

## **Sanctity of the Earth: A Religiocentric Approach to Dealing with the Galamsey Menace in Ghana**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The phenomenon of galamsey (illegal mining) poses a serious threat to Ghana's environment and socio-economic sustainability, despite its perceived economic benefits. While governmental and non-governmental interventions have sought to curb this practice, they often overlook the potential influence of religion in promoting environmental stewardship. This paper advocates for a religiocentric approach to combat the destructive effects of galamsey, acknowledging that most Ghanaians, including those engaged in galamsey, are affiliated with religious traditions. It draws on the ecological ethics embedded in Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions to demonstrate how these faiths uphold the sanctity of the earth and hence, can provide a moral framework for sustainable environmental practices. Using qualitative and textual analysis, the paper emphasizes how, when effectively communicated and integrated with public policy and socio-economic strategies, religious teachings can mobilize communities towards preserving Ghana's ecological integrity. This study contributes to existing knowledge by its integration of religious ethics into sustainability strategies to provide a novel interdisciplinary framework for tackling illegal mining in Ghana.

**Keywords:** *Religiocentric, Sustainability, Galamsey, Eco-Attraction, Religiosity*

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Ghana is currently experiencing the destructive effects of galamsey.<sup>1</sup> Galamsey is often confused with and perceived as artisanal and small-scale mining. While often used interchangeably, artisanal mining and small-scale mining represent distinct practices within the informal mining sector. Artisanal mining generally refers to mining activities carried out by individuals or small groups using rudimentary tools and techniques, often without legal recognition or regulatory oversight. It is typically labor-intensive, community-based, and subsistence-driven.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, small-scale mining is usually more organized and involves a greater degree of mechanization, financial investment, and often legal licensing, though it still operates on a smaller scale compared to large-scale industrial mining.<sup>3</sup> This distinction is significant in policy and regulatory contexts, as artisanal miners often lack access to legal protections and safety infrastructure, whereas small-scale miners may be part of formalized associations and subject to environmental and labor standards.<sup>4</sup>

Galamsey, although having a tremendous economic benefit to some people, is becoming a menace and threat to national life, looking at its destructive effect on nature and the environment. Its overall negative effects on the sustainability of the environment cannot be overemphasized. Directly or indirectly, galamsey activities have done more harm to the environment than good. Although some have argued for the economic viability of the trade, including practitioners, one cannot gainsay its massive destruction of the earth, which to a large extent sustains life. As much as job opportunities are always alluded to as the positives of galamsey by proponents, the other

side of it, being the jobs it equally destroys, are normally not counted by its proponents.<sup>5</sup>

In the attempt to address the galamsey menace, various and multifaceted propositions have been made as solutions over the years.<sup>6</sup> In these regards, the government of Ghana, over the years, has fought the menace from various fronts. It now proposes an inter-ministerial approach and engagement with the populace as the core antidote to dealing with the issue over time. Apart from the government's efforts in this direction, other sectors of the nation's structure, be it academia, the media, non-governmental organizations, and multinational organizations, are equally putting their weight together to fight the menace. What is lacking in these attempts, to a large extent, is the potential contribution of religion to addressing such a menace facing the nation.<sup>7</sup>

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where empirical evidence is touted to be the most important contribution to dealing with phenomenological issues such as this, it becomes difficult to consider religion. This is because some people do not see the objectivity of religion addressing issues such as this. Contrary to such assumptions, this paper argues that by engaging the populace through the lens of religion the menace could be curtailed to the barest minimum because Ghanaians are very religious and would accept religious proposals to address the issue. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to discuss religious views about the earth and its sustainability especially by looking at the thoughts and ideologies of the main religious groups in Ghana being Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions, and how they address the issues about nature and the environment. Since the adherents of these religious groups form the majority of the populace and all propagate a certain code of

<sup>1</sup> Isaac Boaheng, "From Personal Holiness to Ecological Holiness: A Wesleyan-Theological Response to Creation's Cry in Contemporary Ghana," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies (ERATS)* 10 (14) (2024): 13-32, 14.

<sup>2</sup> Gavin Hilson, "Small-Scale Mining, Poverty and Economic Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Overview," *Resources Policy* 34, no. 1-2 (2009): 12-13, 12.

<sup>3</sup> Deborah Bryceson and Jesper Bosse Jønsson, "Gold Digging Careers in Rural East Africa: Small-Scale

Miners' Livelihood Choices," *World Development* 38, no. 3 (2010): 528-530, 528.

<sup>4</sup> James McQuilken and Gavin Hilson, "Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining in Ghana: Evidence to Inform an 'Action Dialogue'," *IIED* (2016): 6-8, 6.

<sup>5</sup> Boaheng, "From Personal Holiness to Ecological Holiness," 17.

<sup>6</sup> Boaheng, "From Personal Holiness to Ecological Holiness," 14.

<sup>7</sup> Boaheng, "From Personal Holiness to Ecological Holiness," 14.

engagement about the sanctity of the earth and its sustainability, this should be a better platform for dealing with the menace of galamsey.

The study, therefore, addressed the following questions: What are the environmental and socio-economic impacts of galamsey (illegal small-scale mining) in Ghana? How have government and non-governmental interventions addressed the galamsey menace so far? What are the religious views of Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions on the sanctity of the earth and environmental stewardship? In what ways can religious teachings and institutions contribute to addressing the galamsey menace? How can a religiocentric approach complement scientific and policy efforts in promoting sustainable environmental practices in Ghana? The study concludes that when the religious views are fully espoused and well taught to adherents as almost all Ghanaians belong to one religious tradition or another, the spate of the destruction of the environment could be controlled if not fully halted.

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative and descriptive research approach, utilizing textual analysis and literature review. It explored the intersection of religion and environmental stewardship by examining theological, ethical, and cultural perspectives within Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions. The goal was to understand how religious worldviews and moral teachings might inform and shape responses to environmental degradation, particularly the galamsey menace in Ghana. The study primarily relied on secondary data sources such as religious texts, theological commentaries, academic journals, and environmental reports. The paper began by describing the current environmental crisis caused by illegal mining (galamsey) in Ghana, emphasizing its socio-economic and ecological impacts. An overview of governmental and non-governmental efforts to address galamsey was conducted,

highlighting their strengths and limitations. Relevant literature was reviewed to establish theoretical foundations on religion's role in ecological consciousness and stewardship. Emerging themes such as stewardship, sacredness of the earth, and moral responsibility were identified and interpreted across the three religious traditions. The study connected religious teachings to practical implications for addressing the galamsey menace, proposing a religiocentric model of ecological intervention. A framework was proposed to integrate religious values into public policy and community-based environmental efforts. The paper concluded with practical recommendations on how religious leaders, institutions, and teachings can contribute to sustainable environmental stewardship in Ghana.

## 3.0 ARTISANAL, SMALL-SCALE MINING AND GALAMSEY IN GHANA

The essentiality of mining in many developing countries cannot be overemphasized. This is so, especially in those places where economic alternatives are critically limited. In countries where majority of the people are poor, the mining sector has become a significant roadmap in poverty reduction. Consequently, many countries in Sub-Sahara Africa, including Ghana and South East Asia, where poverty is high, have opened up for foreign direct investments with the objective of harnessing the inherent potential in mining to address the poverty challenge. It has been observed that no country, at least in theory, is off-limits to foreign direct investment in mining. Many mineral-rich countries, including Ghana, have revamped legislations, particularly in the mining sector, and introduced competitive tax systems to create an environment that would facilitate foreign direct investment in the mining sector.<sup>8</sup>

Although high proportions of the fiscal incomes of many developing countries are export-based of which minerals and ores exportation is key,<sup>9</sup> research has shown that any

<sup>8</sup> Eduardo R. Quiroga, "The Case of Artisanal Mining in Bolivia: Local Participatory Development and Mining Investment Opportunities," *Natural Resources Forum* 26 (2002): 127-139, 128.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Akabzaa and Abdulai Darimani, "Impact of Mining Sector Investment in Ghana: A Study of the Tarkwa Mining Region" (A Draft Report Prepared for SAPRI, 2001), 63.

mining activity can be beneficial and/or become a problem depending on the approach to the management of the exploitation.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, due to lack of skills required for large scale mining, the people have consequently resorted to artisanal and small-scale mining as a means of livelihood or means through which they could reduce their poverty levels. Whilst livelihood has become the argument and the basis for the proponents and practitioners who engage in artisanal and small-scale mining as well as *galamsey*, sustainability on the other hand should be considered as a major issue in such discussions. There is the need for a careful balance between economic growth or advantages and environmental preservation and conservation when it comes to looking at the effects of these mining activities.<sup>11</sup>

However, issues of sustainability is often neglected in such discussions, as being affected by artisanal and small-scale mining as well as *galamsey*. Any discussion that seeks to promote the need for any developmental agenda (including one's livelihood), sustainability should be integrated and made a socioeconomically and environmentally viable issue. In this regard, the increase in population with its attendant problems, such as increasing unemployment and environmental degradation, raises concerns about the sustainability of both livelihoods and the environment. Whilst dealing with the issues of livelihood, one cannot do that at the neglect of sustainability, which has become the guiding principle of any human developmental agenda.<sup>12</sup> It is the reason why the issue of *galamsey* especially, which has a damning effect on the environment with its ripple effects on livelihood and sustainability is to be looked at holistically.

The Government of Ghana recognizes small-scale mining but not *galamsey*. Although, some the perception among the populace intermingles the two, the laws of Ghana distinguish small-scale mining from *galamsey*. The Government of Ghana's definition of small-scale mining is according to concession size. This means small-scale mining is backed by law. According to this definition, a small-scale mining operation in Ghana is one that is based on a land plot measuring less than 25 acres.<sup>13</sup> The Small Scale Gold Mining Law (PNDCL 218) of 1989 section 21 defines small-scale mining as "the mining of gold by any method not involving substantial expenditure by an individual or group of persons not exceeding nine in number or by a cooperative society made up of ten or more persons."<sup>14</sup> The law also indicates the sizes of concessions (5-25 acres) that small-scale miners are entitled to and specifies that a concession may not exceed 10 hectares, which is 25 acres. The law prohibits the use of explosives. It is observed that both artisanal and small-scale mining share common characteristics by looking at the law stated above. These common characteristics according to a Commissioned Report include exploitation of marginal or small deposits, limited capital, labor intensive methods of extraction with low rates of recovery, poor access to markets and support services, low standard of safety and health and significant adverse impact on the environment. Accordingly, it is sometimes difficult to differentiate between the two typologies artisanal and small-scale mining due to these common characteristics.<sup>15</sup> The two terms are, however used interchangeable by many writers and local people which are both sometimes confused with *galamsey*. It becomes

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Akabzaa, Joseph S. Seyire, and Kwabena Afriyie, "The Glittering Facade, Effects of Mining Activities on Obuasi and its Surrounding Communities" (Paper Submitted to Third World Network – Africa, Accra, 2007), 78.

<sup>11</sup> Michael P. Todaro and Stephen C. Smith, *Economic Development* (England: Pearson Education Limited, 2011), 3.

<sup>12</sup> Marco Keiner, "Re-Emphasizing Sustainable Development: The Concept of Evolutionability on Living Chances, Equity and Good Heritage,"

*Environment, Development and Sustainability* 6 (2004): 379-392, 380.

<sup>13</sup> World Bank, "Staff Appraisal Report, Republic of Ghana, Mining Sector Development and Environmental Project," *World Bank Report* No. 13881-GH, (1995).

<sup>14</sup> *The Small-Scale Gold Mining Law*, PNDCL 218 (1989), sec. 21.

<sup>15</sup> Michael T. Styles, Kevin P.C. D'Souza, Sulemana Al-Hassan, Richard K. Amankwah, R.S. Nartey, and Wilson Mutagwaba, "Ghana Mining Sector Support Programme Project: ACP GH 027 Mercury Abatement Phase 1 Report," 2006, 143.

more difficult when the term *galamsey* is used in the local parlance in addressing both artisanal and small-scale mining. Although small-scale mining is allowed by law, its illegalities surfaces when the laws are breached. *Galamsey* on the other hand has no legal backing whatsoever. Their operations are often overshadowed by the perceptions of people about small-scale mining assuming that they are one and the same.

It is the illegal “small-scale” mining of gold or diamond in Ghana that is generally referred to in the local parlance as *galamsey*. It is believed that the term *galamsey* has originated from the English expression “gather them and sell”.<sup>16</sup> In the work of Baah-Ennumh,

The history behind this local parlance is that during the colonial era, the Syrians and Lebanese who were engaged in illicit trade of gold constantly persuaded the local people to “gather and sell gold”. The local people pronounced this phrase as “gal-am-sey”. The Syrians and Lebanese who were involved in this trade were referred to as *galamsey* and with time, it became the name for illegal artisanal mining activity.<sup>17</sup>

This illegal small-scale mining, over the years, has posed several challenges for the countries within which such activities have been taking place as well as its global effects on other nations. All over the world, numerous issues or concerns have come up pertaining to small-scale mining activities (here, both legal and the illegal included). Comparably, in spite of their economic viabilities and the provision of livelihood in the communities where these activities take place, the environmental impact or cost of these activities is higher than those of large scale mining companies. Artisanal and small-scale mining generate negative effects on the physical and social environment compared to large scale mining where necessary and needed skills as well as expertise are employed.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Kwasi Amankwah and Charles Anim-Sackey, “Strategies for Sustainable Development of the Small-Scale Gold and Diamond Mining Industry of Ghana,” *Resources Policy, Elsevier* 29, (2004): 131-138, 132.

<sup>17</sup> Theresa Yaaba Baah-Ennumh, “Sustaining Livelihoods in Artisanal Small-Scale Mining Communities in the Tarkwa-Nsuaem Municipality” (Doctor of Philosophy Thesis: Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, 2012), 40.

During several stages of mining, be it exploration, exploitation, processing, and closure stages, a lot of negative effects are generated that impact the environment both physically and socially.

It is observed that notable environmental challenges in the mining sector especially caused by illegal mining include chemical pollution of rivers and other water bodies, soil and air through direct and indirect dumping of tailings. Other environmental problems include landscape destruction through pitting and heaping of sands, deforestation and destruction of forest reserves, diseases such as lung and skin diseases and malaria. There is also cultural damage due to invasion of important traditionally sacred places such as grooves. There is also the issue of child labor.<sup>18</sup> It is observably obvious that places where *galamsey* thrives have serious environmental challenges. According to Hentschel et al, artisanal and small-scale mining and its environmentally related challenges are brought about through a host of multiple factors.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, some of these factors include lack of information about good practices, inadequate environmental laws, lack of control and enforcement of mining laws. One can also talk about inefficient and ineffective technology or lack of access to better technology, economic limitations and lack of knowledge, education and training of those who are involved in these type of mining activities.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, artisanal and small-scale mining have some laws backing their operations however, *galamsey* is an illegal act. Both have hard negative impacts on both the physical and social environments. To these effects, both global and local attention have been given to the menace of artisanal and small-scale mining as

<sup>18</sup> Baah-Ennumh, “Sustaining Livelihoods in Artisanal Small-Scale Mining Communities in the Tarkwa-Nsuaem Municipality,” 38.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Hentschel, Felix Hruschka, and Michael Priester, “Global Report on Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining,” *MMSD* No. 70 (Paper submitted to International Institute of Economic and Development and World Business Council for Sustainable Development, 2002), 5.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Hentschel, Felix Hruschka, and Michael Priester, “Global Report on Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining,” 6.

well as galamsey over the years. In view of the above impacts on both the physical and social environment, numerous assistance programs have been carried out in most artisanal and small-scale mining countries with the help of numerous multilateral and bilateral organizations. For instance, the then German Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit now Gesellschaft Internationale Zusammenarbeit have assistance programs in Ghana, Colombia and Zimbabwe. The United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) has a form of assistance given to small-scale miners. The Collaborative Group on Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining (CASM), an initiative of the World Bank serves as an essential instrument for donor monitoring, coordination and management. United Nations Organizations such as United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) are all involved as important multilateral donor agencies which have helped the artisanal and small-scale mining sector in numerous countries in various ways. International Non-Governmental Organizations such as the Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG), Conservation International and International Union Association also have also assisted in related programs.<sup>21</sup> The collaborations of some of these multilateral organizations point to the fact that there is a major effect of these mining activities on the environment and its sustainability.

For a better understanding of artisanal and small-scale activities vis-à-vis the activities of galamsey have led to various academic studies on the matter. This is due to global in the international development world over the decades. In view of this, the methodologies or modus operandi taken to address both physical and social impacts on the environment have also altered. In the 1970s, issues pertaining to artisanal and small-scale mining has to do with

its definition whereas technical issues were topical in the 1980s. In the early 1990s, the international community focused its concerns on the issues of technical, environmental, legislative instruments and legal issues. They also looked at social and economic impacts of artisanal and small-scale mining. Toward the late 1990s, the concerns virtually moved toward the relationship between large scale mining companies and artisanal and small-scale mining. Again, gender issues, child labor and labor issues in general were also looked at. In essence, the legalities of artisanal and small-scale mining became an area of concern in the 1990s generally. In the year 2000 and beyond, community related issues and sustainable livelihoods are given much concern in the international development community.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, this has become the focus of academics today. Although much has been accomplished over the period as concerns have been raised on the negative impact of artisanal and small-scale mining as well as galamsey on both the physical and social environment, community and sustainable livelihood, much is left to be done to bring the whole situation under control.

In Ghana for instance, in recent years, government has collaborated with the international development community and other non-governmental organizations with the attempts to stem out the challenges caused by artisanal, small-scale mining and galamsey. Currently, the ban on artisanal small-scale mining is yet to be lifted since the early part of 2017. An Inter-ministerial as well as military interventions and several strategies have been put in place but the challenges still persist. It is to this that this paper opines that a religiocentric approach to dealing with the challenges of artisanal and small-scale mining and especially, galamsey which has no legal backing is appropriate.

#### **4.0 RELIGION AND THE EARTH, ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY**

Religion and the environment as an academic study have been of interest to several scholars

<sup>21</sup> Baah-Ennumah, "Sustaining Livelihoods in Artisanal Small-Scale Mining Communities in the Tarkwa-Nsuaem Municipality," 39.

<sup>22</sup> Hentschel et al, "Global Report on Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining," 6.

over the years. This interest has emerged and growing since the 1960s among all shades of scholars, especially philosophers who fervently look at the ethics of the environment.<sup>23</sup> In recent times, especially from the 1990s, ecology and religion have also equally generated a high attention in scholarship. This in effect shows the linkage between the earth and its environment on one hand and religious thoughts about the earth on the other side.<sup>24</sup> Some have opined overtime that religion provides a system of conceptualized framework of meanings that have some answers to behaviors, social order, and human motivation for both socio-cultural and socio-economic activities. A study on the social ecology of religion has proven that at all times in history, religions have fashioned human thought and behavior, human adaptation and survival.<sup>25</sup> With this in mind this paper affirms the proposition that religion being so pervasive is a powerful force in the lives of the majority of the world's population. The world's religions are therefore, at least in theory, well placed to rally millions and even billions of people on the issue of environmental sustainability. It is to this end that this paper proposes a religiocentric approach to dealing with the challenges posed to the earth and the environment affecting ecology by galamsey especially as an illegal mining activity since it is having devastating effects on livelihood and issues of sustainability.

In pre-modern era, religion had a foremost influence on every area of life. For instance, every significant stage in the life cycle of a person in his or her society was inaugurated with various rituals having some religious appeal. In Africa, especially, be it birth, puberty, marriage, and death as well as the passage of the agricultural seasons, they were managed by the religious leaders. Even issues of environmental conservation and preservation were all issues of

religion. These, all affirm and reaffirm the essentiality of religion and how religious worldviews dominated the people. In verity, an enormous sense of authority was given to religion and the religious worldviews in mundane life, economic, agricultural and in social interactions. For instance, according to Bruce, who happened to be one of the powerful authorities on secularization debates opined that "People commented on the weather by saying 'God be praised' and on parting wished each other 'God Speed' or 'Goodbye' (which we often forget is an abbreviation for 'God be with you')".<sup>26</sup> So life engagements in the pre-modern era were full of religious appeals. To this, religious beliefs informed how activities that affect the earth and the environment were controlled by religious thoughts.

In the modern era, an important view emerged being the anthropocentric thoughts about life. This showed that human is at the center of all things and activities making human the origin of all values. In any attempt of endeavor, the direct benefit to human was key. However, the beginning of 21st century saw a shift where eco-centric conceptions has arisen in place of anthropocentric conception.<sup>27</sup> Here, concern for the environment became a key factor in terms of values and decision making. The anthropocentric views on life would not go away entirely.

Another key thought is the idea that religious views teach that the world was God's and all his creations were given their purpose by their creator. Nonetheless, such proponents again observe that humans have more and special position than all creatures and nature. Abrahamic religions for instance, being Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are noted for separating humans from the surrounding

<sup>23</sup> John Benson, *Environmental Ethics: An Introduction with Readings* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 101.

<sup>24</sup> Heather H Boyd, "Christianity and the Environment in the American Public," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 38 (1999), 36–44, 36; Robin Globus Veldman, Andrew Szasz, and Randolph Haluza-DeLay, "Introduction: Climate Change and Religion: A Review of Existing Research," *Journal for the Study of Religion Nature and Culture* 6 (2012), 255–275, 256.

<sup>25</sup> Reynolds Vernon and Ralph Tanner, *The Social Ecology of Religion*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 336.

<sup>26</sup> Steve Bruce, *Choice and Religion: A Critique of Rational Choice Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5.

<sup>27</sup> Ibrahim Özdemir, "Anthropocentric Character of Environmental Problems," *Felsefe Dünyası*, Sayı 27 (1998): 68-80, 70.

ecosystems.<sup>28</sup> This is so because according to them, humans are considered separate and special in all creation accounts, since human is created in the image of God. “In one interpretation, humans are here partially to provide wise stewardship of nature; at the other extreme nature is placed here for the pleasure of humans, to be used and discarded as needed.”<sup>29</sup> In other words, to a certain extreme, these religions are tolerant for the idea that God’s command that humans have dominion over all created things has too often been used as an excuse to plunder the earth. However, a better understanding of this idea of having dominion over the earth can rather reverse the spate at which the earth is being degraded. If man was to have dominion, then that dominion should make him responsible for what he was to have dominion over.

The challenge is that, the world religions, although having the common ideology of the sanctity of the earth, the nuances in interpretation of the religious worldviews pose challenges on the regulations of how the earth and the environment is viewed and treated. For instance, some religious views of Ancient Near East see humanity to be “embedded in a cosmic order that embraced the entire universe, without any sharp distinction between the human and the non-human, the empirical and the supra-empirical”.<sup>30</sup> This view emphatically emphasizes the sanctity of the earth. Judeo-Christian thoughts, although to a large extent accept sanctity of the earth, stand distinct from the afore stated Ancient Near East view in that Berger, stated that “[t]he Old Testament posits a God who stands outside the cosmos, which is his creation but which he confronts and does not permeate”.<sup>31</sup> This view, therefore, demythologized a universe in which God is radically transcendent from humankind and his

other creatures. These views coupled with White’s claim of the core structure of Western theism in his world’s acclaimed essay, “Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis”, have placed Christianity especially, instead of being an antidote of the environmental problems, to be rather a problem of it. White in his essay alleged that “Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen” and that “not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God’s will that man exploit nature”<sup>32</sup> Thus, he made religion, especially Christianity, the cause of the woes of earth’s destruction rather than its preservation factor. His view stems from the interpretation of Genesis 1:28 – “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth”. Several works have been done in response to White’s alleged views on Christianity especially as the cause of environmental degradation. Of importance is McGrath who observed that, he only used Christianity as the culprit or the scapegoat so that where there is a problem there must by all means be a perpetrator.<sup>33</sup>

Islam, like the above religious views asserts that nature or the natural environment did not appear by accident neither is it the result of an evolutionary process without meaningful purpose or thought.<sup>34</sup> Further, it is established that everything in the universe is the creation of Allah and that the universe is the work and art of Allah. This views then implies taking care of what Allah has made as a believer of Allah. The Qur’an is replete with several references of environmental elements. This fact emphasizes that there is a strong attestation of nature as the handiwork of God to be cared for by humanity. In Islamic teachings, there is reward for those who propagate and protect the vegetation for the

<sup>28</sup> Ali M. Kirman, “Religious and Secularist Views of the Nature and the Environment,” *The Journal Of International Social Research* Volume 1/3 Spring (2008), 269-277, 270.

<sup>29</sup> Kirman, “Religious and Secularist Views of the Nature and the Environment,” 270.

<sup>30</sup> Kirman, “Religious and Secularist Views of the Nature and the Environment,” 270.

<sup>31</sup> Peter L. Berger. *The Social Reality of Religion* (London: Faber & Faber; Peter Berger, 1996), 3-12.

<sup>32</sup> Lynn White, “Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” *Science* Vol.155 (1967), 1203-1207, 1203.

<sup>33</sup> Alister E. McGrath. *Re-enchantment of Nature: The Denial of Religion and the Ecological Crisis* (Westminster, MD: Doubleday Publishing, 2003), xv-xvi.

<sup>34</sup> Özdemir, “Anthropocentric Character of Environmental Problems,” 68-80.



use of humanity and other creatures of Allah. If such views are really expounded to adherents, they can be more responsible in dealing with the environment.

Although Africans and traditional African religious worldviews have been influenced overtime by foreign religious worldviews and other human influences, Africans' thought of the sacredness of nature and the earth cannot be overemphasized. This is clear with the belief that God is the creator or originator of all things with an anthropocentric nuance. According to Mbiti, "Expressed anthropocentrically, God is the Originator and Sustainer of man; the Spirits explain the destiny of man; Man is the center of this ontology. The Animals, plants and natural phenomena and objects constitute the environment in which man lives, provide a means of existence and, if need be, man establishes a mystical relationship with them".<sup>35</sup> In this view, one observes that "African religious beliefs presuppose unity, harmony, and balance in the different categories of things such that one mode of existence depends on another."<sup>36</sup> Again, the belief is held that natural objects are deemed sacred because "the spirits dwell in the woods, bush, forest, rivers, mountains, or just around the villages".<sup>37</sup> Clearly, "[t]raditional Africans do not make any distinction between the natural and supernatural; they are both seen as two aspects of a unified and harmonious ontological category, and the primary mode of accessing reality is through experience".<sup>38</sup> For Mbiti, "the spiritual universe is a unit with the physical, and that these two intermingle and dovetail into each other so much so that it is not easy, or even necessary, at times to draw the distinction or separate them".<sup>39</sup> Supernatural entities or forces are a part of or a different dimension of the all-embracing nature. This understanding amongst Traditional Africans gives credence to the reason why nature is revered. It is a result of

these thoughts that the sanctity of the earth is preserved.

Other world religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism and Shintoism all offer a strong view of human harmony and agreement with nature<sup>40</sup>. It is further stated that

[T]here are some strong ideas of pantheist philosophy in the doctrines of these faiths. All things are the works of the Great Spirit. He is within all things: the trees, the grasses, the rivers, the mountains, and the animals, and the winged people. In this context we keep in mind these faiths are not religions, but philosophical systems. Because they are philosophical systems, their doctrines can easily be reinterpreted in an ecological fashion or in other ones. For example, although the picture of the Buddha seated under the tree of enlightenment has not traditionally been interpreted as a paradigm for ecological thinking, today's Buddhist environmental activists, sometimes [are] characterized as ecoBuddhists or Green Buddhists."

All these world religions to a large extent (if not absolutely), subscribe to high respects or regard to nature and nature's God.

As stated early on, although some ascribe environmental degradation to a segment of religious worldviews, from the discussion so far, it is clearer that "[t]he ecological crisis is defined as a crisis of modernity by some social scientists, and as a manifestation of the broader problems of modernity".<sup>41</sup> There is no gainsay that when the various religious traditions of the world especially in Ghana, seek better interpretations of their various views and likewise teach adherents, that will be a better approach to dealing with the galamsey menace.

Africa and Africans are thought of to be religious. However, whereas studies in religion and its applied forms are attempting to propose solutions to solve societal problems, the area of religion seems to be dormant in seeking for solutions to human problems including that of the environment and ecology as in the case of

<sup>35</sup> John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1989), 16.

<sup>36</sup> Polycarp A. Ikuenobe, "Traditional African Environmental Ethics and Colonial Legacy," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* Vol. 2, No. 4 (2014): 1-21, 1.

<sup>37</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 74.

<sup>38</sup> Ikuenobe, "Traditional African Environmental Ethics and Colonial Legacy," 8.

<sup>39</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 74.

<sup>40</sup> Kirman, "Religious and Secularist Views of the Nature and the Environment," 272.

<sup>41</sup> Kirman, "Religious and Secularist Views of the Nature and the Environment," 273.

illegal mining and its devastating effects especially in Ghana. For instance, in the work of Ronan, she pointed out that

Within American evangelicalism, religion has sought to both challenge the existence of and address the challenge of anthropogenic climate change. In 2006 the Evangelical Climate Initiative (ECI) “Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action” launched with the goal of recognizing “human-induced climate change as a serious Christian issue” (ECI 2006). Launched in February 2006 the initiative grew to include a group of over 300 senior evangelical leaders in the United States “who are convinced it is time for our country to help solve the problem of global warming” (ECI 2006). The 86 original signatories included mega-church pastor, Rick Warren and Duane Litfin, president of Wheaton College and offered a promising glimpse of the capacity for evangelicalism to promote environmental stewardship.<sup>42</sup>

It is to this that a comprehensive view on issues concerning the environment cannot be fully addressed without the religious dimension as taught in all major religions of the world. Although in the work of White, as mentioned early on, he argued that religiously derived environmental values (especially considering those from Western traditions) are counterproductive, today it is rather proven beyond all doubts among most scholars of religion and ecology that the world’s religions can make substantial contributions to environmental ethics which lead to conservation, preservation of the earth and the sustainability of life.<sup>43</sup> This is important as some scholars have observed that spiritual influences are fundamental to the environmental values of the people of the various religions of the world and communities of all faiths have rallied to the cause of Earth Stewardship.<sup>44</sup>

The various religions across the world have a sense of sanctity and reverence for the Creator and his creation - the earth and all things in it. Among the Dangmes of Ghana for instance, in invoking the presence of God through the making of libation, traditionalists often begin with the expression, “*Mawu ke E yo*

*zugba zu...*” literally meaning, “God and his wife, earth....” In the traditional thoughts amongst the Dangmes, therefore, anything one does in destruction of the earth is destruction of God’s wife. Destruction of the earth affects what it produces which are the children. They also believe that humanity is the beneficiary of all that “the wife of God” produces.

## 5.0 TOWARDS A RELIGIOCENTRIC APPROACH TO DEALING WITH THE GALAMSEY MENACE

A religiocentric approach leverages the moral, ethical, and theological teachings of major world religions to confront socio-environmental problems such as galamsey. Since a significant proportion of Ghanaians subscribe to one form of religious faith—Christianity, Islam, or African Traditional Religion (ATR)—religious frameworks provide an untapped yet potentially powerful tool in the fight against environmental degradation. All three traditions emphasize the sacredness of creation and the imperative of stewardship, which can be applied meaningfully to combat the illegal mining menace.

### 5.1 Biblical Foundations for Environmental Stewardship

The Bible lays a clear foundation for environmental stewardship, rooted in the creation narratives and the theological understanding of humanity’s role in God’s world. Genesis 2:15 states, “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” The Hebrew term translated “take care of it” is *shamar*, which conveys meanings of guarding, preserving, and watching over. This verse reveals that human beings were divinely mandated not merely to cultivate the earth (*abad*) but also to protect it, implying a dual responsibility of productivity and preservation.

Unfortunately, Genesis 1:28 has often been misinterpreted as a justification for unchecked exploitation. It commands humanity

<sup>42</sup> Marisa Ronan, “Religion and the Environment:

Twenty-First Century American Evangelicalism and the Anthropocene,” *Humanities* 6, (2017), 1-15, 1.

<sup>43</sup> Willie James Jenkins, “Religion and ecology: a review essay on the field,” *J Am Acad Relig* 77 (2009): 187–

197, 187.

<sup>44</sup> William Kempton, James S. Boster, and James A. Hartley, *Environmental values in American culture* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1995), 123.

to “have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” However, theologians such as Alister McGrath argue that dominion does not imply domination or abuse, but rather responsible management under God's sovereign authority.<sup>45</sup> Thus, dominion is best understood as stewardship—caring for creation as God's appointed caretakers.

In recent decades, Christian theologians have increasingly emphasized the need to integrate ecological concern into theological ethics. Ghanaian ecotheologian Isaac Boaheng, for example, calls for a shift from “personal holiness” to “ecological holiness,” asserting that Christian spirituality must include environmental responsibility.<sup>46</sup> He contends that the church in Ghana, and by extension the global church, must reclaim its prophetic voice to speak out against environmental degradation and incorporate creation care into its discipleship and public theology.

This approach reflects a biblical worldview in which creation is not merely a backdrop to human history but an integral part of God's redemptive plan. The Psalms proclaim, “The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it” (Psalm 24:1), affirming that the world belongs to God and that humans are merely stewards. Romans 8:19–22 further underscores that creation itself longs for redemption, linking human sin to environmental suffering and pointing toward a future restoration.

Biblical stewardship calls for a reverent, justice-oriented, and sustainable engagement with the environment. This perspective challenges Christians to align their lifestyles, ethics, and theology with the sacred trust to care for creation—an act that reflects both love for God and responsibility toward fellow humans and future generations.

## 5.2 Qur'anic Ethics and Environmental Responsibility

<sup>45</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *The Reenchantment of Nature: The Denial of Religion and the Ecological Crisis* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 103.

<sup>46</sup> Isaac Boaheng, *Christianity and Environmental Sustainability: A Ghanaian Theological Perspective* (Accra: Step Publishers, 2021), 45–47.

Islam holds nature in high esteem, teaching that all creation is a sign (*āyah*) of Allah's wisdom and power. The Qur'an states, “And it is He who has made you successors upon the earth...” (Qur'an 6:165), thereby implying that humans are vicegerents (*khalifah*) charged with the duty to care for the earth. The Qur'an further warns: “Do not cause corruption on the earth after it has been set in order” (Qur'an 7:56). Mining practices that destroy land, pollute rivers, and deforest protected areas fall within the category of *fasad* (corruption), which Islamic ethics unequivocally condemn.

Muslim environmental scholars like Ibrahim Özdemir argue for the revival of eco-conscious interpretations of the Qur'an to resist modern anthropocentrism.<sup>47</sup> According to Özdemir, Muslims must return to a theology that affirms the interconnectivity of life and the intrinsic value of all created beings.

## 5.3 ATR and the Sacredness of the Earth

African Traditional Religion upholds the earth as sacred and inherently tied to the spiritual realm. John Mbiti articulates the worldview that “the spiritual universe is a unit with the physical, and that these two intermingle and dovetail into each other.”<sup>48</sup> In many Ghanaian societies, rivers, forests, and mountains are considered abodes of spirits and ancestors, and are thus revered and protected.

Libation rituals among the Dangme people, for instance, invoke “God and his wife, Earth,” signifying the intimate relationship between the divine and the terrestrial. Destroying the land, in this cosmology, is akin to assaulting the divine. Thus, the desecration caused by *galamsey* is not only an ecological crime but also a spiritual transgression against the gods, ancestors, and community. ATR provides practical models for conservation, such as the prohibition of farming or logging in sacred groves, or the observance of taboo days for fishing and hunting. These traditional practices, often dismissed as mere superstition,

<sup>47</sup> Ibrahim Özdemir, “Anthropocentric Character of Environmental Problems,” *Felsefe Dünyası* 27 (1998): 68–80, 68.

<sup>48</sup> John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1989), 74.

offer environmentally sustainable principles rooted in religious obligation and communal ethics.

#### 4.4 Integrative Religious Action

A religiocentric approach thus requires interfaith collaboration that articulates common ecological ethics while respecting doctrinal diversity. Faith-based organizations must reframe environmental care as a religious imperative. Religious leaders should preach against *galamsey* not merely as a legal or political issue but as a spiritual and moral crisis.

The example of the Evangelical Climate Initiative in the United States offers a replicable model, where faith leaders mobilized believers around the issue of climate change as a Christian responsibility.<sup>49</sup> Ghanaian religious institutions—churches, mosques, shrines—should spearhead public education, lead community clean-up campaigns, and advocate for policy reforms rooted in theological convictions.

Moreover, religious teachings must be integrated into school curricula, catechism classes, sermons, Friday *khutbahs*, and traditional festivals. Community by-laws rooted in spiritual beliefs can reinforce civil regulations, making them culturally resonant and morally compelling.

In conclusion, the religiocentric approach is not a panacea, but it offers a deeply rooted, contextually appropriate, and ethically sound strategy for addressing the *galamsey* menace. When properly mobilized, religion can inspire not just compliance with environmental laws, but an inner transformation toward ecological consciousness and earth stewardship.

#### 6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is in the view of the authors that when the religious views are fully espoused and well taught to adherents as almost all Ghanaians belong to one religious tradition or another, the spate of the destruction of the environment could be controlled if not fully halted. Whilst engaging adherents of the various religious

traditions, it is not oblivious that the best of motives or intentions to keep and preserve the environment through Earth Stewardship from religious perspectives may fail as a result of complex socio-cultural and economic pressures. The extreme or excessive consumption of natural resources by the populace is due to current lifestyles informed by several factors which must equally be addressed. The propagation of these religious traditions about earth's stewardship should be done in view of the socio-economic demands. The nexus between religio-environmental values and scientific as well as public-policy and socio-economic demands should continue to be part of engagements to help address issues on the environment as they continue to evolve. Religion scholars, spiritual leaders, and laity can facilitate this process. Again, this paper opines that religious leaders, scholars and laity can spearhead in this engagements to attain a lasting solution to the issues of the environment especially the devastating effects *galamsey*. A national dialogue and awareness creation of religious views on the environment will be appropriate.

#### 7.0 CONCLUSION

In spite of the possible influence and impact of religiocentric perspectives of the various religious traditions in addressing issues about environmental degradation, socio-ecological changes, depletion of various species of both fauna and flora, religion alone cannot solve the problems. Just as all the other sectors of human life and academia are striving to deal with the result of the destructive effect of *galamsey* in recent times especially, a collaborative effort should be the way. Neither religion alone nor science alone is likely to sufficiently empower Earth Stewardship to curtail the current spate of the destruction of the earth. Members of religious communities apart from teaching in their various religious settings should get themselves involved or participate in a broader alliance of scientists, policy makers, and non-governmental organizations. Although

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<sup>49</sup> Marisa, "Religion and the Environment: Twenty-First Century American Evangelicalism and the Anthropocene," 1.

scientific and religious communities have not always viewed each other as allies, successes in strengthening the complementary influences of science and religion on Earth Stewardship have been achieved in recent decades. Such progress is helping to create vital common ground for dialogue and creative partnerships with the aim of envisioning and implementing long-range sustainable solutions to intractable environmental problems. Here, it is appropriate to highlight dynamics, difficulties, and opportunities for ecologists and other scientists to engage with the world's religions on their insights to help environmental sustenance.

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