



Pentecostal Environmentalism: A Symbiosis for Eco-Theology and Biodiversity Conservation

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Abstract

Pentecostal Movements are those Christian religious movements founded in the 1950s and 1960s to date. Pentecostal environmentalism focuses attention on the need to maintain the environment according to the dictate of the Christian religious injunctions. This practice is achieved through the practice of sacred place, which is a designation of some earth surface as holy ground, and is retained for religious and spiritual purposes. These places include mountains, hills, rivers, streams, valley etc. and are deemed to possess religious mysteries and potent spiritual qualities. This practice is also observed in the Old Testament and is also part of the practice of the African traditional religions. In similar fashion, the Pentecostal movement shares many elements of traditional practices and the Old Testament, and as such sacred place has found its way into the practices of the Pentecostal movement. Environmental degradation, pollution, climate change, deforestation are all major global challenges today. Hence, the practice of sacred places and environmental ethics are among several efforts that can be used to tackle the problem of biodiversity loss arising from a range of environmental challenges. Furthermore, Pentecostal environmentalism further engages in the debate on eco-theology. This paper, therefore, serves as a platform to showcase the efforts of the Pentecostal movement towards ecological preservation, biodiversity conservation and the debate among scholars of eco-theology through environmental ethics and sacred places within the purview of Pentecostal religious spirituality. The paper employed a literary descriptive method since the research is qualitative in nature.

Keywords: Sacred-place, biodiversity, environmental-conservation, eco-theology, environmental-ethics.

Introduction

Contemporary thoughts have brought a renewed consciousness in humans including governments and institutions to find ways to curb or avert completely, if possible, the threats posed to the ecosystem by reckless human behaviours. This trend is gradually gaining ground considering the high rate of natural calamities ravaging the global environment and the resultant negative effects not only on the ecosystem but even human life. The understanding that no creature is independent has continued to heighten eco-theology and biodiversity conversations globally (Basse, 2011). Such an all-important conversation involves many approaches and could begin from any point believed to enhance and ensure achievability of the targeted preservation of the eco-system. The environment no doubt has enormous influence on even behavior, not to mention even the way of life and longevity.



From a religious perspective, the usefulness of the eco-system cannot be overemphasized. The holy/divine, for instance, has a need of the environment in which places such as mountains, hills, rivers, streams, valleys, groves, forests etc. are designated as sacred places. Sacred places are holy grounds and in-turn the abode of the divine, which is why ecology is studied from a theological perspective. A study on eco-theology and biodiversity conservation is topical and contemporary perspective. In this vein, Okon (2011) averred that the central theme of ecological theology is to rectify and restore losses and damage perpetuated on earth by means of traditional theology on the earth and environment, and more especially the impact of global environmental catastrophe which does not exclude adherents of any religion (Bebia, 2011). It is hoped, therefore, that the Pentecostal movement with its religious and spiritual traditions and its enormous influence on the attitude and behavior of its adherents, can and should act to promote biodiversity conservation through its eco-theology. It should also, advance towards a better and safer world by stimulating its teachings and preaching towards the process of finding new ways to promote biodiversity conservation in the practice of sacred place(s) and environmental ethics (Scott, 2010).

A sacred place in most Pentecostal Movements is popular and recurring and thus becomes a force to reckon with in terms of its utility in the advancement of environmental conservation. Specifically, noted occurrences in this practice are observed in the quotations of several Biblical verses. For instance in, Genesis 1:26, we read: "God created man in His own image, God instructed man in the Garden of Eden to till and maintain the earth". Mailman (1994), buttressing the Biblical quotation above noted that man is to work the land and preserve it from damage. Thus, considering the divine image in terms of man's totality is in harmony with the creation narrative, whereas the idea of fellowship is true to the context of the whole self-reservation of God in the Bible. From the fellowship comes a deep understanding of the relationship between man and his natural environment. Thus, without the *image Dei* or divine image, man is not capable of exercising his dominion properly.

More so, one cannot talk about sacred places/environmental ethics in the Pentecostal movement without mentioning the important role of the theological mysteries of the preservation and maintenance of environment as a focal point in its dogma. To say the least, their emphasis lies on the theology of "care for environment" which is drawn from the Old Testament theology of care. The idea of the concept "keep" implies caring. The theme for caring for creation occurs in other parts of the Bible. Man is instructed to care for land (Leviticus 25:1-5), care for domestic animals (Deuteronomy 25:40) and wild life (Deuteronomy 22:6). Thus, theology plays a dominant role in preserving the earth as well as in advancing eco-theology and biodiversity conservation in Pentecostal Movements. In summary, the Pentecostal movement plays a great role in the conservation of biodiversity through the practice of sacred places and through the emphasis placed on the teachings and doctrines of environmental preservation, as such this paper is set to critically display the contributions of the Pentecostal movement towards biodiversity conservation and preliminary practice of eco-theology.

Literature Review

Pentecostalism emerged from a religious epochal trend within the social settings of the 1960s leading to a resurgence of a myriad of Pentecostal groups, ministries, churches and Para-churches seeking recognition, popularity and membership (Ayegboyin, 2015). This trend of competitiveness of reformed Christianity came to its pinnacle in the 1990s when economic inflation, political turbulences and social maladies confronted many West African states, especially, Nigeria. Ayegboyin further asserted that Pentecostalism implies the presence of clusters of heterogeneous assemblies with varieties of simple and ambiguous doctrines and



practices. These are characterized by different categories: some are mega-churches, while some are still struggling to be recognized. According to Vondey (2011) and Resane (2021), the Pentecostal Movements are the 'fire-brand' group of Christian religious groups who engage in the propagation of the gospel through their radical approaches, their evangelical and missionary enterprise is overwhelming and epochal, striving to bring all humans to Christ. Accordingly, the Pentecostal movement focuses on Christian conversion, faith, Christian initiation, Christian formation and discipleship, spirit baptism, and experiences in Christian life and community life is their watchword.

Biodiversity is a nomenclature used to illustrate the different ecological life that encompasses a balanced environment on earth. Biodiversity culminates in the various organisms that make up the entire living circle including animals, plants and their habitats. The genesis of every living organism is the actual formation of the ecosystems which involves the entire chain of human production and consumption for the survival of all living things. These include oxygen, food, fresh-water, shelter, protection from storms and floods, stable climate and recreation facilities, and all have their service in nature and healthy ecosystems. Biodiversity gives us much more than the security and health which strongly affect our social relations, freedom and choice (Anyam, 2013). Furthermore, Asaasuen et al (2013) explain the need for biodiversity conservation. They describe the increasing forestland as a veritable tool for a responding increase in new species of organisms into an area, the former either in their search for habitats or as a direct function of the complex interaction between them and the environment. Thus, the more the number of luxuriant vegetal cover, the greater the diversity in flora and fauna to enrich the precious environment promoting its sustainability. This is aptly contained in the seventh item of the Millennium Development Goals drawn up by the 189 member nations of the United Nations in New York in 2000. Nicolaidis and Vettori (2019) add that "Philosophical stances on ethics are important in drives to mitigate environmental degradation and these are also considered since in considering the need for sustainability in ecotourism, and indeed the planet, it is critical that it be regulated effectively to help the country [countries] convert to a green economy".

Biodiversity conversely denotes a scientific term that defines variety and variability of living organisms and the ecological complexes in which they occur (Ofomat & Phi-Eze, 2001). It is germane to note that the continuous increase in human population in Nigeria and elsewhere such as in Brazil, have significantly increased and along with it the menace of deforestation looms where vast expanses of once forest lands have disappeared through pressure from demand for goods and services by the increasing population. It is worth adding that, the increasing number of motorable roads, timber industries and agricultural lands as well as urban development have collectively and dramatically reduced the vegetal resources. It is important for all and sundry to engage in biodiversity conservation, because it will ensure continuous availability of vegetation and its derivatives in spite of the increasing human number (Asaasuen et al, 2013). It is the ethical duty of all people to drive ecological sustainability, and ecotourism can be an inducement for conservation measures and education promotion on a range of ecological issues, and it also serves to support local communities in enhancing their livelihoods (Nicolaidis & Vettori, 2019). The realization of the importance of biodiversity conservation requires a whole lot of actions and in-action to realize it. Hence, this work considers how the Pentecostal movement can help to enhance biodiversity conservation through the practice of sacred places, environmental ethics and eco-theological debate.

It is noted that traditional African religion guided and directed people on how the natural environment should be preserved naturally, especially, through the practice of a sacred place (Odey et al., 2013). Sacred places are places set aside as holy grounds which includes mountains, hills, rivers, streams, valley, groves, forests (whether considered to be evil or



otherwise), cross-roads/specific junctions, wilderness areas, shrines, temples (with other artificial sacred places) and so on (Odey et al., 2013). Sacred places are believed to be or have been the abode of a holy or divine personage and also determine types of sacrifice, sacrificial items, manner, and times of worship. Above all, such places are reverently preserved and maintained by many Pentecostal Movements. This corroborates rightly that Pentecostal Movements have a vital role to play in the conservation of the eco-system. Since Pentecostal Movements engage in the preservation of certain natural space for religious purpose, those reserved places in turn serve as the natural habitat of many organisms which help to promote an eco-system sustainability

According to Okon (2011), the frontline of ecological theology is the preservation, maintenance and rectification of damage upon the environment through traditional theology. He further maintained that the central theme of a Christian ecological message is basically on "nature", "resources", or "environment". The main trust of environmental care is a sacred obligation and veneration through a rigorous religious commitment to conserve. Thus, eco-theology is the means through which a Christian's critical duties of care of the earth and its maintenance are achieved. In view of this, Okon succinctly posited that a mandate was given to man's rule over the God-given creation of earth, with a reputable attitude portraying God's sovereignty in (Genesis 2:15). Greenway (2000) corroborated the above position when he stated man's responsibility in Genesis 2:15 does not only begin or stop at civic obligation of raising a community, but rather the generality of planetary care. Cloete (2021) also interpolated on the debate by averring Christian eco-theology presents a Christian critique of ecological destruction while also offering an ecological critique of Christianity on the matters of the environment.

Commenting on man's stewardship of the environment, Breshears (2000) posited that God's creativity embellishes man as a potential fore-bearer of His image, as such, to man, God bestowed on him all the potential to recreate His creation as well as the ability to invent, modify and recreate ideas on how to supplement and care for the earth since we are created in the image of God. Hence, for Breshears, "...if we are responsible caretakers of God's creation then we must use the earth, the atmosphere, the land, the water so as to conserve and renew their system as intended by God" (240-245). In corroboration of the above, Dudley (2020) asserts that God gave man the divine mandate of care of the earth and as such man has a kingdom responsibility to dominate and protect the environment. Dudley further postulated that God sees the world as a divine project, and as such, people have a divine mandate to care for the earth because they are seen by God and all other living organisms as a sacrament. This implies that God's creations are sacramental.

Statement of the problem

The increasing loss of several square kilometres of forest land every minute, and destructive climate change are of global pandemic proportions. This produces a corresponding loss in biodiversity and ultimately the value of the precious environment around which development revolves. This paper, using documentary sources and field observation, attempts to create awareness on the vital role of environmental ethics, sacred places and debates on eco-theology in the Pentecostal Movements which can contribute to biodiversity conservation and practical displays of eco-theology to the advancement of God's wish for us to be custodians of the earth.

Methodology

The method applied in this research was a literary and descriptive one which involved a qualitative approach which recruited the use of preliminary and post preliminary sources of data



collection. The preliminary sources of data collection was the use of oral interviews and focus group discussions, while the post preliminary source involved the use of library materials, academic journals, the internet, and relevant books. These were supplemented with information from bulletins, programme booklets of the organization as well as the churches websites. In addition, theories of eminent scholars in the sociology of religion, ecological studies, environmental science and Pentecostal studies were also used.

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An important environmental ethic emphasized by Pentecostal Movements is the practice of a sacred place. It does not only denote the practice of reservation of certain places for worship or declaration as holy grounds, but further denotes the teachings of doctrines of care for the environment which in turns contributes to environmental sustainability. In this vein, it could be said, eco-theology is the central theme of Pentecostal Movements. Similarly, it is important to note that most of the teachings and doctrines of Pentecostal Movements are taken from the Old Testament which culminate into fundamental teachings on environmental ethics. It is on this premise of the sacredness of land/environment that the Hebrew Old Testament serves as a reference point for environmental/land care and sustainability. Okon, (as cited in Watson, 2004) aptly captured the consistent use of the Old Testament literature for environmental care, as it applies double usage of Hebrew semantics captured in the Old Testament and portrays an inclusive usage of Adam as 'adamaiḥ' and 'ha'aretz'. Therefore, Adam "*Adamah*" means earth's surface, and fertility of the soil or healthy pastoral soil capable of guaranteeing human subsistence and commercial sustainability. Adam's formation carries serious religious under-toning. His name is derived from the Hebrew semantic '*adamah*' clearly interpreting the actual symbiotic relationship between human beings and the environment. It suffices to say, Adam was created from particles of the earth, and as such he owes his responsibility to the earth to cater for it. This principle also emphasizes theology stressing the origin of man from the soil and why man will end up in the soil (Janus, 2019). This teaching is a prominent feature of the Pentecostal movement because they believe, that land engenders the spirit and the moral obligation bestowed on man to convert and to cater for the physical environment.

More so, the moral obligation inculcated on adherents of the Pentecostal movement is on the concept of "*Ha aretz*" which is designated as the earth, covering land and seas. It further means heterogeneity. According to Alfaro (1978), in the past, religious dogmas on environment were propagated based on misrepresentation and misguided interpretations of Genesis 1:28 (Cloete, 2021). In the contemporary era, especially among members of the Pentecostal community, Biblical exegesis is interpreted so as to carry a new approach, emphasizing a multilateral approach involving a more scientific approach to environmental care issues. In this new approach a brought approach is advocated and applied where all and sundry are engaged in environmental care and more diversified approaches of care. The Pentecostal movement just as Biblical scholars have, however, comes to a conclusion that the earth belongs to God while man is only a tenant in it. As such, man has been given the mandate to cater for the earth. In view of this, Moreau, et al (1984), concluded that humanity is not allowed to mishandle the earth just because people were created in God's image, but rather by virtue of being God's creatures, we owe to God as our responsibility, to demonstrate real care for the earth, therefore, dominion is not a declaration for destruction but rather maintenance and care. This theology is a central and cardinal theme among the Pentecostal Movements and has contributed immensely to the protection and maintenance of the environment.



Similarly, the theology embedded in Genesis 1-2 is a pivotal dogma of the Pentecostal movement. They emphasize the architect of the universe decreed by an order that we care for the earth. In God's creation, degradation and pollution are therefore, defilements of His order (Conradie, 2017). Again, Genesis 2:5 maintains that man is put in the Garden of Eden to till and keep it. This account in the Pentecostal movement implies the maintenance of balance, whereas, Genesis 1:28-30 orders man to multiply and fill the earth, subdue and have dominion over it. "To till and keep" means to manage properly for pleasure and sustenance, whereas to 'keep' implies protection, care and preservation. Egeh (2010) supported the above interpretation when he asserted that creation theology portrays man's obligation to stewardship. Hence, God gave mankind an elevated '*imago Dei*' in the image and likeness of God. This gives man the unique responsibility in the creation to care for all creatures. Man is here seen as a co-creator. This view is another dimension of a Pentecostal approach to eco-theology and biodiversity conservation. Although some schools of thought hold that the biblical instruction in the Old Testament, particularly, the book of Genesis, provided a hostile view of the environment in the mandate to humans to 'subdue the earth' and to 'be fruitful and multiply'. However, Pentecostal movement's interpretation of this Genesis hermeneutics is quite instructive and it is a guide to members to harness nature, nurture and carefully protect it for posterity sake. To subdue' is rather interpreted to mean harnessing nature, while to be 'fruitful and multiply' is interpreted in this ministry to mean "a continuous creative activity by human beings". In this vein, Bishop David Oyedepo of the Winners Chapel Ministry is quoted to have said: "...the earth was given to man to explore and any man can be what he wants to be" (Edet, oral interview). The interpretation of the above quotation of Genesis hermeneutics thus creates a theological foundation of environmental conservation, protection and promotion of wealth, rather than destruction.

Similarly, religion influences people's behavior (Gardner, 2006). The influence of religion on peoples' behavior is made known through parental attachment, cultural affiliation, uniformity of cultural pattern, dressing culture, and even dietary/vegetarianism culture, political affiliation, social solidarity and sexual behavior of adherence. Religion thus contributes to the formation of culture, attitude and values in societies. The ability of religions to exert a grip on its adherence is a peculiar source the Pentecostal movement uses to promote members commitment to the maintenance and sustenance of the environment. Therefore, the environmental ethics inherent in the movement is consistently very pervasive. This influences the adherents' attitude towards the environment. This is why Grigg, (as cited in Bebia, 2011) posited, religion seemingly influences the religiosity of its adherence through inculcation of doctrines and dogmas and through consumption habits, protection habits and even maintenance habits. Further, Sood and Nasu (1995) cited in Bebia (2011) aptly postulated that there is evidence that a person's religiosity influences his or her behaviour. Going by Sood and Nasu's assertions, it is apt to mention that the Pentecostal Movements have effectively engendered strong environmental constructs which help to perpetuate strong ethical principles for environmental and biodiversity conservation approaches and practices.

The Pentecostal Movement succinctly adapts the Old Testament theology pertaining to trees and forest conservation within the context of its practice of sacred place practice. In this purview, the sacred place contains within it, sacred animate and inanimate objects, which include sacred trees, hills, valley, mountain, streams, rivers, and forest etcetera. The Old Testament hermeneutics applied here encompasses many types of religious morals events and stories. However, few or limited aspects of Biblical events and stories explored, consist of what modern conservation biologists would call ecosystem services. Hitherto, trees were inextricably tied to the basic physical, aesthetic and spiritual needs of humans. As such, the Pentecostal Movements faith emphasizes a sense of commitment towards the care for trees and forests, which is why the forests, mountains and special bushes are often set aside as sacred place and spaces. The



Talmud doctrines which recommend a cycle of resting the field one year for every seven years of cultivation are doctrines and principles is eminently emphasized in Pentecostal Movements.

More so, the Pentecostal Movements teach that the planet is the handywork of God, therefore, it requires respect and care. From this backdrop, they maintain that eco-theology or eco-spirituality should become the focus of Christian activities and should be pursued vigorously. In the same vein, Brulle (2000) has listed qualities that biodiversity and eco-theological movements should emphasize namely: spiritual values as are embedded in nature, as such, sacramental meaning should be attached to environmental issues, so as to inspire in humanity the commitment to care for the environment and to inform the actions and inactions of man towards an environmentally friendly and ecologically sustainable society. From the investigation undertaken by the researchers, it can be said that the above listed views by Brulle are the watch-words of the Pentecostal Movements.

Accordingly, many Pentecostal Movements have permanent spiritual sites set aside by each group mainly for annual religious exercises involving spiritual rejuvenation and searches for miraculous and spiritual answers to diverse problems. These places of worship are often regarded as places for spiritual and religious tourism and pilgrimage. Such places have religious sanctity. For instance, Shiloh ground among the Winners Chapel located at Ottah Ogun State, Nigeria, the Redeemed Camp of the Redeemed Christian Church are all geared towards the setting aside of land/ground/earth dedicated to nature and God for spiritual exercises. One of the reasons such places exist in the Pentecostal Movements is to teach the adherents the importance of biodiversity conservation and eco-theology.

Pentecostal Movements also affiliate and align with well-established pro-environmental groups in the West for biodiversity protection in Nigeria. Notable pro-environmental groups such as Environmental Stewardship, the National Council of Churches, the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, the Ecumenical Patriarch or the Green Patriarch, the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Science, the U.S National Religious Partnership on the Environment and others have been involved in pro-environmental crusades. Pentecostal Movements also engage in environmental scientific programmes and training of members in Nigeria and abroad in a bid to execute their environmental ethical accomplishments. Thus, those trained always help to strengthen environmental ethics by providing their research findings and understanding. Pentecostal Movements also provide an avenue for dissemination of research information by ecologists and conservationists training within their groups to adherents and the general public through church services, symposia, seminars and workshops.

According to Bebia (2011), besides providing meaning to reality, religions convey ethical messages which invariably tend to spread wide and far. Religious authorities frequently understudy the psychology of their congregations, and as such build their gospel messages towards addressing what they expect of their congregants. For instance, the Dalai Lama, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Ecumenical Patriarch of the Orthodox Church or the Roman Catholic Pope get broad media coverage. Powerful religious authority such as those mentioned above, utilize the benefit of the pulpit to ensure members partake in the well-being of society. Viewed from this perspective, Pentecostal movements tend to take a lead from the above to send impactful messages to ensure commitment from members on issues of environmental care. On this premise also, Pentecostal movement leaders have a very strong influence over members. Some are reckoned as demy-gods, 'his-lordship', 'daddy' in the Lord etcetera. As such, their admonition towards environmental ethics is held in very high esteem and executed to the letter by members. In fact, members go all out to encourage the general public to practice the



admonition of their leaders during evangelism. It can therefore, be concluded that Pentecostal environmental ethics contributes immensely to eco-theology and biodiversity conservation.

Aer (2017) has similarly projected the fact that the heterogeneity of Nigeria is surrounded by the natural habitats that naturally served as medicinal 'cupboards' and as sources of folk knowledge. In some regions, especially in the Southwest, Eastern/South Eastern Nigeria, conscious efforts are made to sustain the biological ecology for posterity sake, although old and customary ideas particularly that are derived from unorthodox measures of cure are also systematically disappearing (Calixto , 2005). However, since some Pentecostal Movements share or accommodate some basic practices of the traditional religion, the practice of preservation of certain lands, hills, valleys, mountains, groves and forests as well as the purchase of certain mass tracts of land and villages for spiritual exercise, enhances eco-theology and biodiversity conservation. These holy religious camps have helped to sustain a viable ecosystem and biodiversity. A typical example is the practice of holy pilgrimage in the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, which has helped to preserve a certain stream in Biakpan, Cross River State, Nigeria, which is acclaimed to possess healing powers, thereby encouraging and enhancing sustainable ecosystem and religious tourism and pilgrimage in the area (Umoh, 1983).

Also, scholars have argued that human economic activities have exercised severe constraints on the availability of special ranges of plants and all living organism (Anyam, 2013). To say the least, the Neo-Pentecostal Movement have successfully inculcated and indoctrinated their adherents into the practice of vegetarianism and the implementation and non-cultivation practices during holiday and Sabbath periods. They maintain land cultivation should be after every seven years, as such, using the biblical sabbatical or seventh day break observed by God in the creation story as an illustration for the need to have a break after every seven years of cultivation to boost the soil. They also emphasize the preservation and storage of food and food bank implementation to ensure environmental care and biodiversity conservation.

Anyinam (1995) again remarked that the progenitors of ethno medicine, native medicine practitioners and traditional healers., all stand to face annihilation faster than plants and animal's extinction because of the speed of the disappearance of forests and other biomes. Hence, knowledge is likely to disappear faster than the plants themselves. What accounts for this is the destruction of tropical forests in the equatorial regions, the extinction of the aborigines owing to not giving their accumulated knowledge to people about the usefulness of plants for curing diseases, ailments and other health disorders. It is therefore pertinent to note that most Pentecostal Movements practice natural healing and understand the inherent powers in this. As such, they adapt the application of natural objects, plants and animals in their curative processes. This is why they cherish the preservation of nature so much so, and it adds impetus to their religious dimension.

The importance of land, soil, plants' and animals as bio-sources of medicine from ancient times and even in modern times is taught in the Pentecostal Movement with reference to Christ's teachings and healing in the New Testament, most importantly, Christ's instruction to one to get up and walk, and carry his bed (where the lame man walked by the pool of Bethesda) (John 5:6). Jesus use of the earth, and soil to heal the blind man is another point illustrated by the Pentecostal Movements. Chivian (2002), Lev (2003), Yesilada (2005) and Alves (2006), aptly averred that plants' and animals based systems contribute immensely to health care. They postulate that the by-products of plants and animals, for instance: hooves, hides and skin, bones, feathers, trunks etc. constitute essential contents of curative, protective and preventive medicines. The Pentecostal Movements use of such element as curative measures to treat their in-house patients or sick members, whose sickness require progressive approach, through the use of such herbs



and potent natural drugs is well recorded. Also, Pentecostal Movements engage in mid-wifery and health care delivery for child and mother care. This practice helps to seriously engage with the practice of nature/earth care system thereby adding to environmental care, eco-theology and biodiversity conservation.

It is germane to note that most Pentecostal Movements derive their spiritual anointing water from water fountains, streams or rivers which are acclaimed to possess certain spiritual powers to perpetuate miracles. Such, such fountains, streams, rivers are reserved and venerated for religious and spiritual purposes. This practice is adapted from the Old Testament and New Testament ideas of spiritual possession of some natural place. This is typified in the story of Naaman, (see 2 Kings 5) the Israelite soldier who was cured of leprosy. This idea is very prominent among many Pentecostal Movements such that the anointing water obtained from reserve fountains, streams and rivers are given utmost reverence and are also believed to possess spiritual power to the point that some are sold at exorbitant prices. Though selling of anointing water may be seen from a negative point of view, however this practice has helped in the preservation of biodiversity and has encouraged eco-theology.

Another point of consideration is burial rites and their implications on the physical environment. Commenting on burial rites and concerns for the physical environment, Gbenda (2010) noted that the interactions of organism biotic (living things) and abiotic (non-living things) impact on ecosystems to the level of interaction and they determine the success or failure in a given environment. Furthermore, Gbenda argues that modern burial rites create problems for healthy agriculture and housing, hence the formalin clinical substance used for embalment constitutes an environmental hazard. On the other hand, some Pentecostal Movements practice the act of burying members as recorded in the Old Testament, for instance, where the dead are buried within seven days of demise, in order to discourage the use of artificial preservative drugs on the corpse. This practice may, however, not be a direct process of environmental care by the movements. It, however, can be noted that this practice does also help in the prevention of biodiversity loss on the earth and encourages eco-theology.

Recommendations

The investigation from the research reveals the following recommendations: for optimum and adequate environmental and biodiversity conservation and protection, indigenous communities which have designated certain areas as sacred places should be encouraged by governments to maintain the sanctity of such places because of their associated biodiversity.

Sustainability of the soil depends solely on plants and their roots to prevent erosion and to sustain the living organization on the earth's surface. Billions of tiny organisms in the soil exist to help mix the soil and recycle nutrients for adequate biodiversity conservation. Understanding this dynamic in the cycle of life is very important, and as such, the soil and the earth need adequate protection and preservation. Thus, environmental education is a necessary requisite for earth care and biodiversity conservation.

Environmental ethics should be included in the curriculum of educational learning at all levels of education.

Governments should revitalize environmental agencies to stand up to the task of fighting against environmental degradation and climate change.



Environmental sanitation agencies should be properly sponsored by governments and also staff of such agencies should be paid suitable salaries to encourage them to become more committed in carry out their vital duties.

Dumping of refuse in gutters and gullies should be prohibited and strong penalties should be stipulated for defaulters.

Environmental cleaning should be made a serious job for all and sundry and a day within the week should be set aside for general environmental cleaning.

The concept of 'cleanliness is next to Godliness' should be re-echoed in churches and schools and even in the general public to engender in every one the spirit of environmental love and care.

A A crusade for environmental care should be encouraged by frequent staging of conferences, symposia, and workshops etcetera.

Local churches should continuously seek the support of the international community for the maintenance and sustenance of the environment and especially multi-national corporations

Scholars of eco-theology and religious environmentalists should continue in the debate on environmental care and more awareness should be raised, and the empo on ecology, biodiversity conservation as well as global warming matters should continuously be raised globally.

Indiscriminate littering, bush burning and dumping of refuse should be totally discouraged as these pose huge challenges to environmental sustainability.

Conclusion

The concept of eco-theology and biodiversity conservation has correctly pointed out that a deep conservation method is required to maintain an ecologically balanced environment. As such, a scientific approach alone cannot be enough grounds for environmental sustainability but rather a holistic approach is required. This is where religious ethics, sacred place and eco-theology are needed as an additional impetus to biodiversity conversation, which reminds us to acknowledge our symbiotic relationship with other beings in nature and also to take actions accordingly to restrain climate change and biodiversity loss.

Environmental challenges can certainly not be solved by only scientific or technological approaches but also, through religious environmentalism and eco-theologians who spread the needed messages (Ejeh, 2010; Dudley, 2020; Cloete, 2021). This is why scholars in this field of studies have argued that environmental complications are as results of much more serious spiritual crisis, involving misinterpretation of theological principles both for and against environmental management and maintenance. In response, this paper calls for further an eco-theological approach towards environmental protection and preservation such as that which is currently embarked on by the Pentecostal Movements. This is to say environmental concerns are the work for all and sundry failing which the planet will continue to be degraded. .

Individuals, societies, governmental and non-governmental organizations should realize that organisms occupying the earth are subject to deterioration and that as such, the surface and all that is in it deserves absolute care and maintenance. More so, living organisms deserve the process of life recycling and this can only be achieved through maintaining the nutrients from decomposition. Hence, all ecosystems are important, including the tiny billions of organisms, and



soil erosion, global warming, deforestation, biodiversity loss can all be handled through global streams of support coming from all and sundry, as such Pentecostal environmentalism will become a household name in achieving this important cause.

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