptist churches in the Accra North Baptist Association teach morality that has little or no regard for ecological ethos. In their administration as autonomous congregations, the churches have no definite policy that promotes the environmental agenda.

In this regard, we draw the following as the call to action for the churches in the Accra North Baptist Association.

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<sup>340</sup> Dennis, "Theology of Nature," 368.

### A. Advancing Eco-Friendly Theology

Although ecological theology has not yet fully developed, some denominations are engaged in periodic discourses on problem of the environment. In prescribing a holistic solution to the crisis of the environment, Castillo identifies three intertwined levels of human life that is required for integral liberation. Quoting Gutierrez, he terms the approaches as socio-political, cultural/psychological and theological. He, however, admits that for lack of comprehensive ecological approach, what most people in the church community expect is “superficial rhetoric, sporadic acts of philanthropy and perfunctory expressions of concern for the environment, whereas any genuine attempt by groups within society to introduce change is viewed as a nuisance based on romantic illusions or an obstacle to be circumvented.”<sup>341</sup>

In view of this, Ormerod calls for what he termed as ‘ecological conversion’ that favours the ecosphere. Coined by Pope John Paul II, the term refers mainly to changed relationship to our natural environment. To achieve this transformation, Ormerod places the notion of ecological conversion within the general context of the conversions identified by Bernard Lonergan and extended by Robert Doran. Lonergan in his work, *Method in Theology* identifies the aspects of the conversion as religious, moral and intellectual. This was extended by Doran’s work to include the notion of psychic conversion as a distinct mode from those identified by Lonergan.<sup>342</sup>

In light of the above scholarly discourse, it seems proper to imply that the Baptist church like others in Ghana must seek ecological conversion that will alter the religious, moral and mental attitude of her members. In line of this, Nwaigbo, a priest of the Catholic

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<sup>341</sup> Dennis, “Sublime Communion: Laudato Si’,” 54.

<sup>342</sup> Neil Ormerod and Cristina Vanin, “Ecological Conversion: What Does It Mean?” *Theological Studies* 77, no. 2 (June, 2015): 329-330.

Church in Nigeria for instance advances the canonical legislations as suitable eco-theology that offers some framework to promote environmental management. He argues that the Scriptures stand as the basic tool for theology and can be profitably used to promote such things that project God, the cosmic reality and human beings. With reference to the creation narratives (Gen. 1—2), Nwaigbo perceives God as the Creator of the cosmic ecological system with human beings as centre and master of the cosmic system. He believes the narratives confer on humans the power to take charge of the cosmic system. From this viewpoint, Nwaigbo thinks that the Church has an obligation to direct humanity in this responsibility.<sup>343</sup>

The argument of the scholar anchors on the premise of relationships — between the Creator and the Church — which agrees with the thinking of the Baptist Church. The Baptist Church believes that its congregants are God’s children and masters of the created world. Drawing its inspiration from the Scriptures (Gen. 1—2), the Church believes that humankind has responsibility towards the cosmic system as stewards because they both relate with God the Creator and the rest of creation. Concurring with the idea of humanity’s stewardship, Okopido thinks that the concept of stewardship serves as a theological resource that motivates the church to engage in environmental activism.<sup>344</sup> It is fair, therefore, to state that the lack of responsibility towards the cosmic system is not due to absence of eco-theology but lack of doctrine(s) that care for the entire community.

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<sup>343</sup> Nwaigbo, “Ecological Sensitivity,” 186.

<sup>344</sup> Agbiji, “Religion and Ecological Justice,” 1.

## **B. The Nature of the Social Doctrine of the Baptist Church**

The social doctrine generally gives meaning to the dignity and the rights of the human person. According to Nwaigbo, the starting point for a true vision of society is the theological foundation of the church's social doctrine that recognizes the sacredness of human life and the dignity of the human person. Anthropologically, the doctrine must be equally concerned about, "the social nature of a human person, the principle of the common good, the relationship between the Church and the State, the option for the poor, the concept of 'subsidiarity and solidarity and the practice of social justice and peace in human society.'"<sup>345</sup>

He suggests that the churches in contemporary Africa incorporate the doctrine in their evangelization plan because it helps the church to achieve social cohesion, peace and justice in the society. Pope Francis reiterated this idea when he stated:

"Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it."<sup>346</sup> For the pontiff, the human and the non-human creation are inseparable, and must be considered as such by the church in her social mandate. This presupposes that the church's evangelistic drive ought to impact the community in its entirety. Considering the parish as a community, Ojemen thinks that the parish is ecologically similar to other human communities which are made up of living and non-living.<sup>347</sup> It is therefore, the missionary agenda that brings salvation (cohesion, peace and justice) to the whole community, both human and non-human, that respects sacredness of all. Social justice that addresses the problems of the environment, in effect tackles the concerns of

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<sup>345</sup> Nwaigbo, "Ecological Sensitivity," 162.

<sup>346</sup> Dennis, "Sublime Communion: Laudato Si'," 139.

<sup>347</sup> Ojemen, "Ecological Sustainability," 177.

the poor who are often the most affected.<sup>348</sup> In line with this, Stephan de Beer argues that the quest for justice raised from the dumping sites where the poor of the society dwells poses a challenge to the church to theologically re-think of constructions of justice from below, in solidarity with such outcast communities.<sup>349</sup>

The social interventions of the Baptist Church, however, focus on the soul winning to the detriment of social justice and the environmental care. The Church has neither definite social doctrine nor written document that spells out the church's obligation towards the locality in which it resides. In the absence of well thought out plan, the Church engages in sporadic social interventions from time to time as a 'bait' to win members of the community into their folds. The interventions appear incapable of salvaging the entire community of creation and, therefore, needs re-consideration.

### **C. Eco-friendly Initiatives Apposite for the Baptist Churches**

The Baptist churches in the Accra North Baptist Association of the Ghana Baptist Convention like others in Africa have a need of well-defined eco-friendly initiative that takes care of health needs of its members, and the community. The initiatives, though unexhaustive, have the potential of making the churches eco-friendly and also promote positive attitude towards ecological issues. The researcher adopts some recommendations made to the parishes of the Nigerian Catholic Church by Nwaigbo.

#### **a) Master Plan for Physical Development**

In the first place, the Baptist churches must have a master plan. A master plan is defined as "a draft design of a development unit so that the different structures that would be fitted on the unit, immediately and/or in the future, would be specified in the proper

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<sup>348</sup> Ojemen, "Ecological Sustainability," 177.

<sup>349</sup> De Beer, "Jesus in Dumping Sites," 5.

places in the drawing.”<sup>350</sup> It is assumed that because these designs are done by experts the topographical conditions of the land are taken into consideration before structures are sited and the practice results to maximization of landmass. The master plan seeks to identify location for main Church, residential quarters, auditorium, car parks, buildings, culverts, pathways, toilets, gardening, recreation facilities, catechetical/social halls, sales centers and open spaces. This helps to avoid the situation where the structure development of the church is left in the hand of the pastor, who may not know anything about architectural development.

#### **b) Promotion of Tree Planting**

The leadership of most of the Baptist churches focuses on construction activities. It is a common practice for pastors in Ghana to boast of their church buildings, hence the concentration of significant effort on construction activities that result in felling of trees, plants and cutting of flowers that have tremendous impact on the ecosystem. More so, it is fashionable presently for churches to have their premises tiled with pavement blocks with no space provided for grassing or planting of flowers or plants. For the purpose of eco-sustainability, the churches must make room for green-grassing and tree planting both in their premises and their communities. This therefore, means that the Baptist Church must not be left behind but takes front-role responsibility in promoting greenery (the growing of vegetation) in their environs and it is best to begin from the church premises.

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<sup>350</sup> Nwaigbo, “Ecological Sensitivity,” 186.



### **c) Construction of Drainage Systems for Erosion and Polluted Water Control**

Many Baptist Churches in Accra are faced with challenge of perennial flood and soil erosion in the period of heavy rains. The situation is largely due to improper siting of structures, including church buildings, on water ways. The churches could be in need of culverts to help direct the flood out of the premises to preventing damage. Such culverts could also need input of professionals to get the entire church landscape well drained and floor waters properly directed out of the compound. Such drainage systems help to preserve land and buildings from erosion-related disasters.

### **d) Purpose-made Refuse Disposal Bins**

Disposal bins strategically placed in the church's premises go a long way to keep the compound free from dirty. The bins should be placed at vantage locations where people often congregates on well-constructed holders fixed to the ground. The purpose is to make waste disposal convenient to the congregants. Hence, instead of littering the premises with disposals such as waste papers, wraps and other disposable items, the bins provide alternative way of disposing them. In like manner, the lavatories should be constructed in strategic locations for proper disposal of waste products.

### **e) Control of Noise Pollution**

Another way that the churches contribute to the hazards of the environment is through noise pollution. Most engagements of the church including catechetical, liturgical and social activities such as talking and singing lead to noise pollution. According to Nwaigbo, when acts of communication are limited only to the members of the groups

it ceases to be noise. It becomes pollution only when such activities disturb other persons whether within the Church premises or outside it.<sup>351</sup> The issue of noise pollution from worship centers in Ghana is of great concern to the general public.<sup>352</sup>

It is important, therefore, that the Church perceived generally as an agent of societal change does everything to curb noise making in its premises. The researcher in this regard makes the following suggestions to the Baptist churches in the Accra North Baptist Association:

- i) Training of ushers to properly manage and curtail noise and disturbances during liturgical and other public functions.
- ii) Deliberate attempts to contain liturgical communication within the vicinity of the premises by controlling the volumes of the public-address systems and hire experts to direct and confine the volume base to the assembly only.
- iii) The worshippers should also be educated on concern for others. Most noise pollutions are a result of lack of proper concern for the welfare and feeling of others.

#### **f) Catechesis and Sermon on Members' Attitude to Eco-sustainability**

The attitude of the members is influenced and transformed mostly through the teachings and the preaching programs of the church. Similarly, positive attitude towards the environment is achievable by deliberate promotion through catechesis and sermons. Pope Benedict XVI re-enforced the position when he called on the Roman Catholic Church

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<sup>351</sup> Nwaigbo, "Ecological Sensitivity," 188.

<sup>352</sup> Frimpong Boateng, Minister of Science and Environment of the Republic of Ghana. Comment made during Media Encounter on April 10, 2018. In recent times several opinion leaders openly express their disgust about the menace. For instance, Frimpong Boateng the Minister responsible for Science and Environment, lamenting on the phenomenon suggests that noisy communicative means such as megaphones that are used by the Muslim and Christian community as a mean of inviting and attracting worshippers should be replaced by text messages that are noiseless.

to use the pulpit to encourage its members and the political leadership to promote the fundamental good of the land and water for the human life of present and the future generation.<sup>353</sup> Since the church is the centre for catechetical formation, it behoves the Baptist churches to take charge of such catechesis to educate their membership on issues concerning the ecology.

#### **g) Committees on Parish Ecological Sustainability**

The Baptist Church has several committees in place to help in the smooth running of the churches. The committees cover such areas that are of importance and need attention of the members. It is important, therefore, that the churches have committees on ecological sustainability that assist in ensuring eco-friendly activities. These committees should be set up at all levels — church, association, sector and Convention — to ensure proper implementation of environmental management practice and promote ecological sustainability. The committee at the level of the Convention is to ensure that real actions are being taken at all levels to promote ecological discourse. It also acts as regulatory body that encourages actions and initiatives towards environmental care.

#### **h) Mobilization of the Youths for Eco-sustainability**

The most active part of church population everywhere is the youth. Though some are gainfully employed and are not readily available, some are equally available and are playing very significant roles. Most of them see the church as important centers for peer group interactions and activities, get themselves involved in diverse groups. They prove usefulness in the liturgy through their participation in the choir, evangelism, teaching the word of God and other services. It is important that the church exploits their regular

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<sup>353</sup> Ormerod and Vanin, "Ecological Conversion," 329-330.

presence for the purpose of ecological formation and care. Besides, they have the energy and the dynamism to assist the church put in place initiatives that are ecologically sustainable in their premises.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

Eschatological and apocalyptic preaching remain a common phenomenon in Ghana. The preachers identify moral conduct as prerequisite for participation in the new era. In view of this the preachers, including those of the Baptist Church, make believer's uprightness as common subject of their sermons. However, the morality that the Baptist pastors preach has little or no recourse to the matters of the environment. Instead environmental problems are cited as signs of the end. Hence the Ghanaian society is faced with numerous ecological challenges that carry hazardous consequences. In this chapter, the research engaged the text with the Baptist churches in the Accra North Baptist Association as a mean to giving an alternative way of preaching morality.

The engagement reveals that the Baptist Church must first of all review its concept of morality to include the environment. In light of the concept drawn from the second epistle of Peter, moral conduct that God demands from believers includes the environment. It is righteousness that affects our relationship with God, self, others and nature.

Further, the Baptist churches are not only communities of faithful believers but must be considered an ecological unit, comprising of humans, other living and non-living organisms. In view of the fact that believers are the light of the world (Matt. 5:13), the church community has an advocacy role to play in dealing with the challenges of nature. This requires social doctrines that preach salvation that is concerned with the entire creation (Rom. 8:18-23).

Finally, the church must be involved in taking initiatives that are eco-friendly. For example, road map for structure development, beautification of their localities, sanitation and any other engagements must be geared towards ecological preservation.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Introduction

The chapter is divided into three main parts namely; summary, conclusion and recommendations. The summary contains a brief account of the research guided by the statement of the problem and the research questions. The conclusion covers the main findings of the research, whilst recommendations have been offered for further study and for effective pastoral practice.

#### 5.2 Summary

The research aimed at the ecological reading of 2 Pet. 3:1-13, against the background of its use by environmental sceptics. In the awareness that the interpretation of a text is not complete until it is made alive in a specific context, the researcher further explored the Baptists' eschatological preaching and its relevance for ecological agenda. In order to investigate the problem, the study addressed the following questions:

1. What is the call to action of 2 Peter 3 as regards to the environment?
2. What does ecological reading of 2 Pet. 3:1-13 contribute to or otherwise to the present ecological crisis in the nation Ghana?
3. What implication does the reading of the text by Baptist Ministers have on the environment?

To answer these questions, the research employed the communicative approach proposed by Ossom-Batsa as its theoretical framework. The framework follows a three-step approach: exegesis of reality, exegesis of the text and engagement.

Following the framework, the researcher examined as the first step the eschatological preaching of the Baptist pastors in the Accra North Baptist Association. The three main research tools — interviews, focus-group discussions and personal observations were employed for data collection. From the analysis of the data collected, three main issues emerged.

First, the concept of stewardship comes out as the dominant model of the Baptist eschatological preacher. The concept considers the humankind as ‘stewards’ rather than ‘possessors of the earth’. The stewardship of the Christian, according to the Baptists, is based on his/her relationship with the Creator and the community of creation. As faithful children of God, Baptists believe Christians are duty-bound to take proper care of the non-human creation because it belongs to God. Besides, humans are part of creation, and are either affected positively or negatively by what happens to it.

Second, the Baptists see eschatology as an opportunity for accountability. As stewards, the Second Coming of Jesus presents the opportunity to account for their stewardship. The stewardship responsibility, according to the Baptists includes humans’ responsibilities toward the eco-sphere. On such occasion, the faithful stewards receive rewards and the unfaithful punishment.

Lastly, the Baptists preach morality as the basis of accountability at the end. The preachers consider faithful stewards as righteousness, and the unfaithful stewards as unrighteousness. The morality that the Baptists preach, however, is limited in content. The focus is the relationship with God, self and others, and has little or no space for ecological ethos. There is very little or no preaching and teaching about ecology.

Furthermore, ecological consciousness is not present in church building, and no comprehensive plan for tree planting and sanitation is present. This culminated into attitude among the membership that showed little or no appreciation for the present world.

The second step of the approach proposes the exegesis of the pericope. The rhetorical analysis proposed by Moller was used to analyse the text. From the analysis, three main theological themes emerged which were used to engage the reality.

The first theme that arose was the faith of the original readers. The author points to the magnificent promises of God as the basis of their belief, of which the Parousia is one. And because God is always true to His promises, the readers must have faith that the Second Coming of Christ is a certainty (2 Pet. 1:4a; Matt. 19:28; Mark 14:25; Rom. 8:19-22), despite the seeming delays. The writer reveals that there is a day set aside by God, but the time of the divine intervention is unknown to humankind and cannot be calculated through human 'chronometry'.

Secondly, the exegesis of the text revealed the author calls on his readers to live in trust of the promise of the Second Coming because of the source of the promise; the words of the prophets and the apostles (2 Pet. 3:2). The author urged his readers to avert their minds with the promises in the Scriptures concerning the Parousia because they make it trustworthy. By appealing to the Scriptures, the writer of 2 Peter 3 alluded to instances of divine interventions in the biblical history (v. 1). For instance, the Noah's flood (Gen. 7) and the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19) are cited as proof of God's actions in the past that warrant trust in the promise of the Parousia.

Lastly, the author identified morality as the readers' contribution in hastening the coming end. Apart from faith and trust which are elements of belief, the moral conduct of the readers, as they wait for the Parousia, begins the process of transformation that they



seek in the new world. Unlike the morality that the Baptists in Ghana preach, the author teaches a morality that is holistic in nature. It is holiness that affects the four-dimensional relationships of the humankind; holiness towards God, self, others and nature.

The third and final step of the methodology engaged the text and the context in a dialogue. It sought to provide answers to such questions as; what does ecological reading of 2 Peter 3:1-13 contribute to or otherwise to the present ecological crisis of our nation Ghana? What implications does the preaching of the pericope by Baptist Ministers have for the environment? The section observed that the focus of the Baptist preacher is not the present earth but heaven; the new earth and the new heaven (v. 13). It is observed that even though the Baptists preach morality, the focus is to prepare members for heaven, hence very little is said about justice towards the environment. The study reveals that the process of finding solutions to the problems that emanates from the Baptist reading of the pericope begins with a search for what constitutes holistic morality. As discovered from the pericope, the concept of morality in its holistic form expresses itself at four levels of relationship; God, self, others and nature. It is discovered that the four dimensions are intrinsically connected. The engagement, however, focuses on environmental consciousness which is the point of departure between the text and reality.

As a way of remedy, the study considered each autonomous congregation as ecological units in the context of the congregational polity of the Baptists. Further, it explores how the freedom granted to the local churches can be employed for the benefit of the environment.

The approach is to help create ecological consciousness among the congregants. This can be achieved through preaching, teaching and programs that sensitize the congregation to be actively involved in ecological discourses that encourage positive care for the environment.

Besides, the churches ought to reframe their social doctrine that focuses only on spiritual needs of the humankind to a kind that works towards the redemption of the entire creation. This presupposes that their engagements must take into consideration the total good of their community. Finally, the churches are encouraged to get involved in initiatives that are eco-friendly. Some of the eco-friendly initiatives that the Baptist churches should consider include putting in place master plan for infrastructural development, tree planting, construction of proper drainage system, provision of dustbin to ease refuse disposal, control of noise at worship centres, regular catechesis on the issues of the environment and create committees that promote ecological care.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

The thesis explored the concept of eschatology and apocalypticism and its consequences for the environment, by examining 2 Pet. 3:1-13. To achieve this purpose, the communicative approach was employed.

The following are the main findings of the thesis:

The research reveals that the pericope does not justify the destructive exploitation of the earth. The focus of the text is, in fact, the destruction of neither the material world nor the doctrine of afterlife but on life in the 'now'. The study of the text revealed strong

emphasis on morality of the real readers in the present life. The moral doctrine contained in the pericope, however, is not just a list of moral conducts but a holistic morality. It is morality that includes nature.

The study of the reality on the contrary, showed that even though the Ghana Baptist Convention has a moral doctrine that promotes care for the present world, it is not reflected in the catechesis of its ministers. The morality preached by these ministers as basis of accountability at the end, focuses on sins in the armpit of sexuality, and says little about social justice and environmental care. There is, therefore, no link between the Baptists' eschatological preaching and ecological consciousness. The thesis seeks to breach this gap by proposing concrete steps to create ecologically sensitive Baptist churches.

Using the autonomy that characterised the local Baptist church as an opportunity of contextualization, the study seeks to consider the Baptist church as an ecological unit belonging to a larger ecological system. This means that the Baptists in Ghana pattern their moral doctrine after the holistic approach proposed by the text. It suggests a new way of evangelism that aims at not only 'saving lost souls' but at salvaging the entire creation of God (Rom. 8:18-23). This also calls for a social doctrine that prescribes and offers holistic approach to social interventions that are geared at 'saving' the whole community of creation.

Additionally, the study revealed the need of well-structured eco-theology for all Baptist churches. In place of constitutional framework that devotes only a phrase to ecological stewardship, the church needs detailed document that spells out clearly how the Baptist believer relates to his/her environment. The document is to help streamline the Baptist

churches' theology on ecology which will subsequently result in eco-related sermons and the attitudes that are eco-friendly.

Besides advancing eco-friendly theology, the research also proposes initiatives that the Baptist churches can put in place to make their churches eco-friendly. Such initiatives include developing a master plan for all church structures, well-structured drainage system for liquid waste disposal and to solve the problem of erosion, promotion of tree planting, use of purpose-made disposal bins, control of noise pollution and setting up committees to manage issues of the environment.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

At the end of the study, the researcher wants to articulate some recommendations for both academic and pastoral purposes. From the academic point of view, the research indicates some areas that need further study. These include:

1. Ecological reading of apocalyptic texts.
2. Eschatological preaching in the New Testament and its relevance for the Ghanaian Christianity.
3. Dualistic attitude in Baptist catechesis on earth/heaven and consequences for the environment.

For pastoral purposes, the researcher proposes that environmental issues be made part of Baptists' catechesis at all levels. In addition, the Baptist Seminaries, that are responsible for training ministers, must incorporate eco-ethics in their curricula. This, to a large extent, will help create the needed ecological awareness for the ministers for future pastoral practice.

Besides, regular training for both laity and the clergy on environmental issues should be encouraged. The primary aim of these trainings should be to promote environmental care and advocacy. Further, the churches should be encouraged to put in place initiatives that make them eco-friendly. Some of the initiatives suggested in the study include putting in place a master plan that guides structural development of the churches, proper drainage systems to control erosion and liquid waste, promoting tree planting, reduction of noise pollution in our services, proper siting of dust-bins and setting up committees that monitors and controls eco-friendly activities in the churches.

Finally, the researcher suggests that the Baptist Church in Ghana set aside a day on her calendar that should be dedicated to tree planting. On that day, every member of the church should be encouraged to plant a tree or two and nurture it till maturity. The exercise should be used to promote awareness on individual's responsibility towards the ecosphere.

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## APPENDIX I

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What are your general thoughts about the environment?
2. What is your assessment of the ecological condition in Ghana?
3. What factors do you think are responsible for the present state of the environment?
4. Do you think we have responsibility towards the environment?
5. Do you think the Christian Bible matters when it comes to the issue of the environment? If yes, how?
6. What relationship does the Bible prescribed to exist between the environment and humankind? Any text?
7. Do you ever use this text(s) to preach about the environment? If yes, is it on regular basis?
8. Does Christian/Baptist focus on eschatological discourse have any consequence for the environment?
9. What is your interpretation and application of the text; 2 Peter 3:1-13?
10. What key terms do you think informed your interpretation?
11. Do you think the interpretation and application of the above text has consequences for the environment?
12. Per your interpretation, what do you suggest preachers and other users of the Bible should do with the text?

**APPENDIX II**  
**PROFILE OF MINISTERS OF THE ACCRA NORTH BAPTIST**  
**ASSOCIATION**

**(Interviewed from 5th to 22nd of September 2017)**

**1. Rev. Enoch Thompson**

**Qualification:** MPhil Religions (Biblical Studies)

**Position:** Vice-President (Ministries) of the Ghana Baptist Convention

**2. Rev. Thomas Ammah**

**Qualification:** MTh. Applied Theology

**Position:** Director of Evangelism and Mission

**3. Rev. Asante Agyei**

**Qualification:** MA Christian Education

**Position:** Director of Christian Education

**4. Rev. George Mallet**

**Qualification:** MTh. Applied Theology and MTh. Pastoral Counselling

**Position:** Former Dean of Baptist Theological Seminary, and present Director of Ministry, Calvary Baptist Church, Adabraka.

**5. Rev. Francis Narterh**

**Qualification:** MA Ministry

**Position:** Chairman, Accra North Baptist Association and Head Pastor, Calvary Baptist Church, Adenta.

**6. Rev. SekyiYorke**

**Qualification:** BA Ministry and ACIB (Association of Chartered Institute of Bankers)

**Position:** Chairman, Accra Baptist Ministers Fellowship and Head Pastor, Bethel Baptist Church, Odorkor.

**7. Rev. Samson Joshua Aduamah**

**Qualification:** BTh

**Position:** Director of Evangelism and Mission (Accra North Baptist Association) and Head Pastor, Redeemed Baptist Church- Kpone.

**8. Rev. Ebenezer Agyapong**

**Qualification:** BA Ministry

**Position:** Director of Evangelism and Mission, Accra South Baptist Association and Head Pastor, Providence Baptist Church- Kisseima

**9. Rev. Alexander Kwame Offih Kyei**

**Qualification:** Denominational Tract; ICA Level 2

**Position:** Accountant, GBC and Head Pastor, Ei-Shadai Baptist Church- Sarpeima

**10. Rev. Timothy Aidoo**

**Qualification:** MA Guidance and Counselling; BA Theology

**Position:** Head Pastor, Tongues of Fire Baptist Church- Mayera

**11. Clement Kwame Addo**

**Qualification:** MPhil Agriculture, MA Religions, MA Ministry

**Position:** Associate Pastor, Calvary Baptist Church- Adenta

**12. Prophet Eric Ocloo**

**Qualification:** CA Ghana, BSc. Banking and Finance, CFA Level 2

**Position:** Director of Finance, Ghana Baptist Convention

**13. Rev. Leo Owusu-Afriyie**

**Qualification:** MA Christian Ministry, BA Publishing Studies

**Position:** Head Pastor, Love Community Baptist Church- Abensu

**14. Felix Owusu**

**Qualification:** MPhil Religion

**Position:** Youth Pastor and Associate Director, Department of Ministry, Calvary Baptist Church-Adabraka.

**15. Pastor Mrs. Joy Frimpong**

**Qualification:** MA Ministry

**Position:** President, Prayer Warriors of the Accra North Baptist Association.