

The *Missio Dei* and Environmental Justice: Advancing the Church's Prophetic Role in Addressing Accra's Waste Crisis

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the Church in Ghana's role as a prophetic voice against environmental injustice, focusing on solid waste management in Accra. The research problem centred on Accra's persistent flooding, worsened by poor waste management and socio-spatial disparities impacting low-income communities. The purpose was to reinterpret *missio Dei* as a call for holistic environmental stewardship. Using qualitative secondary data analysis, the study synthesized literature on urban environmental issues and theological perspectives. The main argument is that the Church, as a participant in God's mission, needs to address ecological crises. Key findings indicated that political, social, and economic factors contribute to environmental injustice, while churches such as the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) and Church of Pentecost (COP) lack practical initiatives despite their theological commitments. The paper concluded that leveraging biblical narratives and cultural proverbs could mobilize action. It contributes to the field of missiology by integrating environmental justice with mission praxis model for urban governance in Ghana.

Keywords: *Missio Dei, Environmental Justice, Solid Waste Management, Ghanaian Church, Urban Governance*

Publication History

Date received: 02-04-2025

Date accepted: 09-05-2025

Date published: 23-05-2025

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Accra, the capital of Ghana, experiences ongoing flooding during its rainy seasons, a situation exacerbated by poor waste management and insufficient urban planning. The devastating flood on June 3, 2015, which resulted in the deaths of 154 individuals at the Kwame Nkrumah Circle, underscored the severe impact of environmental injustice, with low-income neighbourhoods being disproportionately affected.¹ In these regions, clogged drainage systems due to uncollected refuse and uncontrolled construction along water bodies worsen socio-spatial disparities.² Despite the significant influence of the Church in Ghanaian society, its involvement in environmental matters tends to be largely theoretical, with minimal practical implementation.³ This paper investigates the Church's potential to serve as a prophetic advocate for environmental justice in Accra, reinterpreting the *missio Dei* (mission of God)—God's purpose—as a call for comprehensive environmental stewardship.⁴

The motivation for this research arises from the necessity to connect the church's theological affirmations, like the Accra Confession (AC) 2004, with its practical efforts to combat environmental injustice.⁵ Ghanaian churches, including the PCG and the COP, recognize environmental issues but are lacking in substantial initiatives to address challenges such as waste management.⁶ This study intends to clarify how the church can incorporate

environmental justice into its mission, drawing on biblical stories like the Eden narrative and cultural sayings such as “cleanliness is next to godliness” to galvanize grassroots and governmental actions.⁷ By placing the church within the context of the *missio Dei*, the research aims to redefine its role in supporting equitable environmental policies and sustainable practices in Accra.

The paper found that environmental injustice in Accra stems from a complex array of political, social, and economic elements. Poor enforcement of urban planning regulations, uncontrolled urban expansion, and the neglect of low-income neighbourhoods lead to waste build-up and flooding.⁸ The paper indicates that while Ghanaian churches profess theological commitments to caring for creation, their practical efforts fall short. For example, the AC advocates for justice in both economic and environmental arenas but does not provide specific strategies for effective waste management.⁹ Likewise, Pentecostal groups like the COP prioritize spiritual matters over environmental advocacy.¹⁰

The research concludes that the church can fulfil its role in God's plan for redemption by actively participating in public policy advocacy and mobilizing communities. By translating theological concepts into sermons, educational resources, and collaborative projects with authorities, the church can tackle ecological and social inequalities, promoting sustainable waste management in Accra.¹¹ This

¹ George Benneh, Jacob Songsore, John S. Nabila, A. T. Amuzu, K. A. Tutu, Yvonne Yangyuoru, and Gordon McGranahan, *Environmental Problems in Ghana: The Urban Perspective* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1993), 15.

² Anthony Baabereyir, *Urban Environmental Problems in Ghana: A Case Study of Social and Environmental Injustice in Solid Waste Management in Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi* (PhD diss., University of Nottingham, 2009), 40.

³ Moses Kumi Asamoah, “Religious Environmentalism: The Church's Environmental Sustainability Paradigm (The Case of the Church of Pentecost in Ghana),” *European Journal of Business and Social Sciences* 2, no. 8 (2013):65–79, 65.

⁴ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 390.

⁵ World Alliance of Reformed Churches, “The Accra Confession,” adopted at the 24th General Council, Accra, Ghana, 2004, <https://wcrch.ch/accra>.

⁶ Asamoah, “Religious Environmentalism,” 70.

⁷ Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 152.

⁸ Baabereyir, *Urban Environmental Problems*, 50.

⁹ World Alliance of Reformed Churches, “Accra Confession.” Adopted at the 24th General Council, Accra, Ghana, 2004. <https://wcrch.ch/accra>.

¹⁰ Asamoah, “Religious Environmentalism,” 72.

¹¹ L. Newton, “The Mission of God and the Environment,” *Missiology: An International Review* 40, no. 4 (2012):391–404, 395.

study highlights the church's potential to function as a transformative agent in urban environmental governance, aligning its mission with God's intent for creation. It advocates for a transition from passive theological contemplation to active involvement, ensuring that the church in Ghana serves as a symbol of justice and stewardship in addressing environmental issues.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This research employed a qualitative approach, leveraging secondary data analysis to investigate the church's function as a prophetic advocate for environmental justice in Accra, Ghana, framed within the concept of *missio Dei*. The methodology centres on synthesizing existing literature to scrutinize the relationship between ecological (environmental) injustice, specifically in solid waste management, and the church's theological and practical responses. The study used secondary sources to thoroughly investigate the socio-political, economic, and ecological factors contributing to environmental issues in Accra, while also exploring the theological foundations of the church's mission. Data were gathered from various academic resources, including books, journal articles, dissertations, and ecclesiastical documents. Significant texts included research on urban environmental challenges in Ghana. Thematic analysis was utilized to pinpoint recurring themes, including failures in urban planning, socio-economic inequalities, and the church's involvement in public advocacy. This process entailed coding data to identify patterns associated with environmental injustice and church-related responses. The investigation also included cultural proverbs, like "cleanliness is next to godliness," to propose practical strategies for grassroots mobilization. This desk-based methodology guaranteed a solid integration of theological and environmental

scholarship, opting against primary data collection in favour of a focus on theoretical and contextual analysis. The strength of this methodology lies in its interdisciplinary fusion of missiology, urban studies, and environmental justice, establishing a basis for rethinking the church's role in addressing the ecological crisis in Accra.

3.0 ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS IN GHANA

Environmental injustice in Ghanaian cities, particularly Accra, arises from complex political, social, and economic factors. George Benneh and colleagues argue that deteriorating environmental conditions stem from rapid population growth and economic constraints, which limit city governments' ability to provide essential infrastructure for environmental management.¹² This interconnectedness necessitates a holistic response addressing political, social, and economic dimensions. Anthony Baabereyir, citing Tamakole, identifies poor urban planning, weak enforcement of development laws, low institutional capacity, inadequate infrastructure, and low public awareness as primary drivers of environmental injustice in Ghana.¹³ These challenges might suggest that government is the primary actor, prompting the question: Does the church have a role in addressing such issues?

Unplanned urbanization significantly worsens environmental injustice. Benneh et al. and Tamakole highlight its role in exacerbating the crisis.¹⁴ Michael Pacione notes that solid waste management is a global urban challenge, with high-income countries grappling with disposal costs and lower-income countries struggling with collection and proper disposal.¹⁵ J.M.L. Kironde describes developing nations' cities as marred by garbage heaps, choked drains, and stinking gutters.¹⁶ Jorge E. Hardoy, Diana Mitlin, and David Satterthwaite

¹² George Benneh, Jacob Songsore, John S. Nabila, A. T. Amuzu, K. A. Tutu, Yvonne Yangyuoru, and Gordon McGranahan, *Environmental Problems in Ghana: The Urban Perspective* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1993), 45.

¹³ Baabereyir, *Urban Environmental Problems in Ghana*, 72.

¹⁴ Benneh et al., *Environmental Problems in Ghana*, 50; Baabereyir, *Urban Environmental Problems in Ghana*, 75.

¹⁵ Michael Pacione, *Urban Geography: A Global Perspective*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2009), 321.

¹⁶ J. M. L. Kironde, "The Governance of Waste Management in African Cities: Lessons from the Case of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania," In *Urban Waste and*

characterize the Global South's urban environments as highly health-threatening.¹⁷ Costas Velis, David C. Wilson, and Christopher R. Cheeseman observe that authorities often prioritize waste collection in wealthy areas, neglecting poorer communities despite public funding.¹⁸ Robert D. Bullard notes that waste facilities in poor areas are poorly maintained, disproportionately burdening marginalized communities.¹⁹ Jennifer A. Elliot argues this concentrates environmental hazards in slums, exposing the urban poor to overcrowding, sanitary risks, and disease.²⁰

The Accra Metropolitan Authority struggles with escalating solid waste issues and socio-spatial inequalities in Accra. Kironde compares the problem to an intractable “monster” overwhelming authorities.²¹ The June 3, 2015, flooding, which killed 154 people, sparked significant public outcry, yet the solid waste crisis persists, disproportionately impacting the poor despite public-funded waste management systems. The church, as a participant in *missio Dei*, is called to engage political, social, and economic structures strategically to combat environmental injustice holistically.

The church's role is not to supplant government but to serve as a prophetic voice, advocating for equitable policies, raising public awareness, and mobilizing communities.²² By leveraging its societal influence, the church can support infrastructure development, challenge systemic inequalities, and promote sustainable waste management practices. This approach aligns with the *missio Dei*'s call to care for creation, positioning the church as a vital

contributor to practical solutions for Accra's solid waste crisis and fostering environmental justice. In the next section, the paper will present on *missio Dei* and environmental justice as its framework.

4.0 MISSIO DEI AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Mission, in its traditional sense, refers to the sending of a representative who is archetypical of a diplomatic mission.²³ Gregory P. Leffel observed that within the church setting it could be described as the crossing of boundaries in furtherance of the word that could be geographical, linguistic, political, social, cultural, or ideological.²⁴ For James Scherer, this boundary crossed is principally between non-faith and faith in Christ Jesus.²⁵ Whereas the singular “mission” is similar to *missio Dei* the plural “missions” is mostly used to describe the church's organisation of programs and activities meant to spread the gospel to the World.²⁶

Ross Langmead observed that, the traditional understanding of Christian mission that was reduced to verbal proclamation, justice seeking and peace-making, or an aspect of practical theology or something only by cross-cultural workers and finally as something that happens only happens at the frontiers of Christendom has been contested. He noted that this concept is much deeper and more encompassing. He further argued that the Christian concept of missions has come to be perceived as participation in the mission of

Governance in Africa, ed. J. M. L. Kironde and A. Yhdego (Addis Ababa: Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa, 2003), 15.

¹⁷ Jorge E. Hardoy, Diana Mitlin, and David Satterthwaite, *Environmental Problems in an Urbanizing World: Finding Solutions in Cities in Africa, Asia, and Latin America* (London: Earthscan, 2001), 23.

¹⁸ Costas Velis, David C. Wilson, and Christopher R. Cheeseman, *Waste Management in Developing Countries: Challenges and Opportunities* (London: IWA Publishing, 2015), 48.

¹⁹ Robert D. Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality*, 3rd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 98.

²⁰ Jennifer A. Elliot, *An Introduction to Sustainable Development*, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 2012), 67.

²¹ Kironde, “The Governance of Waste Management,” 17.

²² Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 28–30.

²³ Bosch, *Transforming mission*, 1–2.

²⁴ Gregory P. Leffel, *Faith Seeking Action: Mission, Social Movements, and the Church in Motion* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press Inc, 2007), 30.

²⁵ James Scherer, *Gospel, Church and Kingdom in World Mission Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1987), 37.

²⁶ Leffel, *Faith Seeking Action*, 31.

God.²⁷ David J. Bosch observed that, it was Karl Barth who argued for a shift from the classical theological idea of the Father sending the Son and the Father and Son sending the Holy Spirit to the Triune God sending the church.²⁸ Thus, the mission of God that the church participates in is perceived in resonance with Trinitarian understanding of missions. In this manner, Lesslie Newbigin concurs by suggesting that mission should be perceived in Trinitarian terms.²⁹ Thus, this understanding of missions has some implications. The purpose of God is to reconcile the cosmos to Godself through the sending of Jesus Christ and the activity of the Holy Spirit. In addition, this idea of missions depicts images of community, dynamism, and mutuality, which enrich and shape missions. This image of community comprises of the environment in which we find ourselves.³⁰

With this understanding of missions, as the mission of God and as one which is Trinitarian in nature, there have been calls to engage this understanding of missions in the public sphere. One may ask if there is a dichotomy between the public and private spheres and if the church has the moral right to engage in the public sphere without being consumed. Bosch in his thirteen-point interim definition of mission stated that, “it is therefore indicative of false anthropology and sociology to divorce the spiritual or the personal sphere from the material and the social.”³¹ In this definition of mission Bosch, see no dichotomy between the “spiritual or personal sphere” or the “material and social”. This tend to reason that to Bosch mission is both the engagement of the spiritual and the physical (public). Similarly, Johannes Verkuyl noted that, “The Kingdom (of God) does not only address the spiritual and moral needs of a person but his material, physical, social, cultural, and political needs as well.”³² Verkuyl presents this argument in his

definition of the concept of *missio Dei*. In expositing on the Kingdom of God, Verkuyl writes, “The Kingdom does not only address the spiritual and moral needs of a person but his material, physical, social, cultural and political needs as well.”³³ Verkuyl’s assertion on the term *missio Dei* challenges the notions that places much emphasis on the spiritual salvation and liberation of humanity whereas placing less emphasis on earthly salvation. As his definition suggests, the Triune God in their activity in the world does not limit their scope to the supernatural but also interested in the social, political and economic needs of individual ensuring they are not marginalised or oppressed.

As Bosch suggested, the church is privileged to participate in the *missio Dei*, thus, the fulfilment of the church wherein lies in its role of bringing the Kingdom of God to expression as Verkuyl extrapolated hence, participating in the mission of God. Despite Verkuyl’s definition being superficial in focusing on the activity of the Triune God, Emilio Castro elaborates further on the purpose of God to include both the church and persons. He writes, mission is the essence of Christian life, as God calls us to join His purpose for humanity’s redemption. Human existence is inherently missional, finding purpose through participation in God’s plan. Daily, humans renew their commitment, individually or communally, to fulfil God’s mission for all creation.³⁴

The appositeness of Castro’s assertion sees the church’s very existence in the mission of God wherein its fulfilment and accomplishment are inherent in her obedience to bringing the Kingdom of God on earth that is multi-dimensional to include the social, political, economic, and cultural needs of people. These needs in people’s lives are mostly brought about because of injustices in the state.

²⁷ Ross Langmead, “What Is Missiology?” *Missiology: An International Review* 42, no.1 (2013): 67–79, 69.

²⁸ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390.

²⁹ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Relevance of Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission* (CWME Study Pamphlet 2) (London: Edinburgh House, 1963), 119.

³⁰ Langmead, “What Is Missiology?” 70.

³¹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 10.

³² Johannes Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: W.B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 197.

³³ Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology*, 203

³⁴ Emilio Castro, “Liberation, Development, and Evangelism: Must we choose in Mission?” *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 2, no. 3 (1978): 87-91, 88.

As the church's mission is inexplicably intertwined in the mission of God, the church, therefore, is mandated to be a prophetic voice in speaking against injustices in any shape and by so doing establishes the kingdom of God on earth. The aforementioned exposition by the author is also made evident in the fifth paragraph of the Lausanne Covenant:

We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all men. We, therefore, should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society for the liberation of men and women from every kind of oppression...Although reconciliation with other people is not reconciliation with God, nor social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless, we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both parts of our Christian duty....the message of salvation implies also a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist.³⁵

This affirmation of the Lausanne Covenant on Christian Social responsibility further places it within the *missio Dei* paradigm, in which the Triune God, in their activity in the world, admonishes the church to be in communion through participation. Thus, Bosch, Verkuyl, Castro and the Lausanne Covenant affirms that, the public and how the church engages in the mission of God cannot be separated, thus the church naturally engages in the public by participating in the mission of God. If the mission of God is understood in this manner, how can it be reinterpreted in the context of environmental justice? To embark on this quest, the paper will present a brief understanding of environmental justice.

Kristin Shrader-Frechette describes environmental justice as comprising of "both a more equitable distribution of environmental goods and bads and greater public participation

in evaluating and apportioning these goods and bads."³⁶ The description presents environmental justice as a concept concerned with equity in environmental matters that includes the participation in the allocation of resources and burdens in a community. Participant of the conference in Budapest 2003 deliberating on Improving Environmental Justice in Central and Eastern Europe and what constituted environmental justice noted that:

A condition of environmental justice exists when environmental risks and hazards and investments and benefits are equally distributed without direct or indirect discrimination at all jurisdictional levels and when access to environmental investments, benefits, and natural resources are equally distributed; and when access to information, participation in decision making, and access to justice in environment related matters are enjoyed by all.³⁷

This definition tends to suggest that environmental justices promote the environmental rights of all citizen groups in the process of participating in environmental decision-making and implementation, equitable distribution of the harms associated with human use and interactions with the environment, and equitable access to environmental benefits or resources. Thus, environmental justice is not merely about distributing harms and goods. David Schlosberg states, "... besides inequality, we must speak about recognition of the diversity of the participants and experiences in environmental justice."³⁸ Similarly, the view of Schlosberg is captured in the following statement: "Environmental justice is not only about inequalities in how environmental goods and bads are distributed, but also about allowing diverse groups to participate in decision-making processes and balancing the distribution of power and responsibility."³⁹ These definitions stand to describe environmental justice as a concept that goes beyond equal distribution of

³⁵ The Lausanne Covenant, accessed online on 21 October 2020
<https://www.lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant>:

³⁶ Kristin Shrader-Frechette, *Environmental Justice: Creating Equality, Reclaiming Democracy* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002), 4.

³⁷ Tamara Steger, "Local Governance Brief: Environmental Justice," *Policy Journal of The Local*

Government And Public Service Reform Initiative, (2004):4-20, 4.

³⁸ David Schlosberg, "Reconceiving Environmental Justice: Global Movements And Political Theories," *Environmental Politics* 13 no.3 (2004):517-540, 520.

³⁹ Steger "Local Governance Brief: Environmental Justice,"4.

environmental benefits and harms between different population groups. It involves the participation of people affected in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of environmental policies and programmes with respect to where they live, work, recreate, learn, or play.

With environmental justice seen in this light, the mission of God, understood or reinterpreted from the environmental justice perspective, will imply how the Good News is holistic and promotes equity, equality, and justice. Furthermore, Langmead states that, “An ecological perspective in mission asks the question of how the gospel takes a different shape not only in different cultures but also in different ecosystems. . . . If we are to situate our mission more deeply in creation in all of its regional variety, we may have to learn to take into account other factors such as the land, flora, fauna, climate, geography, and physical history.”⁴⁰ Bryant Myers posits that the transformation that the message of the Gospel presents includes the restoration of a healthy environmental relationship.⁴¹ In this regard, L. Newton further noted that *missio Dei* thus argues, “the purpose of God is to fulfil the unity of the creation through Jesus Christ,” so the “church’s missionary calling is to cooperate with God’s action and intention for all the creation.”⁴²

5. BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON MISSION AND ENVIRONMENTAL CARE

The Bible provides a robust theological foundation for integrating environmental care into the church’s mission, emphasizing stewardship and God’s redemptive plan for all creation. Central to this perspective is Adam’s mandate in Genesis 2:15, where God places

Adam in the Garden of Eden “to work it and take care of it” (NIV). The Hebrew terms *abad* (to serve/work) and *shamar* (to keep/protect) imply a role of servitude and guardianship, not exploitation.⁴³ This mandate establishes humanity as stewards of creation, tasked with nurturing and preserving the environment as an act of obedience to God.

The *missio Dei*, God’s mission to reconcile all creation, further frames environmental care as integral to Christian mission. Colossians 1:19–20 declares that through Christ, God reconciles “all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven” (NIV), encompassing the cosmos.⁴⁴ This cosmic redemption extends beyond humanity to the groaning creation awaiting liberation (Rom. 8:19–21), as Paul describes the earth’s longing for renewal.⁴⁵ The church, as a participant in *missio Dei*, is called to embody this redemptive mission, addressing ecological degradation as part of proclaiming the gospel.⁴⁶ Psalm 24:1 affirms, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it” (NIV), underscoring God’s ownership and humanity’s responsibility to manage creation justly.⁴⁷ This stewardship is echoed in Leviticus 25:23–24, where God commands the Israelites to treat the land as His, ensuring sustainable practices like the Sabbath rest for the land.⁴⁸ These passages highlight environmental care as a moral and spiritual duty, aligning with the prophetic call for justice, which includes ecological equity.

Jesus’ command in Mark 16:15 to “preach the gospel to all creation” (NIV) broadens the mission’s scope, suggesting that the good news encompasses the restoration of the environment.⁴⁹ The New Testament vision of a renewed creation in Revelation 21:1–5, where God dwells with humanity in a restored

⁴⁰ Langmead, “What Is Missiology?” 510.

⁴¹ Myers, *Walking with the Po*, 152.

⁴² L. Newton Thurber, “Care for the Creation as Mission Responsibility,” *International Review of Mission* 79, no. 314 (1990): 143–149, 145, 149.

⁴³ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 67.

⁴⁴ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 135.

⁴⁵ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: SPCK, 2004), 121.

⁴⁶ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 409.

⁴⁷ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 114.

⁴⁸ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 2193.

⁴⁹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 650.

earth, reinforces the eschatological hope that drives Christian environmental action.⁵⁰ Integrating these perspectives, the church's mission involves advocating for ecological justice, combating such issues as pollution and deforestation, and promoting sustainable practices. The church can prophetically engage society by rooting environmental care in Adam's mandate and God's redemptive plan, fostering policies and grassroots efforts that honour creation.⁵¹ This holistic mission not only addresses ecological crises but also reflects God's love for all creation, fulfilling the church's role in *missio Dei*.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE IN ACCRA

As argued above, there is a relationship between issues of environmental injustice and issues of poverty and marginalisation. This paper will focus mainly on studies on some selected cities in Accra to support this assertion. The settlement of the city of Accra can be divided into two main categories, which are residential and non-residential areas. Furthermore, these residential areas could be divided into three main categories: low-density high-income areas, average-density middle-income areas, and high-density low-income areas.⁵² Some of these residential areas are well planned with plush housing, utilities, paved roads, and drainage systems. These areas also enjoy excellent environmental services, including a piped water supply, cleansing of the streets and drains regularly, and house-to-house garbage collection.⁵³

The increase in population and settlement has led to the deterioration of previously average-density middle-income residential areas. Most of these households in

these communities lack in-house toilets and depend on public toilets. Others, on the other hand, resort to open defecation in nearby bushes, rivers, drainage systems, or adopt the "wrapper method". This is a process whereby one defecates in a plastic bag and dumps it in the nearby drains.⁵⁴ This has been one of the causes of the blockage of the drains, which, when it rains, results in floods. Since there have been relatively poor waste removal services in these communities, waste accumulation has become a canker. In addition, high-density low-income communities like Jamestown, Mamobi, Nima, Chorkor, Sabonzongo, and Sukura are the most neglected and worst off, due to poor infrastructure and a lack of basic services like sanitation and waste collection, which have led to these communities having dire environmental conditions.⁵⁵ The public toilets in these areas are not adequate for the entire population and are usually so poorly maintained that many people refuse to use them.⁵⁶

Residents in these areas also resort to open defecation in the bushes or open lands, or often into the open drains and seas, since most of these communities are closer to the beaches or resort to the popular "wrapper method".⁵⁷ The limited waste containers provided by the municipal authorities are always overflowing with their contents, without anyone attending to them. This has also resulted in dumping of waste be it solid or liquid, in the drains and sometimes indiscriminately.⁵⁸ The above brief survey has shown that poverty, economic inequalities and lack for proper waste collection procedures have resulted in the drains being filled with garbage.

7.0 THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE

In analysing the response of the church with regard to environmental justice, I would focus

⁵⁰ Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2010), 175.

⁵¹ Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 204.

⁵² Baabereyir, "Urban Environmental Problems in Ghana," 100.

⁵³ Baabereyir, "Urban Environmental Problems in Ghana," 100.

⁵⁴ Baabereyir, "Urban Environmental Problems in Ghana," 101.

⁵⁵ Baabereyir, "Urban Environmental Problems in Ghana," 101.

⁵⁶ Baabereyir, "Urban Environmental Problems in Ghana," 101.

⁵⁷ Baabereyir, "Urban Environmental Problems in Ghana," 101.

⁵⁸ Baabereyir, "Urban Environmental Problems in Ghana," 102.

on the PCG and the COP. The steps taken by the PCG in addressing the issue of environmental injustice, as noted on its website can be summed up in the AC. The AC was adopted by the delegates of the Word Alliances of Reformed Churches (WARC) that the PCG is a part of during their 24th General Council in Accra, Ghana (2004). The AC is based on the theological conviction that the economic and environmental injustices of today's global economy require the Reformed family to engage in issues of faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. This then called for an engagement of issues of injustice in the world, which is an integral part of their church's witness and mission.⁵⁹

The AC affirmed that God has called humans as partners of creation and the redemption of the world; this affirmation thus includes the sovereignty of God over all creation. The confession further affirmed the covenant that God has made with all creation. This covenant translates to an earth community based on the vision of justice and peace. Thus, God calls for a just relationship with all creation. They affirm that the economy is there to serve the dignity and wellbeing of the people in the community within the bounds of the sustainability of creation. They thus reject any forms of injustice in the economy and the destruction of the environment. Thus, the rejection of any theology that affirms that human interests dominate nature. Thus, they reject any church practice and teaching that exempts the poor and care for creation in its mission. Thus, they commit themselves to seeking a global covenant for justice in the economy and the earth in the household of God. The AC noted how the reformed tradition in one way or the other have failed in misusing creation and failing to play the role of a steward and being companions, thus they confess their sins.⁶⁰ However, although the AC attempts to construct

environmental justice as a dogma of the church, there have not been robust practical actions taken by the PCG to respond to this issue of environmental injustice in the city of Accra. The church should translate these confessions into creative actions to deal with the issue. In addition, the AC does not specifically address issues of solid waste management and how the church could put in place measures to prevent the pollution of the environment, but keep the environment clean.

A study conducted by Moses Kumi Asamoah seeks to support the assertion that the churches in Ghana are doing little when it comes to issues related to the environment. I argue in this manner because an interview conducted by him seeks to reason that the mainline churches are rather the ones who have taken on the fight with regard to environmental justice. Nevertheless, as argued above, these actions are enshrined in confessions, but their practical aspect is missing. In the interview conducted, one of the respondents observed that, both the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches had put in little or no effort when it comes to issues of environmental concerns. The respondent further noted that the historic mission churches are doing well in this regard. The respondent cites examples of their attendance with respect to conferences on issues relating to the environment. Another respondent stated that it was only occasionally that the children's wing of the COP attempted to educate the public on topics such as bush burning and the indiscriminate cutting of trees during drama performances.⁶¹

Another respondent was of the view that, the COP never make mention of issues of environmental care during their crusades, conferences and retreats, but sometimes invites governmental official to these programs who take it upon themselves to educate people on

⁵⁹ The Accra Confession: Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth (2004). <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/accra-confession1.pdf> (accessed 19/11/20)

⁶⁰ The Accra Confession: Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth (2004). [https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-](https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/accra-confession1.pdf)

[content/uploads/accra-confession1.pdf](https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/accra-confession1.pdf) (accessed 19/11/20)

⁶¹ Moses Kumi Asamoah, "Religious Environmentalism: The Church's Environmental Sustainability Paradigm (The Case of the Church of Pentecost in Ghana)," *European Journal of Business and Social Sciences* 2, no.8 (2013):65.

how to care for the environment when given the opportunity to make a speech. However, the respondent was quick to add that the human right advocacy, which is also an environmental care element, is practiced by the church in its English worship assemblies, but such advocacies are absent in the local congregation. The respondent further noted that the concerns for environmental care in the church is minimal with much emphasis being on spiritual things. The respondent noted that the church does not show interest in the environment. The respondent suggested that the leadership of the church could formulate a policy to educate the church members on environmental care issues, such as tree planting.⁶² From the above response of the churches, one could identify two main things. The first, Pentecostal churches seem to engage minimally in issues relating to the environment and still function within the narrow definition of environmental justice. In addition, though the COP has a narrow understanding of what environmental justice consists of, it fails to address the issue of solid waste management in the country.

8. THE WAY FORWARD

In responding to these challenges, it could be noted that environmental Justice is holistic in nature. Environmental justice not only focuses on the environment as part of the ecological system, but also pinpoints the factors that lead to these injustices that the environment suffers from, with emphasis on solid waste management as a consequence of poverty and injustice. The AC of the Reformed tradition's response to these has attempted to address the economic injustices, inequalities, and poverty that result in the mismanagement of solid waste in Ghana. Nevertheless, the AC fails to address or tackle specific issues. Thus, in my response, I would not focus much on the economic injustice, inequalities, and poverty that result in the mismanagement of solid waste, though not practically explicated. I would thus present certain Christian resources to address the issue of how, as humans, we ought to treat the environment. Coupled with that would be a

popular adage, "cleanness is next to godliness," to demonstrate the church can engage the public in this discourse.

The Garden of Eden in Genesis could be reinterpreted as an important Christian resource to construct a public missiology of environmental justice. Environmental justice affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity, and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction. This then translates to the creation of a public policy to see to the realisation of the above affirmation of environmental justice. However, the creation of such a public policy should be one that is based on mutual respect and justice for all people, which is also free from any form of discrimination or bias. Thus, the reinterpretation of the Eden story should reflect the above affirm.

The Eden story presents us with a glimpse of how God wanted creation to exist side by side. God thus, asked human to "take dominion" or "subdue" the earth in Genesis 1:26-28. This concept does not denote the exploitation or the abuse of nature but rather stewardship of creation. Scriptures from both the Old and New Testaments demonstrate how God gave certain commandments aimed at enhancing the reduction of poverty, ensuring respect for humanity, enhancing social conditions, promoting a political regime that respects human freedom, and other goals ought to be pursued; failure to keep these commandments results in punishment. Thus, the biblical understanding of environmental care resides in the promotion of sound and healthy environmental care for people, the poor, marginalized, wildlife species, plants, etc. Thus, the connection between environmental concern and social justice. The reason for this is for sustainable development and environmental integrity.

In addition, the famous adage "cleanliness is next to godliness" can be capitalised by the church in dealing with the issue of solid waste management in Ghana. The church must involve the public from two main angles, first, the grassroots, which includes its

⁶² Asamoah, "Religious Environmentalism," 65.

congregation, on how it ought to relate to the environment, and second, the government, and joining together in providing resources and ideas that shall help, first, in the distilling of the drains, and also the collection of solid waste. If mission is witnessing and this witnessing involves our participation in the mission of God, then there must be a continuous proclamation of the evils of littering, environmental disparities, inequalities and injustice that is melted out to the environment and the call for repentance from these evil ways. Also, since the PCG through the AC has responded to some of these issues in a broader perspective, a public mission of environmental justice would call for the translation of these confessions into sermons, doctrines, bible study materials, and so forth to get it down to the public. Furthermore, during the crusades and conventions of the COP, issues of such concerns could be raised, and addressed through the power of witnessing. Regarding this, emphasis is placed on grassroots because even if the church engages the government in addressing these issues, it would need the assistance of the masses to succeed. Secondly, those who hold public offices find themselves in churches often, which is a good space to voice out one's grievances.

9. CONCLUSION

This study underscores that environmental injustice in Ghana, particularly in Accra's solid waste management, is driven by political, social, and economic factors, including poor urban planning and socio-spatial inequalities. The church in Ghana, despite theological affirmations like the AC, has not sufficiently translated its commitments into practical actions. By reinterpreting *missio Dei* as a Trinitarian call to environmental stewardship, the church can emerge as a prophetic voice, mobilizing communities and engaging authorities to address ecological crises. Leveraging biblical narratives like Eden and cultural proverbs such as "cleanliness is next to godliness," the church can foster grassroots and policy-level change, promoting equitable waste management and sustainable urban governance. For society, this advocates for inclusive environmental policies, reducing burdens on

low-income communities. For the church, it necessitates a shift from theoretical to actionable environmental advocacy, enhancing its societal relevance. Academically, it enriches missiology by integrating ecological justice, offering a model for faith-based urban governance studies. These findings urge collaborative efforts among churches, governments, and scholars to address ecological and social disparities, fostering a just and sustainable future in Ghana and beyond.

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