



Religious diversity and environmental ethics in a Pluralistic Ghanaian Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between religious diversity and environmental ethics in Ghana's pluralistic religious context, where African Traditional Religion (ATR), Christianity, and Islam coexist within a shared socio-cultural environment. The research responds to growing environmental challenges, including deforestation, illegal mining (galamsey), water pollution, biodiversity loss, and climate variability, as well as limited scholarly attention to the ecological implications of religious pluralism. Guided by Sacred Ecology Theory, Stewardship Theory, the Just Sustainabilities Framework, and African Communitarian Ethics, the study adopted a mixed-method research approach. The target population comprised religious leaders, environmental activists, traditional authorities, community elders, members of faith-based organizations, and community residents. Using purposive and stratified sampling techniques, data were collected from 330 participants, comprising 300 survey respondents and 30 key informants, selected from urban, peri-urban, and rural communities across Ghana. Semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis were employed, and data were analyzed using thematic and statistical techniques. Findings indicate that religious diversity significantly shapes environmental ethics and sustainability practices. ATR promotes sacred ecological values through taboos and sacred groves, while Christianity and Islam emphasize stewardship and environmental responsibility. The study concludes that religious diversity is both a resource and a challenge for sustainability and recommends integrating religious institutions, interfaith collaboration, and indigenous ecological knowledge into environmental governance and development policies.

Keywords: Environmental Ethics, Environmental Governance, Interfaith Ecology, Religious Diversity, Religion, Religious Pluralism

I. INTRODUCTION

Environmental degradation is gradually emerging as one of the key challenges of the twenty-first century. The implications are not only environmental loss, but have impacts on public health, economic productivity, social stability, and sustainable development. Environmental issues have become more urgent in various African nations, but Ghana stands out as a major concern. It faces ongoing environmental challenges including deforestation, illegal mining (galamsey), water contamination, biodiversity decline, and increasing climatic uncertainty, all straining ecosystems and human activities (Twumasi-Ankrah & Adu-Gyamfi, 2024). The widespread destruction of forest reserves, contamination of major rivers such as the Pra, Ankobra, and Offin, as well as agricultural land, show how much environmental degradation is now deeply embedded in contemporary Ghanaian society.

Environmental concerns, even though talked about in scientific terms, economic terms, and terms of government policies are always inadequate as explanations for this. Human encounters with the natural environment are deeply rooted in cultural assumptions; they involve moral value systems and religious beliefs that structure and interpret communities' relationships with nature (Tucker & Grim, 2001; Jenkins, 2013). As a result, any serious exploration of environmental sustainability must consider not only technical remedies, but also the moral and spiritual approaches that support environmental behavior. Ghana is particularly well-suited to these questions because of its significant religious diversity. African Traditional Religion (ATR), Christianity, and Islam exist in a shared social context, and their interactions sometimes shape human or communal feelings toward nature (Mbiti, 1990). In contrast to societies where religious identities are sharply polarized, Ghana has generally cultivated a culture of religious coexistence and interfaith engagement, yielding opportunities for collaboration on such matters of national concern (Konadu et al, 2022; Konadu et al, 2026).

However, the implications of this religious pluralism for environmental ethics are underexplored. In African Traditional Religion, nature is not merely seen as a collection of physical resources ripe for human exploitation. On the contrary, natural components of the land—rivers, woods, mountains, sacred groves—constitute spiritual aspects of connection to divine realities of ancestors (Benson, 2021).

Historically, such beliefs have played a role in indigenous conservation, controlling access to natural resources and reinforcing communal responsibility for the environment. But romanticizing these traditions as uniformly conservative would be too simple. As with all religious belief systems, ATR is situated within changing social and economic landscapes, and certain traditional ecological practices have become increasingly diluted under the pressures of modernization and urbanization. Christianity and Islam offer a different but no less important set of views on the environment.

Indeed, critics have observed that certain readings of the Abrahamic traditions lead to anthropocentrism, underscoring the dominion of humanity over creation (White, 1967). Yet recent studies increasingly prove that Christianity as well as Islam share important theological resources with respect to environmental ethics, ecological justice and sound stewardship of creation (Konadu, 2026). It is in Ghana that such ecological issues have more openly been highlighted, with churches, Islamic bodies and faith-based ones initiating tree-planting programs, environmental education drives and sustainability efforts. This implies that historical reflections on religious traditions are reductive and will not work unless we compare them to contemporary environmental challenges. Conversely, religious change in Ghana has added fresh complexity to environmental discourse. The explosive growth of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity has brought about in a great number of respects a transformation in religious life, and in many cases this transformation highlighted the emphasis of religion on material well-being, self-empowerment and the intervention of religion within everyday life (Kalu, 2008; Onyinah, 2012). Some scholars have wondered if teachings about prosperity promote over-consumption vs control or if they affirm the dominance of man over the natural world, others claim that there are movements there that have the organizational power, the social capacity, the social influence to mobilize environmental action.

So the link between religious change and responsibility with regard to the environment remains a much subtler matter than is at times recognised in existing literature. In fact, academic conversations about religion and environmental ethics uncover a structural tension. On the one hand, religion is often framed as a compelling force for environmental values that empowers individuals and ecosystems to act sustainably in the long term. On the other hand, religious beliefs have sometimes been linked to attitudes that legitimize environmental exploitation or inhibit critical scrutiny of ecological crises (White, 1967; Gottlieb, 2006). Neither stance adequately reflects the complex texture of religious existence in contemporary Ghana. Religious tradition is oftentimes equally responsible to the environment, a social, and even an ethical unit. Their impact may depend largely on how doctrines are interpreted, institutionalized, and transformed into practice.

However, given the rising body of scholarship on religion and ecology across the world, the gap remains in the Ghanaian context. The majority of prior scholarship focuses on Christianity, Islam, or African Traditional Religion in isolation, failing to identify the intersections, exchanges, and mutual moral space that arise in a religiously plural milieu (Ahiabu, 2013). Consequently, limited attention has been paid to how various interreligious communities collectively form environmental attitudes, shape responses to climate-related challenges, and form public discourse on sustainability.

Here, we aim to fill this gap by an interdisciplinary perspective on the relationship between religion, environmental ethics and sustainability in Ghana. Instead of studying all religious traditions in isolation, this study investigates the impact of varying faith communities on environmental consciousness and practices; on ecological sustainability more broadly. It also explores what interfaith relationships offer or hinder in meeting environmental challenges.

Thus, the study situates environmental ethics within Ghana's plural religious landscape and the study extends its contribution not only towards academic discourse on religion and ecology but also contributes to growing discussions around environmental governance, sustainable development, and public policy in a number of other disciplines that are currently being debated.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Environmental degradation is one of the most urgent national issues still facing Ghana. Deforestation, land degradation, biodiversity loss, water contamination and other impacts of illegal mining on the environment, and on public health and food security as well as on a population are continuing to threaten the ecosystem and the country's sustainable growth and well-being (Twumasi-Ankrah & Adu-Gyamfi, 2024). These challenges persist over the longer term despite a wide range of policy interventions, which suggests that existing solutions to environmental governance may not be sufficient.

Recent responses to environmental degradation have largely focused on regulatory changes, tech-assisted solutions, and economic incentives. Although all of these measures are certainly important, they also tend to overlook

moral and cultural underpinnings of environmental behaviour. Legal mechanisms and economic considerations do not determine human behavior towards the environment; rather, they are shaped by belief systems, moral commitments, and worldviews that influence how individuals perceive their responsibility to nature (Jenkins, 2013; Hiskes, 2009).

Religion remains a great influence on social values, community ties, and public behavior in Ghana (Konadu et al., 2025). Religious leaders have considerable moral authority, and religious organizations have massive grassroots structures that can mobilize communities around social issues. As a result, religious institutions hold substantial potential to shape positive environmental beliefs and promote sustainable behaviors (Tweneboah, 2025). But this potential is only partly ingrained in national environmental planning and policy frameworks.

The country's religious diversity poses another challenge. African Traditional Religion maintains indigenous ecological knowledge systems and sacred ecological values that have long served as a basis for conservation initiatives. On the other hand, the modernization, urbanization, and changing religious affiliations that are present today marginalize many of these traditions (Benson, 2021). Simultaneously, Christianity and Islam have a rich theological context within which to care for the environment but are not necessarily observed in actual operational environmental action or as priorities of the State (Gwaravanda & Marevesa, 2025).

Religious pluralism presents both opportunities and challenges for environmental governance. On the one hand, there is an agreement in mutual ethical problems between various religious traditions for more mutual collaboration and cooperative action. Alternatively, the theological assumptions and institutional imperatives could give rise to fragmented conceptions of environmental responsibility. While Ghana is known for its tolerance of religion and peaceful coexistence, this diversity is not necessarily related to an organized environmental response (Konadu et al., 2022; Konadu et al., 2026). Nor is that to be the case with the continuing disparity between religious creed and environmental practice. For many religious groups, these values appear publicly, albeit quietly, as being the moral of stewardship, care of creation and devotion to the natural environment. But these pledges frequently do not quite show up in what is done every day in waste, real estate utilization, resource extraction and preservation.

This incongruence begs the question of the appropriateness of religious teachings in determining environmental attitudes and facilitating sustainable development. The main issue examined in this study, accordingly, is the scarce understanding of the impact of religious diversity on environmental ethics, and sustainability practices in the context of Ghana. But in the absence of a more profound understanding of the ethical, cultural and religious aspects of environmental behavior, policy interventions will be less about treating the symptoms and more about dealing with the cause of ecological degradation. Thus, knowing how various religious influences shape environmental thinking, practices and collective action is important for the formulation of more inclusive and sustainable responses to Ghana's environmental challenges.

1.2 Research Questions

- i. How do African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islam shape environmental values and ethical attitudes in Ghana?
- ii. How do religious beliefs influence individual and community environmental behaviours such as conservation, waste management, and resource use?
- iii. How does religious diversity promote or hinder collective environmental action and interfaith ecological cooperation?
- iv. What role do religious institutions play in addressing environmental degradation and promoting sustainability?
- v. What opportunities and challenges does religious pluralism present for environmental governance and policy implementation in Ghana?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

Scholarly interest in the relationship between religion and environmental ethics has expanded significantly across religious studies, environmental humanities, sociology, and African philosophy. This growth is largely driven by escalating ecological crises such as climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and pollution, which have intensified attention to the moral and spiritual foundations of environmental stewardship. In pluralistic African contexts like Ghana, religion functions as a central framework of ethical reasoning and social organization, making it essential for interpreting environmental attitudes and sustainability practices. This study is grounded in four interrelated theoretical perspectives—Sacred Ecology Theory, Stewardship Theory, the Just Sustainabilities Framework, and African Communitarian Ethics—which together provide a multidimensional lens for understanding how religious diversity shapes environmental ethics and ecological behaviour in Ghana.

2.1.1 Sacred Ecology Theory

Sacred Ecology Theory (Taylor, 2010) emphasizes the intrinsic spiritual value of nature, rejecting its reduction to a mere commodity for human exploitation. It views ecological systems—forests, rivers, mountains, animals, and land—as possessing sacred significance, thereby demanding moral respect and protection. Environmental responsibility is therefore understood as both a spiritual duty and a cosmological obligation.

This perspective strongly aligns with African Traditional Religion (ATR), where nature is often regarded as inhabited by divine forces and ancestral spirits (Mbiti, 1990). In many Ghanaian societies, sacred groves, rivers, and ecological taboos function as indigenous conservation mechanisms that regulate human interaction with the environment. Such practices embed sacredness into cultural life, promoting respect and sustainable resource use. Benson (2021) further argues that indigenous ecological systems are valuable for biodiversity conservation and environmental sustainability. Thus, Sacred Ecology Theory highlights the continuing relevance of ATR in shaping environmental ethics and communal stewardship in Ghana.

2.1.2 Stewardship Theory

Stewardship Theory is rooted in Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions, emphasizing humanity's moral responsibility to care for creation. It rejects the notion of human ownership of the earth and instead frames humans as trustees accountable to God for environmental management (Gottlieb, 2006). Environmental protection is therefore a religious and ethical obligation rather than a purely economic or political concern.

In Christianity, stewardship is grounded in biblical teachings that balance dominion with care for creation. Similarly, Islamic environmental ethics emphasize *khalifah* (trusteeship) and *amanah* (responsibility), which require maintaining ecological balance, justice, and harmony. In Ghana, Christian and Muslim institutions increasingly incorporate environmental themes into sermons, advocacy, and development programmes. However, Kalu (2008) and Onyinah (2012) caution that prosperity-oriented religious interpretations may weaken ecological awareness by prioritizing material success over environmental concern. Stewardship Theory, therefore, explains how Christian and Islamic teachings shape environmental ethics within Ghana's plural religious landscape.

2.1.3 Just Sustainabilities Framework

The Just Sustainabilities Framework links environmental sustainability with social justice, equity, and inclusion. It critiques environmental approaches that prioritize ecological protection while neglecting poverty, inequality, and cultural diversity. According to Agyeman (2013), sustainability is only achievable when environmental integrity and human well-being are addressed simultaneously.

In Ghana, environmental degradation is closely tied to socio-economic conditions such as poverty, unemployment, rapid urbanization, and unequal resource distribution. Activities such as illegal mining and deforestation often persist due to economic survival needs. This framework is therefore crucial for explaining why religious environmental ethics do not automatically translate into sustainable behaviour without supportive socio-economic structures. It demonstrates that environmental responsibility must be understood within broader systems of justice and development.

2.1.4 African Communitarian Ethics and Environmental Management

African Communitarian Ethics emphasizes relationality, reciprocity, and interconnectedness among individuals, communities, nature, and the spiritual world. In African philosophy, the individual is inseparable from the community and the environment, making environmental responsibility inherently collective rather than purely individual (Mbiti, 1990; Gyekye, 1997).

This worldview reflects indigenous Ghanaian understandings in which environmental care is tied to kinship systems, social harmony, and communal survival. African ecological ethics prioritize respect for nature and harmonious coexistence rather than domination (Menkiti, 1984). This framework is therefore central to understanding how environmental stewardship operates as a shared moral responsibility within Ghanaian communities, including interfaith cooperation and collective conservation practices.

2.2 Empirical Review

This section synthesizes empirical studies on religious diversity, environmental ethics, environmental behaviour, interfaith cooperation, and environmental governance in Ghana and similar contexts.

2.2.1 Religious Traditions and Environmental Moral Orientations in Ghana

Empirical evidence shows that different religious traditions shape distinct environmental values. In African Traditional Religion, nature is perceived as sacred and spiritually interconnected with human life (Mbiti, 1990). Practices such as taboos, sacred groves, and ritual restrictions regulate resource use and promote conservation. Benson (2021) highlights the role of indigenous beliefs in protecting forests and water bodies in rural Ghana, while Kpobi and

Swartz (2019) show that indigenous healing systems reinforce ecological meaning systems that support environmental stewardship.

Christianity in Africa increasingly integrates ecological concerns into theology and practice, emphasizing creation care. Churches in Ghana have incorporated environmental themes into preaching and outreach programmes. However, Kalu (2008) observes that prosperity-oriented Pentecostalism may weaken ecological engagement. Islamic environmental ethics similarly promote balance, trusteeship, and responsibility, though their practical application varies across contexts. Overall, literature shows that ATR, Christianity, and Islam each contribute to environmental ethics, but are rarely studied together in a pluralistic framework.

2.2.2 Religious Beliefs and Environmental Behaviour

Religious beliefs significantly influence environmental behaviour, including conservation, waste management, and resource use. Konadu et al. (2026) found that stronger religious commitment correlates with higher environmental awareness and moral responsibility in Ghana. Twumasi-Ankrah and Adu-Gyamfi (2024) further show that faith-based initiatives promote tree planting, sanitation, and environmental activism through churches and mosques.

However, a gap exists between belief and practice. Despite widespread teachings on stewardship, environmental degradation persists due to socio-economic pressures. Poverty and livelihood insecurity are identified as major barriers to sustainable environmental behaviour. This suggests that religious ethics alone are insufficient without structural economic and policy support.

2.2.3 Religious Pluralism and Inter-Religious Ecological Cooperation

Empirical studies indicate that interfaith collaboration can enhance environmental sustainability. Tucker and Grim (2001) argue that shared moral values across religions can foster collective environmental action. In Ghana, Tweneboah (2025) notes increasing cooperation among religious groups in addressing environmental challenges such as pollution and deforestation.

Konadu et al. (2022) and Konadu et al. (2026) also highlight Ghana's history of interfaith harmony and cooperation in social development. However, White (1967) warns that certain theological interpretations may encourage ecological exploitation. Thus, religious pluralism functions as both a unifying and fragmenting force depending on the quality of interfaith relations.

2.2.4 Religious Groups and Environmental Governance

Religious institutions play a growing role in environmental governance. Churches and mosques increasingly engage in environmental education and sustainability programs. These institutions often have strong grassroots influence, especially in rural communities.

African independent churches also contribute to community mobilization and social transformation (Adedibu, 2018), while Octuro et al. (2008) highlight their long-standing role in development. However, environmental discourse within many Ghanaian religious organizations remains limited and inconsistent, often overshadowed by spiritual and economic concerns.

2.2.5 Globalization, Modernisation, and Environmental Ethics

Globalization has reshaped religious environmental ethics in Africa. Konadu et al (2026) argues that global climate discourses and transnational faith networks have strengthened environmental awareness among religious communities. However, modernization has also weakened traditional ecological systems. Asante et al. (2025) report that sacred groves and indigenous conservation practices in Ghana are increasingly threatened by urbanization and shifting religious identities. Kalu (2008) further notes that prosperity-driven religious movements often prioritize consumption and individualism over ecological responsibility.

2.3 Literature Review and Research Gap Analysis

The literature demonstrates that religion significantly influences environmental ethics and sustainability practices. ATR emphasizes sacred ecological values, while Christianity and Islam promote stewardship and moral responsibility. Empirical studies also show that religious institutions contribute to environmental awareness and community action.

However, three key gaps remain. First, most studies examine religious traditions in isolation rather than in interaction within Ghana's plural context. Second, limited research directly links religious beliefs with environmental behaviour and sustainability outcomes. Third, there is insufficient focus on interfaith environmental cooperation and its implications for governance.

This study addresses these gaps by adopting an integrative approach that examines how religious diversity shapes environmental ethics, behaviour, interfaith relations, and sustainability practices in Ghana.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-method research approach combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine the relationship between religious diversity and environmental ethics in Ghana. This design was appropriate because the study sought not only to measure environmental attitudes and practices but also to explore the religious beliefs, ethical systems, and socio-cultural meanings that shape ecological behaviour within Ghana's pluralistic religious context.

The qualitative component employed an interpretive and descriptive approach to examine how African Traditional Religion (ATR), Christianity, and Islam conceptualize environmental responsibility, sacred ecology, and sustainability. This allowed for an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of environmental ethics.

The quantitative component used a cross-sectional survey design to measure environmental awareness, conservation practices, and ecological behaviour across different religious groups. This enabled the identification of patterns, trends, and differences among respondents.

The integration of both approaches facilitated methodological triangulation, strengthening the validity, reliability, and comprehensiveness of findings. In addition, an interdisciplinary framework drawn from religious studies, sociology, environmental ethics, and African philosophy was adopted to provide a holistic analysis of the religion–culture–environment nexus in Ghana.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in selected communities across Ghana representing diverse religious, ecological, and socio-cultural settings. Ghana was chosen due to its strong religious pluralism, where African Traditional Religion, Christianity, Islam, and other faith traditions coexist and influence social life.

Data were collected from urban, peri-urban, and rural communities in the Ashanti, Greater Accra, Northern, Bono, and Volta Regions. These regions were selected due to their varying religious compositions and environmental conditions. Urban centres such as Kumasi and Accra experience significant environmental pressures, including rapid urbanization, industrialization, and waste management challenges.

In contrast, rural and peri-urban areas maintain stronger indigenous ecological practices associated with African Traditional Religion, such as sacred groves, river taboos, and communal conservation systems. These areas also experience varying degrees of environmental degradation, including deforestation, illegal mining (galamsey), water pollution, and land degradation. This diversity provided a strong basis for examining how religious values shape environmental ethics and sustainability practices across different Ghanaian contexts.

3.3 Target Population

The target population comprised religious leaders, environmental activists, traditional authorities, community elders, and members of faith-based organizations drawn from African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islam.

Religious leaders—including pastors, priests, imams, and traditional spiritual leaders—were included due to their influence on moral teachings and environmental consciousness within communities. Community members were also included to capture everyday ecological practices such as waste disposal, farming activities, resource use, and environmental conservation.

Environmental officers and activists were incorporated to provide professional and policy-oriented perspectives on environmental governance and sustainability initiatives. The inclusion of diverse demographic groups such as gender, age, and socio-economic categories enhanced the representativeness and reliability of the study.

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The study employed purposive and stratified sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used to select participants with relevant knowledge and experience in religion and environmental issues, including religious leaders, traditional authorities, environmental activists, and faith-based organization representatives.

Stratified sampling ensured balanced representation across African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islam, as well as across gender, age groups, and geographical locations. This enhanced inclusivity and reduced sampling bias.

A total of 300 respondents participated in the quantitative survey, proportionally distributed across regions and religious affiliations. Additionally, 30 key informants were selected for semi-structured interviews, including pastors, imams, traditional priests, environmental officers, and community leaders. This sample size ensured both statistical reliability and rich qualitative insight.

3.5 Instruments and Procedures for Data Collection

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, structured questionnaires, and document analysis to ensure triangulation and complementarity.

3.5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with religious leaders, traditional authorities, environmental activists, and selected community leaders. Key themes included environmental stewardship, sacred ecology, conservation practices, religious interpretations of nature, and interfaith environmental cooperation.

The flexible interview format allowed participants to provide detailed explanations and contextual insights into how religion shapes environmental ethics in Ghana.

3.5.2 Structured Questionnaires

Structured questionnaires were administered to community respondents. The instruments collected quantitative data on environmental attitudes, conservation behaviours, waste management practices, ecological awareness, and the influence of religious beliefs on environmental responsibility.

Additional variables included religious affiliation, level of education, frequency of religious participation, and exposure to environmental education. The questionnaire was pre-tested on a small sample and revised to improve clarity, reliability, and validity before full administration.

3.5.3 Document Analysis

Document analysis involved reviewing religious texts, sermons, policy documents, environmental reports, and publications from faith-based organizations. This provided institutional and theological insights into environmental ethics across African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islam.

Data collection was supervised over a three-month period to ensure consistency, accuracy, and ethical compliance.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data were separately organized into qualitative and quantitative datasets prior to analysis.

3.6.1 Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data from interviews and documents were analyzed thematically. Transcripts and field notes were coded, categorized, and interpreted to identify recurring themes such as environmental ethics, sacred ecology, stewardship, interfaith cooperation, and sustainability.

Both inductive coding (emerging from data) and deductive coding (guided by theory) were applied. This approach enabled a nuanced understanding of how religious and cultural worldviews influence environmental behaviour in Ghana.

3.6.2 Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data from questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and charts were used to summarize environmental attitudes and behavioural patterns.

Inferential statistics, particularly correlation analysis, were used to examine relationships between religious affiliation, religious participation, and environmental practices. The integration of qualitative and quantitative findings strengthened the validity and depth of the study results.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered strictly to ethical principles governing social science research. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, and assurances of confidentiality.

Anonymity was maintained throughout data analysis and reporting by ensuring that no participant could be identified. Special attention was given to cultural and religious sensitivity, particularly in relation to African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islam.

All religious perspectives were treated with respect and without bias or misrepresentation. The study also upheld academic integrity by properly acknowledging all secondary sources and ensuring that data were used strictly for academic purposes.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

In this part, we present and interpret both findings from the quantitative survey and qualitative interviews. Instead of treating these two pieces of data as isolated strands, the discussion brings them into conversation with one another in order to better understand how religious diversity shapes environmental ethics and behaviour in Ghana. The objective is not only to report statistical outcomes but also to situate them within the lived realities, perceptions, and moral reasoning of participants drawn from African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islam.

4.2 Quantitative Findings

Table 1

Religious Belief and Environmental Responsibility (n = 300)

Response	Frequency	%
Agree	244	81.3
Disagree	32	10.7
Not sure	24	8.0

The responses in Table 1 point to a strong and fairly consistent conviction among participants that religion plays a meaningful role in shaping how people relate to the environment. More than four out of five respondents see environmental responsibility as something influenced by religious belief.

What is particularly interesting is not simply the dominance of agreement, but the confidence with which it is expressed across religious backgrounds. It suggests that in the Ghanaian context, environmental ethics are rarely detached from moral or spiritual interpretation. People tend to locate responsibility for nature within a wider moral universe that includes God, ancestors, and communal expectations. Jenkins (2013) points this out and indicates that environmental behaviour is rarely value-neutral but driven by more fundamental moral perspectives.

Table 2

Influence of Religious Teaching on Environmental Behaviour (n = 300)

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	217	72.4
No	53	17.7
Sometimes	30	10.0

Here, the pattern becomes more nuanced. While a significant majority acknowledge that religious teaching influences their behaviour, the data also reveal that this influence is not uniform or automatic. The presence of respondents who answered “sometimes” is particularly telling. It reflects the reality that religious teachings may be strong in principle, but their application depends on circumstances such as economic pressure, social expectations, or immediate survival needs. In other words, belief is present, but its translation into consistent environmental practice is uneven.

Table 3

Role of Religious Institutions in Environmental Governance

Response	Frequency	%
Very important	234	77.9
Important	42	14.1
Not important	24	8.0

Respondents appear to agree that religious institutions are not marginal actors in environmental governance. Instead they are seen as moral authorities whose voices make a difference in driving public conduct. This view reflects the social reality in Ghana – where religious leaders are often consulted on things that go far beyond matters of spirituality. Their influence stretches out from community discipline, social development and gradually, environmental awareness.

Table 4
Interfaith Environmental Cooperation

Response	Frequency	%
Support	222	74.1
Do not support	48	16.0
Neutral	30	9.9

A significant majority support collaboration between different religious traditions in addressing environmental challenges. This is an important finding because it suggests that, at the level of public perception, religious diversity is not seen as a barrier to environmental action. However, the minority who express resistance reminds us that interfaith cooperation is not always straightforward. Beneath the surface of tolerance, there are still doctrinal sensitivities and institutional boundaries that occasionally limit collaboration.

Table 5
Correlation between Religious Commitment and Environmental Concern

Variables	r	p-value
Religious commitment & environmental concern	0.61	< 0.05

The correlation finding indicates a moderately strong correlation between religious commitment and environmental concern. Simply put, people who are more actively involved in religious life are more likely to show greater environmental awareness and ethical concern. Yet this relationship is not absolute. The coefficient also indicates the importance of religion among other factors, rather than being a sole determinant of environmental behaviour.

4.3 Qualitative Analysis and Discussion of Findings

4.3.1 Religion as Moral Anchor of Environmental Life

One of the most common themes that emerged from interviewees was that environmental issues are not perceived as strictly technical or scientific problems. Instead they take the form of moral and spiritual concepts. Many participants portrayed environmental degradation as a type of moral disorder. One respondent expressed this concept succinctly, *“When we destroy nature, we are also breaking our responsibility before God and our community”* (Interviewee A, 06/07/2025). This form of framing betrays the abiding moral ecology where environmental action is linked to a responsible being whose responsibility is not limited to the human sphere.

4.3.2 African Traditional religion and sacred ecological memory

For adherents and custodians of African Traditional Religion the environment is not seen as a neutral space. It is lived, relational and meaningful spiritually. And 88.5% of ATR respondents acknowledged elements of nature to have spiritual significance, hence warrant preservation. What emerges from the interviews is a structure of ecological regulation that works through belief, fear of punishment and cultural memory. Sacred groves, taboos, and ritual restrictions are not just cultural artefacts but are in fact mechanisms of environmental governance. But many of those who responded also said these systems are deteriorating. Younger people in particular are less likely to respect classical environmental regulations, especially urban ones.

4.3.3 Christianity and Caring for the Environment

For the most part, Christian respondents filtered the notion of environmental responsibility through the framing of stewardship. Nature is viewed as God’s creation, entrusted to humanity for concern rather than exploitation. Most of them mentioned church activities like clean-up activities, planting trees, and sanitation campaigns. Environmental themes were sometimes also integrated into sermons in a few instances in these churches. But there is no single Christian environmental stance, though. Mainline churches are generally more system-oriented in their engagement toward this subject area, while, however, some Pentecostal and Charismatic churches as well as some evangelical and Charismatic movement have less attention to ecological themes, especially in contexts where prosperity theology is dominant. A consistent theme that recurs across the participants was that material success can occasionally outweigh one’s ecological responsibility.

4.3.4 Islamic Environmental Ethics

For Muslim respondents, environmental responsibility has always been recast within the context of trusteeship (khalifah), and accountability (amanah). Environmental consideration was not portrayed as an optional extra, but

rather as a matter of religious duty. Wastefulness, pollution, neglect of environment, were commonly denounced as moral violations. Imams said they had included in their sermons environmental messages, particularly regarding sanitation and responsible use of resources. Mosque-led clean-up initiatives also were reported in some communities.

4.4 The Disparity between Perception and Practice

A key conclusion of this study is the discrepancy between environmental ideology and behavior. Though religion has a strong emphasis on caring for the environment, day-to-day activities are not aligned with it. Even in a devout community, illegal mining, improper waste disposal, and deforestation persist. Moral awareness is not enough to induce behavioral change, this indicates. It is common to have economic pressure, job loss, unstable livelihoods and insufficient enforcement mechanisms frequently trump ethical reasons.

4.5 Socio-economic challenges and Environmental behaviors and conditions

Poverty and economic need were cited repeatedly as the constraints as well as poverty and economic urgency as major barriers by participants. It was only one of the five factors to ethical behaviour. In mining and farming communities, many noted being environmentally harmed but said they had few other options. As one respondent put it, *"We know what it's doing to the land, but survival comes first"* (Interviewee B, 06/07/2025). This reveals a fundamental tension: there are environmental ethics, but they usually struggle within the constraints of economic survival.

4.6 Interfaith Collaboration: Promise & Limits

Many respondents see interfaith collaboration as good (even in general), although we have examples of joint environmental action, such as tree planting and other sanitation campaigns. But collaboration is not straightforward. Differences in doctrine, institutional identity and acceptance of indigenous practices can also pose a barrier. To make that point even more interesting, while Christian participants expressed discomfort with close coordination with ATR practitioners, traditionalists believed that these indigenous systems were often disregarded. So there is cooperation, but it is fragile and uneven.

4.7 Religious Institutions and Environmental Governance

Religious institutions are arguably the most influential for environmental governance. They influence public opinions, mobilize communities, and often fill gaps left by formal state institutions. But their levels of engagement differ enormously. It's a matter of who is most active there and who feels environmental concerns are not important. This variance is heavily driven by leadership concerns and institutional capacity.

4.8 Overall Interpretation

The findings indicate a nuanced relationship between religion and environmental ethics in Ghana. Religion does matter because it shapes moral thinking, community norms and ecological understanding. But it cannot exist in a vacuum. Its impact is mediated by economic realities, institutional apparatuses, and cultural change. Religious diversity then is not just a facade to be noticed in Ghanaian society. It is a dynamic force, which can be a catalyst for and also a problem for environmental sustainability.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The present study investigated the influence of African Traditional Religion, Christianity, Islam, and environmental values, ecological ethics, sustainability practices, and green initiatives on environmental ethics in a pluralistic Ghana. It illustrates how religion is key to shaping moral, cultural, spiritual, and environmental conceptions in Ghanaian society. Environmental sustainability is thus not only a technical or economic issue but also a deeply social, cultural, and spiritual matter grounded in indigenous moral and religious ethical principles.

The results indicate that ecological ethics is substantially influenced by all three religions. The religious tradition of African Traditional Religion emphasizes ecological sustainability and includes sacred groves, taboos, symbolic limitations, and social practices in preservation and community conservation, through environmental principles and natural conservation techniques. Both Christianity and Islam, by contrast, develop environmental ethics through stewardship theology, moral accountability, and care for creation.

Despite their doctrinal differences, those traditions share common moral principles of environmentalism, social responsibility, and communal well-being, grounded in a collective commitment to ecological protection, social responsibility, and societal justice that undergird sustainability in Ghana. Religious difference offers both opportunities and limitations. It facilitates interfaith exchange, ethical convergence, and collective environmental action through faith-based activities such as tree-planting, sanitation campaigns, environmental education, and

ecological advocacy. But theological fragmentation, doctrinal exclusivism, and prosperity-oriented readings erode collective ecological sense of responsibility and create piecemeal environmental responses.

Socio-economic context also plays a marked role in the success of social environmental ethics. Practically, poverty, unemployment, fast urbanization coupled with dependence on eco-devastating livelihoods like illegal mining and deforestation constrain the material manifestation of ecological values. It shows that religious ethics do not provide an effective solution without viable economic setups, systems of governance, and alternative means of livelihoods.

In theory, the study supports Sacred Ecology Theory, Stewardship Theory, the Just Sustainabilities Framework, and African Communitarian Ethics in understanding the religion–environment nexus in Ghana. Together, these frameworks demonstrate that environmental ethics are culture-bound, spiritually grounded, and also socially relational, rather than individual or technical in nature solely. Religious diversity is no hindrance to sustainability in Ghana. Instead, it is a strategic ethical and cultural resource that can contribute greatly to the achievement of conservation, environmental governance, and sustainable development, when properly utilized and can be supported via progressive policies, interfaith cooperation, and social and economic welfare structures.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the study results, it is suggested some suggestions come to the fore, for the influence of religion to be further promoted in the area of environmental policy and sustainability among the various branches of government in Ghana. The recommendations are based on inclusivity, respect for culture, and a multi-sectoral effort from religious institutions, traditional authorities with state organizations.

In the first place, environmental governance arrangements in Ghana could, and must, be broader based on culture. Religious organizations and traditional authorities should have greater involvement in the development and implementation of environmental regulations alongside local government structures. Churches, mosques and traditional councils need to interface more effectively with other state institutions (Environmental Protection Agency, Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation) and metropolitan, municipal, and district assemblies. These institutions possess the moral authority and depth of grassroots reach to enhance environmental compliance, awareness generation, and community ownership of sustainability initiatives.

Second, interfaith environmental collaboration needs to be solidified by structuring platforms that align Christian, Muslim, and ATR leaders. Joint initiatives like afforestation drive programmes, climate change awareness drives, waste management initiatives and community sanitation activities should be scaled up and institutionalized. This level of cooperation will turn competing religious beliefs into a common platform for ecological management, and while it does so, it will also help build social cohesion, understanding and peace in Ghana's plural religious society.

Third, there is an urgent need to support and rejuvenate the African Traditional Religion based indigenous ecological knowledge-systems. Cultural and environmental resources such as sacred groves, taboos, rites and traditional conservation practices should be viewed as something other than a historical artifact; instead, as a rich cultural and environmental memory. Such indigenous systems should be officially incorporated in conservation initiatives by the political and environmental institutions and players. Traditional authorities need to be supported and resourced to be able to manage sacred ecological sites that are central to biodiversity conservation and ecological sustainability.

Fourth, environmental ethics and interfaith ecological education need to be embedded in Ghana's education system of all levels. Teaching on environmental sustainability modules, religious ecological ethics, and indigenous environmental knowledge should be offered at elementary schools, secondary schools, teacher training colleges, seminaries and Islamic educational institutions. That will result in the development of environmentally conscious citizens and future religious leaders who are not only ethically responsible, but are also culturally competent.

Fifth, religious leaders need to increase the frequency of environmental advocacy in religions including ecological message incorporation within sermons, religious teachings, public talks and outreach programmes: religious leaders as the facilitator and promoter of environmental protection and advocate for the environmental issue. Environmental protection should be articulated not only as a civic duty but also a spiritual and moral responsibility framed in terms of stewardship, justice, accountability, and the community as a whole, rather than merely concern for the environment. It is hoped this will help to close the gap between religious faith and actual environmental action.

Finally, for faith-based environmental projects, government agencies, civil society, development partners, social institutions, and even international environmental organizations need to step up technical support and financial assistance. They must strengthen strategic partnerships between religious ethics, indigenous knowledge systems and sustainability goals on a global scale in areas such as sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, climate adaptation, reforestation and community-based conservation. Such collaborations will improve the credibility and impact of religious diversity as a positive resource for environmental sustainability, national progress and longevity of nature in Ghana.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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