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Undoubtedly one the complex challenges facing humanity today is the environmental problem and how to avert further destruction and/or degradation of the natural world. Environmental challenges, such as climate change and diminishing natural resources, and the apprehensions that have attended them are a wake-up call for humankind to adopt simpler, modest and sustainable lifestyles in order to better relate with the nonhuman world. In order to enhance the sustainable use of resources so that the needs and rights of the future generations to environmental goods and services enjoyed by current occupants of the earth are not compromised, the concept of sustainable development become the new normal of development processes. This means rethinking the processes of production and consumption in ways that correlate with the regenerative capacity of the earth as well as its ability to sustain a flourishing life for future people of the earth. Briefly explained, this is the core thesis of sustainability and/or sustainable development, which is defined as "… development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987, 43).

The content of research and policy processes that inform the United Nations (UN) agenda towards sustainability is what I refer to in this article as sustainability discourse. Interestingly however, this discourse, "has often overlooked how religious symbols, rituals, and ethics imply the need for changes in attitudes toward and actions for creating a sustainable future" (Histhuizen and Tucker 2015: 372). However, the complex and inter-linked nature of the environmental challenge and concerns for the natural world mean that efforts and processes towards the search for sustainability and sustainable development have interdisciplinary significance. In recent decades, faith communities and scholars in religion have also been prominent voices in sustainability discourse, exploring the connections between their faith traditions and the care of the environment. Usually these voices reflect the norms, virtues and values of religious commitments and their relevance for motivating sustainable behaviour. Other disciplines, especially those dealing with climate change and sustainability issues, have recognized the connection between religious and theological disciplines as well as partnerships between religious organisation and environmental organisation (Histhuizen and Tucker 2015).

However, there remains a tendency to overlook religion in mainstream sustainable research and policy frameworks. Sustainability discourse tends to emphasize technological and technical solutions, usually generated from the natural and social sciences. This article suggests that the concept of Sabbath, and specifically the values, norms and responsibilities found within the religious concept of environmental stewardship, holds promise as a viable and comprehensive moral framework for promoting sustainability discourse in Africa. When one considers the religiously vibrant context of Africa, there is promise in reframing the

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largely secular notion of environmental sustainability with a religious concept of environmental care – stewardship (Golo and Yaro 2013).

This article demonstrates the value of this concept through informal discussions with members from two indigenous communities in Ghana. This article first unpacks the concept of environmental stewardship in secular sustainability discourse. The article then examines Sabbath as grounds for religious environmental stewardship, and the potential for beliefs, norms and values to relate to sustainability discourse.

Environmental Stewardship

The term environmental stewardship (ES) is an application of a traditional principle of stewardship. The term steward has been traced to the etymology of the old English word *stigweard*, meaning "a servant who looks after a hall, a manor or landed estate" (Welchman 2012: 299). Over the centuries this term has been "applied to a wide range of occupations centrally concerned with caring for things or persons on another's behalf" (Welchman 2012: 299). The term itself "has undergone radical transformation in its practical understanding and application" (Petersen 1994: 20). During the Enlightenment in Christian West, Protestant churches of the late 19th century popularised the concept following the medieval practice of tithing when they called for donations and pledges from congregations as means to raise revenue for the church. Churches continued this practice into the early 20th century, and through the social gospel it was popularised as a means of raising adequate funds for ministries in the surrounding communities (cf. Petersen 1994: 20). Thus, it is evident the principle was popular in the Protestant West, specifically the United States, Canada and the British Empire (Welchman 2012). Chirisa (2010) notes that although stewardship relates fundamentally to the philosophy and practice of managing things for others, the term has been applied to a host of resources, such as estates and materials assets. However, the principle is derived from the theoretical belief that humankind was created by the Creator of the whole universe to dwell and improve the earth on behalf of God (Chirisa, 2010: 1). This indicates the religious significance of the concept, although it is not clear when the term was used in this religious context.

The concept found its way into the language and diction of volunteers and organisers' of grassroots conservation groups and campaigners in the latter half of the 20th century as a way to conceptualize and re-order their moral relationships to the natural environment (Welchman 2012; Petersen, 1994), when the despoliation of the earth dawned on humankind. One the reasons that the concept of stewardship appealed to secular environmentalists was that it dislodged human relationships to the earth from its old trapping in which humanity was the owner and conqueror of nature (Petersen 1994). Rather, stewardship conceptualized humanity's relationship to the natural world through four virtues. Welchman (2012: 299) notes,

First, stewardship is a traditionally a form of guardianship: a role whose practice requires the observance of constraints on the pursuit of personal interest. Second, stewardship, in contrast to other forms of guardianship, has a longstanding association with *landholdings*. Third, stewardship is an *ongoing role or relationship* maintained over time with the stewards' principals and with the lands, things or persons in their care. Fourth, performance of the role requires the exercise of certain moral virtues. To be a competent steward, one must possess and act from dispositions such as loyalty, temperance, diligence,

justice and integrity, as well as intellectual virtues or technical skills such as prudence and practical rationality

From the above, one sees that stewardship is a virtuous practice (Welchman 2012) in which the steward works within certain constraints. The steward's actions are restrained by "the trust and legitimacy in his or her support from the principal (behind) as well as the confidence that he or she enjoys from the people receiving his or her services" (Chirisa 2010: 42). Attfield (2003) notes that, though stewardship is of religious origin, according to both secular and religious beliefs in stewardship, they suggest that human beings are not the owners of the earth but they hold the earth in trust, not least for future generations. The view further attests that as a trustee, human beings are not only responsible for the care of the Earth but they are also answerable for the way they fulfil their roles as stewards.

Brown (1994: 18) suggests that the framework of stewardship "can be, and has been, grounded without reference to theological beliefs." Environmental volunteer groups and campaigners, for instance, appropriated the concept in a secular way without its religious trappings, as was the case of the Protestant churches at the time. It is for this reason that groups, such as the United States Forest Stewardship Program (1990), the United Kingdom's Countryside Stewardship Scheme (1991), the Canadian Province of Ontario's Stewardship Program (1995), the Canadian Habitat Stewardship Programme (2000), Australia's Environmental Stewardship Programme (2007) (Welchman 2012) utilized the concept of stewardship with no religious connotation.

From this stewardship perspective, a sustainable future has been conceptualised as being possible through responsible environmental stewardship by present generations. Although the term has endured, the concept of environmental stewardship has a range of common definitions. Brown (1998:17) defines environmental stewardship as emphasizing "the obligations that people have to discharge fiduciary duties: to leave the world as good as they found it. It thus points in the direction of risk aversion in bringing about large scale ecological changes." The United Nations Global Compact (2010: 9) defines it as the "comprehensive understanding and effective management of critical environmental risks and opportunities related to climate change, emissions, waste management, resource consumption, water conservation, biodiversity protection and ecosystem services." The US EPA (2005: 2) defines environmental stewardship as:

> ...the responsibility for environmental quality shared by all those whose actions affect the environment. This sense of responsibility is a value that can be reflected through the choices of individuals, companies, communities, and government organizations, and shaped by unique environmental, social, and economic interests. It is also a behaviour, one demonstrated through continuous improvement of environmental performance, and a commitment to efficient use of natural resources, protection of ecosystems, and, where applicable, ensuring a baseline of compliance with environmental requirements.

For Welchman (2012, 303), environmental stewardship "is the responsible management of human activity affecting the natural environment to ensure the conservation and preservation of natural resources and values for the sake of future generations of human and other life on the planet, together with the acceptance of significant answerability for one's conduct to society."

In contemporary times, environmental stewardship comes to the fore in discussions on sustainability and sustainable development (Golo and Yaro 2013; Chirisa 2010). It is even suggested that, in many ways, the idea of stewardship is the precursor to the discourse on sustainability and sustainable development (Golo and Yaro 2013). This is evident for instance, in statements such as "As we explore how to become a more sustainable society, it is clear that environmental stewardship can help preserve natural resources and achieve sustainable outcomes" (US EPA 2005: 2). Generally, environmental stewardship is seen as crucial for preventing further environmental degradation and attaining sustainability. It is also important to note that environmental sustainability focuses on future generations whose interest are to be protected (Chirisa 2010, Welchman 2012). These considerations of inter-generational equality, which emphasize that "each generation should have an equal right to enjoy, experience, and benefit from nature' (Brown 1998:17), stewardship places restraints on present generation's use of earth's resources.

Thus, the definitions of stewardship have diverted from its original roots and been adapted for secular sustainability discourse (cf. Attfield 2003; Welchman 2012 for history). However, these secular adaptations of stewardship are not without criticism and have not received consensus among environmental ethicists and philosophers. Therefore, it has the tendency to be relegated as a religiously oriented concept with little relevance for environmental ethics and philosophy (Welchman 2012). For instance, even earlier from a theological perspective, Petersen (1994: 21) considers what he calls the greening of stewardship as flawed "in its basic understanding between God, humans and the rest of Creation." This understanding, itself grows from "the underlying assumption that there indeed is God, humans and the rest of creation. In such a model, nature is one step removed from humanity. Thus humans are either foolish lord of the earth with the power to destroy nature, or humans are benevolent lord with the power to save and preserve nature. Nature is somehow dependent upon our actions" (Petersen 1994: 21).

However, the recourse to environmental stewardship by environmental groups and agencies, such as the US EPA and the UN, means that policy-makers and the development community affirm the relevance of the concept to their situation (cf UNGC 2010).

Religious Environmental Stewardship and the African Context

Faith communities, and religious professionals have awakened to the stark realities of climate change. The consequences have impressed upon the consciousness of humankinds a new sense of interdependence that humanity depends on and belong to earth (Abraham 1994: 69). Faith communities have taken a second look at the beliefs, traditions and doctrines that influence their views of the world and the role of humankind in it. From within their traditions, religious groups and experts have been engaged in reflections on the status of the natural environment, and their contributions to mitigate further anthropogenic destruction of creation. A recurring metaphor in this global resurgence of faith-based environmentalism is *stewardship*, and the need to recover responsible earth stewardship . With this understanding I will look at the issue of religious environmental stewardship and its potential as a framework for promoting sustainability discourse in Africa.

Comparing the stewardship model to other biblical concepts about the relationship between humanity and creation the clarity Asante (1984:15) notes that "God, who is the Creator, is interested in creation. God does not despise creation and so the human has no right to despise it. The Christian has the moral responsibility to care for creation." Generally,

religious environmental stewardship reflects those typically religious beliefs, norms and values that emphasize human obligations to care for God's creation. This view affirms that humans are God's trustees with the responsibility not only to care for the earth, but are also answerable for the way they execute their roles as stewards of God's creation (Attfield 2003). Thus, religious environmental stewardship affirms that, as stewards, humans are to nurture and protect the natural world but not to destroy it, because the 'destruction, desecration, or waste of resources is an affront to the generosity and beneficence of God' (DesJardins 2006: 39).

Religious environmental stewardship motivates religious communities to care for creation, by which "religious people have begun to identify elements of their religious traditions that might help support the promotion of ecological concern and responsible action" (French 2005: 469). In a study of a section of the three main religions in Ghana, believers affirm that "stewardship underscores that humans are to nurture and protect the natural world while benefiting from it, and they are not to destroy it" (Golo and Yaro 2013: 288). The believers suggested the roots of the problem of environmental degradation is humanity's refusal to act as responsible environmental stewards (Golo and Yaro 2013). Being a steward, therefore suggests that while benefitting from the Earth's resources and altering it, humans must do this within defined limits and constraints. Thus, greed and waste are simply incongruent to the stewardship ethos.

Comparing the above definition of religious environmental stewardship to the secular version currently used in sustainability discourse, I suggest that with the concept of environmental stewardship with religious diction provides promise as a moral framework for a comprehensive sustainability discourse in Africa. This claim is supported by two contextual reason.

First, the emphasis on the centrality of religious beliefs, norms and values is the ground for both individual and group social action, such as sustainable development processes, in many African societies. If one agrees that development of any sort does not proceed in a vacuum, then one can admit that sustainability discourse and sustainable development cannot marginalize the religious ontologies of the religiously vibrant context of Africa. Gerrie ter Harr and Stephen Ellis note:

> Most policymakers today accept that sustainable development can be achieved only if people build on their own resources. Logically, these assets should be considered to include not only intellectual and social resources, but also spiritual ones, if and when these are available. It is a fact that large numbers of people, particularly in developing countries, have a religious outlook on the world. (ter Harr and Ellis 2006: 353).

For this reason, religious environmental stewardship correlates with the African religio-cultural worldview of the relationship between human and nonhuman beings. This religio-cultural worldview contradict some secular environmental orientations that are scandals of (African) religious faith. Ecocentric orientations, are one example, which struggle to see a qualitative distinction between humans and nonhumans. In African cosmology, although humans and other nonhuman beings live in harmony, inter-dependence and in communal relationships, there exist moral distinctions between them. For instance among, the Akans and Ewes of Ghana, humans occupy privileged positions within creation.

Therefore, I argue that ignoring the moral and spiritual ontologies that are foundational to and legitimate individual and social action in most sub-Saharan African societies, in sustainability discourse is unjustifiable. The Canadian Faith Communities affirm that "the growing crisis of climate change need to be met with solutions that draw upon the moral and spiritual resources of the world' religious traditions" (CFC 2011:1). Histhuizen and Tucker (2013:368) also affirm: "Scientists, policy makers, economists, and educators can advance Earth Stewardship by engaging with the environmental perspectives and resources of the world's religions."

Secondly, the context of this paper is sub-Saharan Africa. Here, the legitimacy of religious claims remains central in both individual and communal lives. Beyond the consensus among religious respondents in Ghana that religiously inspired concepts of environmental stewardship are necessary for resolving the environmental problem (Golo and Yaro, 2013), I remain convinced religious diction remains crucial in defining and sustaining the duties and responsibilities of environmental stewardship if they will gain widespread acceptance and legitimacy among the religious. This is because, the world of the African is not only physical but also largely religious. Religious and cultural values are central to individual and community values (Ter Harr and Ellis 2006; Amenga-Etego 2016). Adeyemo (1995: 19) writes, "The African lives in a religious world. Unlike his Western counterpart, an African perceives, analyses and interprets reality (or events) through his religious grid." It worth emphasizing that this religious orientation of the African extends to the natural world (Golo 2017; Amenga-Etego 2016).

It is therefore encouraging that in recent years the development community has acknowledged religious communities as viable partners in development, and has expanded its previously narrow focus on the quantitative dimension of development towards religion (Freeman 2015; ter Haar and Ellis 2006), which opens up subjective and qualitative dimensions. Histhuizen and Tucker (2013: 368) also underscore the growing scholarly and environmental NGO attention to the connections between religion and Earth stewardship in theological and ecological disciplines. It, however, remains that the turn to religion is often based on a deficient functionalist, narrow and instrumental understanding of religion (Jones and Petersen 2011). In order to deepen this understanding, I turn to the Biblical motif of the Sabbath as a form of religious stewardship.

Sabbath as Environmental Stewardship

Found in Exodus 20: 8-10, and repeated in 23:10-12, the Sabbath entails the notion of rest for man and creation as well as justice for the vulnerable and landless poor in community. While the Sabbath motif in Exodus 20:8-10 requires man, land and oxen to rest on the seventh day, Exodus 23: 10-12 also requires this rest to occur every seven years, at which time the land lays fallow and animals used in the production process also allowed to rest the entire year. The land-owners are not allowed to returning to to land for work or harvest, and must leave the harvest to the landless and vulnerable. Suggesting that Sabbath entails multi-layers of a faith community's relationship with God, Cafferty (2015: 35) writes,

> At the observable, outward layer, Sabbath refers to consecrated time, the seventh day of the week, to be kept holy. This day when no work is done is set apart for worship to God. Sabbath also refers to the day of worship that also provides rest, which renews for future service. This rest applies as much to the earth as it does for humans. At a

> much deeper level, Sabbath refers to our entire relationship with God where persons in community rest from human efforts to achieve reconciliation with God. Sabbath is commitment to the set of principles designed to foster flourishing life. Thus, Sabbath is a miniature representation of all the principles of a flourishing relationship with God, namely, his Law.

Cafferty (2015) sees two dimensions of the Sabbath – a creation dimension and a covenant dimension - that both point to the Earth stewardship of humans. In its creative dimension, located in Exodus 20:8-10, the Earth is seen as gift and the Sabbath is also a gift, "designed to foster a deepening relationship between God and humankind, a gift which represents the reality of a joyful life of peace (shalom) envisioned for all God's creatures" (Cafferty 2015: 36). Examining the Sabbath in a homily quoting Norman Wirzba, Martin-Schram (2011: 1) suggests that central to the Sabbath observance is how "we participate regularly in the delight that marked God's own response to a creation wonderfully made." He further notes that keeping the Sabbath would mean praising God for the goodness of creation, a praise in which we learn "to train our desires and to value creation as a gift not a possession" Martin-Schram (2011: 1). Cafferty suggests that is in Sabbath worship highlights the relationship between God's work and humanity's work, where human beings made in the image of God "are to be co-workers with God, as responsible servants, to sustain flourishing life. … Thus, awareness of our role in sustaining the earth is integral to Sabbath worship" (Cafferty 2015: 37).

In terms of the Sabbath's covenant dimension, Cafferty (2015: 38) notes that the requirement of Exodus 20: 8-10 is repeated in Deuteronomy. This repetition frames the Sabbath as a covenant, which must be seen as a covenant relationship that God has established between God and humankind as signified in Exodus 31: 13-17. He suggests the Sabbath would cease to be so "if the principles of covenant were accepted only one day of the week for worship but ignored or rejected the other days of the week during work. Accordingly, Sabbath is a sign of loyalty to God" (Cafferty 2015: 38). He suggests that as a test of loyalty to the relationship with God, "the Sabbath tests the willingness of humans to lay aside wealth producing behaviours, which, if they do in response to God's grace by placing limits the economic dimension of shalom, God makes room to enjoy the other dimensions of shalom" (Cafferty 2015: 38). The covenant dimension of the Sabbath further entails managing the land. Cafferty notes that resting the land every seven years (sabbatical) was not for the utilitarian purpose of increasing productivity but as an inherent right of the land to be sustained (2015). In relation to the stewardship of humanity, this means that land "cannot endlessly be exploited. Humans are expected to have dominion over the land, but also to serve it and not hold the land in bondage" (Cafferty 2015: 39). Reflecting an eco-justice perspective, Sabbath entails not just a day among seven to rest and worship, but involves physical justice towards land and the vulnerable poor. "Working together with God, humans have a responsibility to make right the injustices which have oppressed the whole created order of all living things" (Cafferty 2015: 39).

While it is evident that the Sabbath is of the Abrahamic tradition because of its Biblical foundation, it is also evident the major religions in sub-Saharan Africa not only ascribe a supernatural origin to the created order but also demonstrate Sabbath commitments. The emphasis here will be on the Indigenous African Religion. While the following draws examples from the Ghanaian context that are familiar to the author, similar practices exists

among many indigenous traditions in sub-Saharan Africa. Diverse practices that are similar to the Sabbath can be found across many Indigenous African religions. For instance, among some indigenous Fante fishing communities on Ghana's coastline there are sacred days, usually Tuesday, set aside as rest day for fishermen. No fishing is allowed on those days. This gives the sea the time to replenish its fish stock (Awuah-Nyamekye 2009: 266). Similarly, in many inland communities there are days set aside when some lands are not worked, providing rest days for earth and wildlife. For instance, among the people of Dormaa Traditional Area in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana it is prohibited to work the land or go into the bush/forest for any occupational activity on Tuesday. Similarly, among the people of Matse Traditional Area in the Volta Region of Ghana there are many lands on which farming or hunting is prohibited after every five days (following the provincial market day). Awuah-Nyamekye (2009: 265) also reports sacred days of Thursday and Friday for the Akan and Fante of Ghana, respectively. He indicates that apart from their religious significance, these days "can serve as giving resting day not only to human beings, but also the animals, forests, lakes, rivers and all that has something to do with the land" (Awuah-Nyamekye 2009: 265). Thus, one could say the Sabbath motif is already central to the major religions of Africa.

Religious Environmental Stewardship, the Sabbath and Sustainable Futures in Africa

Humanity's responsibilities and duties for environmental stewardship become clear in the covenant traditions. Sabbath practices are one such traditions. Simon-Peter (n.d.: 1) notes "Sabbath reveals itself as the first environmentally friendly biblical covenant. Sabbath is good for people and the earth. It is not a stretch to say that faith grounded in the Bible is green. Sustainability is built into the fabric of creation." The religious responsibilities of humans, affirmed further in the Sabbath, requires humankind to be loyal to God in managing the gift of the nonhuman world so that it does not degenerate into destruction. This gift is to be managed in ways that sustain life here and now and into the future for inhabitants of the earth, while maintaining its own integrity and value as a good gift from God. These have certain promises and implication for the sustainability discourse and sustainable futures in Africa:

1. Religious Beliefs, Values and Norms as Spiritual Capital for Sustainability

Spiritual capital refers to the immaterial resources religious people use to interpret and construct their material world. These resources are acquired through experiences and encounters with the divine or spiritual realm of life. These religious experiences are the result of people's vertical encounter and experience of the transcendent, which motivate them to organise life on their horizontal encounters in the material world. These include norms, moral frameworks, personal conviction and orientation – inner foundational impulses that motivate behaviour and action – that the individual and/or community forms, in response to such encounters. Among individuals, this spiritual capital motivates subjective personal transformation towards a more integrated response and approach to realities of life. This "transformation of subjectivity" (Freeman 2015: 5), what Abamfo (2017) refers to as "spiritual capital" and is one of the central subjective roles of religion in sustainability discourse. It is this subjective transformation, which faith communities make in believers, which make faith communities viable partners in sustainable development.

Considering that environmental degradation and climate change are largely anthropogenic and spiritual, the claims to the centrality of religious morality in motivating human beings' environmental stewardship is not a stretch. Quoting Chapin et al, Histhuizen and Tucker (2013: 368) submit:

> Given the urgent need to promote a flourishing, sustainable future, the world's religious communities have much to offer because the attitudes and beliefs that shape most people's concept of nature are greatly influenced by their religious worldviews and ethical practices. The moral imperatives and value systems of religions have the potential to mobilize the sensibilities of people toward the goals of Earth Stewardship, here defined as shaping the trajectories of social–ecological change to enhance ecosystem resilience and human wellbeing" (Chapin *et al*. 2011)

The environmental crisis is spiritual because it is related to humans' definition of the self and place in the world. In Africa, these anthropologies are largely influenced by religious worldviews. It is also spiritual because, as suggested by the Canadian Faith Communities, the crisis "is symptomatic of a spiritual deficit: excessive self-interest, destructive competition, and greed have given rise to unsustainable patterns of production and consumption" (CFC 2011:1). If the "use which man makes of his environment has to do with his attitude towards nature" (Klostermaier 1973: 133). Then one would expect that which is both the foundation and interiority for human behaviour and attitudes, would be central to processes towards attaining sustainability. To many Africans, these are largely their religious beliefs, values and norms, which ultimately translate into attitudes and actions with which they relate to the natural world.

Religious ontologies and the subjective dimension of religion serve as the deep-seated doldrums from which decisions and choices in the daily lives of believers emerge. This fundamental and subjective dimension of faith communities, which motivate attitudes of believers, cannot be marginalized in any discourse towards a sustainable future for human communities, regardless of how subjective they seem. They hold the promise of both religious and moral contract for faith communities to act in the world and improve on the condition of the world. As noted by Atiemo, emphasising this subjective religious dimension does not in any way contradict scientific interpretations and interventions of the world but rather indicate there are other dimensions – spiritual and/or religious – which contribute to the material end that science alone may not achieve (Atiemo 2017: 256-7). Religious language and norms may motivate concerns for climate change and spiritual transformation especially when framed in moral language.

From the Sabbath perspective, for instance, the views espoused by those interviewed in Ghana (Golo and Yaro 2013), underscore their belief that obedience to Sabbath norms maintains a healthy reciprocity between deity and humanity and brings flourishing life while deviation from these norms brings diminishing life. Especially, among indigenous people, 'Sabbath' days are guided by moral obligations and their consequent rewards to indigenes. Faith communities, therefore, are aware of their moral responsibility to emphasize the values, virtues, and norms of their environmental stewardship, such as the Sabbath – rest and living with enough. When faith communities have the conviction that their environmental commitments are first, directed towards the concerns of God and/or the supernatural, and then to their own welfare and that of future generations, they become

motivators for moral restraint at the level of individuals and groups. If state institutions and the development community appreciate the religious consciousness, norms and values of environmental care from religious traditions such as the Sabbath, faith communities in Africa could play very significant roles towards the attainment of sustainable futures in Africa. What they require is a continuous exploration of their traditions for moral and practical understandings of the natural world to motivate believers towards living in the world sustainably.

Similarly, environmental researchers, policy makers and the development community would have to search for analogues for these subjective and qualitative dimensions among faith communities if holistic and comprehensive sustainability remain goals in Africa. This will mean confronting the anti-religious syndrome of the modern secular mind, which, with a functionally deficient understanding religion, separates religion and state, thereby marginalising religion in the development process of modern societies.

2. Religious Beliefs and Practices Generating Eco-Dimensionality for Sustainability

A related promise that the religious concept of environmental stewardship holds for sustainability discourse in Africa lies in the translatability of religious beliefs, norms and values into practices that correlate with contemporary secular and scientific concepts of sustainability. Wholesome religious traditions are more effective in generating eco-dimensionality than others (Bratton 2018:2), religious traditions have the capacity to encourage environmental sustainability. Eco-dimensionality is defined as "the integrative expression of environmental values, caretaking norms and sustainable practices in all aspects of religion, including symbolism, myth, art, ritual, and ethics, that recognizes and specifically adapts to keystone environmental processes and ecosystemic or geo-physical diversity" (Bratton 2015:2). Bratton sees what she calls viable religious approaches to sustainable practices rather than abstract theological ideas and qualities, as eco-dimensional as "eco-dimensionality offers a bridge for conversations with scientists and policy makers due to its refined interface with critical environmental variables" (Bratton 2015:2).

While I disagree with suggestions that abstract theological ideas remain at the communicative level, on grounds that such claims are still beholden to the modern secular mind, it remains true that the translatability of beliefs and values of faith communities and their practical analogues strengthen their partnership in the sustainability discourse. In Africa, and particularly in Ghana, several such eco-dimensional practices abound and provide promise for sustainable futures. There are several Sabbath practices found among religious communities in Ghana grounded in beliefs, such as panentheistic notions of places, and even animal and plant species. For instance, a growing phenomenon among Ghanaian Christians, and popular in other parts of West Africa, is the sacred mountain phenomenon. These require the stewardship of believers in restraining themselves when dealing with these natural spaces and species. Examples are the Abasua Prayer Mountain and the Mountain Olive Prayer Camps in the Eastern Region of Ghana, where beliefs in the sacredness of these places restrain worshippers' sanitation practices, whereby "littering, spitting, urinating and defecating in the open spaces are deemed serious infractions by the culprits" (Okyere 2018:208). As earlier noted, while in some cases human intervention and activities within these sacred spaces are controlled and limited to certain days, some others are restricted entirely from direct human activities and interventions. Because beliefs, values and norms regulate practices some of these places still exist as ecosystem habitats for

wildlife, flora and fauna. It would, therefore, be ridiculous, if not an insult, to suggest that the interpretations of the supernatural that ground these beliefs, norms and values of faith communities are without knowledge of practical consequences on real lived experiences of communities here on earth. What a development researcher or worker needs is the engagement of the faith communities to unearth the eco-dimensionality embedded in many of these beliefs and practices.

Within the context of religious environmental stewardship, such as the Sabbath, present environmental challenges of human societies are reflections of human estrangement from God and refusal to be restrained by natural limits set by God, even if individuals consider themselves irreligious. Restraint from burdening nature through the processes of production and consumption, which the Sabbath requires, correlates with scientific truths about ecosystem regeneration, hence are eco-dimensional. Human restraint in our interactions with the earth is necessary for maintaining balance between work (industrial production) and rest (period of worship of God and physical justice for the earth to regenerate for a healthy eco-system balance) (Cafferty 2015). Simple indigenous and subsistent agricultural practices, such as shifting cultivation teach us this simple fact of land and wildlife regeneration if the land rests. While long periods of fallow, such as a year stipulated in the Bible, may not fit into current industrial and work schedule, sustainable production and consumption requires rest and the idea of the integrity and rights of the earth and communities require restraints. Cafferty suggests, while the concept of the Sabbath embraced human beings working in the material world, "the aim of such work was not accumulation of material possessions but rather to enter into rest with God while serving the needs of others including that of the earth" (Cafferty 2015: 37)

Restraint (obedience) to shared norms of the eco-community, even when it seems inconvenient, is a virtue that ensures the good and mutual benefit of the entire community of created beings. Both the secular and religious views of environmental stewardship emphasize working within restraints that nature imposes on human actors in the natural world. Hence the key concept 'restraint' is practicable in several ways. One does need to a believer to learn to restrain oneself be or made to. Already, in our legal systems and other systems of public governance, there are restraints to what individuals and groups can or cannot do, based on the consequences for the common good of the community. Cafferty notes that whatever conclusions are drawn about Sabbath, the implicit purpose is the overall well-being of the community in all its dimensions (Cafferty 2015: 37). What this practically means, is a set of broader principles, in "keeping in focus the larger purpose of work and, when necessary, placing limits around work so that a flourishing life can be enjoyed in the larger community both now and in the future" (Cafferty 2015: 39).

Sabbath orientations mean contemporary societies and individuals could cultivate the norms of human restraint and avoid certain forms of environmental challenges. Humans restraining themselves from the arrogance of overcoming constraints, especially those that work for creation and the common good, would be a better and responsible ethic and what it means to be human, not the Creator. Martin-Schram (2011) affirms that the Sabbath tradition confronts the anthropocentrism and industrial mind-set of our society head-on. He concludes, "We are not independent but radically inter-dependent with all that God has made. We must let go of our false sense of superiority and live more humbly under the restrictions and limits God has provided, so that all may flourish" (Martin-Schram 2011:1).

Consequently, Sabbath norms of environmental stewardship could become publicly shared for their eco-dimensionality in societies where religious beliefs and institutional religion are still central to individual lives and visible in the public sphere, such as those in Africa with liberal secular orientations. This will be their expression of stewardship responsibilities, which itself can be grounded in theological beliefs (Brown 1998, 18). Religious institutions, NGOs and experts come to the fore as resources to governments in working out environmental regulatory and public policy frameworks that can be implemented in religious contexts, in order to reflect shared beliefs, norms and practices, even for the strictly secular sectors of such communities. For the sake of the common good and of reducing risks and threats, these concepts could inform public policies in such a way that infringing on them comes with negative rewards.

Conclusion

In this article, I pursued the claim that religious environmental stewardship remains a viable framework that obligates the duties of care that faith communities have towards the nonhuman world and the natural environment. Admittedly, religious ES may not be able to solve all our environmental problems in their complexity. However, beliefs and claims that faith communities make about their religiously embedded environmental stewardship and which commit them to norms, values and lifestyle changes that are environmentally sustainable, such as the Sabbath, remain viable spiritual capital and resources of eco-dimensionality towards a comprehensive sustainability discourse in the highly religious context of Africa.

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