



Evangelisation of all Creation: An Analysis of the Neglected Target Group of Mark 16:15

Eric Owusu¹ 

¹ Department of Religious Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi Ghana

ABSTRACT

It is a glaring fact that the environment has constantly been subjected to deforestation, air and atmospheric pollution, and many other related factors that threaten both human and animal life. Individuals, governments, churches, etc. have long identified the pressure on the ecology and have addressed it from different perspectives. This paper thus sought to address this environmental problem from a religious or Christian point of view. Since the paper involved the analysis of a text (Mark 16:15), text critical method was applied. This method studies and compares ancient manuscripts of texts like biblical passages to find out which texts were originally written by the author and can thus be proved authentic. It was found out in the analysis that though Mark 16:15 was not written by the original author of Mark's gospel, the text laid bare the fact that Christians especially, must have a strong sense of responsibility towards nature. Enshrined in Jesus's mandate to his disciples in Mark 16:15 is the Christian responsibility to care for created things. It appears, however, that in their evangelisation plans, Christians concentrate more on the salvation of human beings than the survival of the ecology which suffers from the handiworks of humans. Christians are, therefore, encouraged to value nature and take necessary measures to ensure its survival. This paper contributes to the debate on how sacred texts can positively influence humanity's attitudes towards the ecosystem. It creates the awareness that nature is God's greatest gift to humanity and must be properly cared for.

Correspondence

Eric Owusu

Email:

akuracus@yahoo.com

Publication History

Received: 12th January, 2024

Accepted: 13th March, 2024

Published online:

28th March, 2024

Keywords: *Evangelisation, Creation, Environmental Crisis, The Gospel of Mark*

INTRODUCTION

In Genesis, the book of creation, God entrusted his creation which he considered as good to human beings (see Genesis 1:26, 28). It is, therefore, pathetic that instead of taking good care of God's creation, human beings have rather subjected nature and created things to futility. The dire consequences of humanity's irresponsible actions and negative attitudes to creation are felt everywhere in the world today. Awareness has been created from different angles on the need to save nature and the created things in the cosmos from danger and eventual destruction or annihilation. The Bible, which talks about God's creation, also talks about the need for human beings to cherish creation as God's gift and leave no stone unturned to address ecological problems. One such biblical passage is Mark 16:15 which reads: "And he [Jesus] said to them [the disciples], 'Go into the whole world, proclaim the good news to the entire creation.'"

In Mark 16:15 the target group for evangelisation or proclamation of the good news of salvation is clearly given as "the entire creation" which definitely comprises not only human beings but also other creatures or created things. It appears that while more attention is paid to the salvation of human beings, the well-being and survival of nature and created things are less considered in evangelisation plans and processes. The problem or "oversight" may be due to the fact that in all the other parallel texts in the synoptic gospels which talk about the proclamation or preaching of the good news of salvation (see Matthew 28:19; Luke 24:47; also Mark 13:10), the target group is given as "all nations or all peoples." The target group for evangelisation in Mark 16:15 is so

unique and it appears to be neglected. This paper tries to draw the attention of evangelists, and for that matter all Christians, to nature and created things which should be beneficiaries of evangelisation but are unfortunately quite neglected.

Textual Analysis of Mark 16:15

A textual critic is a scholar who studies ancient manuscripts of writing (such as biblical texts) to see what the author wrote and to determine which manuscripts preserve changes in the original text.¹ Scholars engaged in textual criticism also examine all of the surviving manuscripts to try to reconstruct what the biblical authors originally wrote and to see how scribes modified the author's words over the centuries of transmission.² By this method, manuscripts are also compared to establish the original or most appropriate text among different variant texts. Textual criticism or analysis has made it possible over the years to establish the fact that Mark's gospel had varying endings. Mark 16:15 is part of the pericope of Mark 16:9-20 which is considered to be one of the additional possible endings of Mark's gospel.³

The discovery of Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲙ) in 1844/1859 and the publication of Codex Vaticanus (B) in 1889/1890 aided biblical scientists to identify and study seriously the various endings of Mark.⁴ It was realised that though these two codices are the oldest and the most important witnesses of the Koine-Manuscripts, they did not contain Mark 16:9-20. They both ended with Mark 16:1-8, i.e. with the short canonical ending.⁵ This raised the suspicion that verses 9-20 of Mark chapter 16 were additions to the original text. In his comment on Mark 16:9-20, Ehrman rightly asserts that:

This new ending does give a kind of closure to the account [of Mark's gospel], but it is not original. It cannot be found in our oldest and best manuscripts of Mark, and its writing style and vocabulary are not consistent with the rest of the Gospel otherwise. It was added by scribes who simply did not want the book to end where it did.⁶

Among the challenges that confront biblical scholars today regarding the Gospel according to Mark, written around the year 70 CE, is the question regarding its various endings in the available ancient manuscripts and papyri and how the message of the various endings conform to or depart from the overall theological message of the entire gospel. While some biblical exegetes hold the view that Mark originally ended with Mark 16:1-8,⁷ others opine that Mark could not have ended his gospel so abruptly in Mark 16:1-8 with the original Greek prepositional phrase *ephobounto gar* (ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ) which translates into English as "for they were afraid."

Ehrman tries to clearly bring out the role of the prepositional phrase "for they were afraid" in its context by summing up the entire text of Mark 16:1-8 as follows:

On the third day after Jesus was crucified, dead, and buried, several female followers come to the tomb to anoint his body, only to find the stone rolled away from the tomb and a young man – but not Jesus – inside. The young man instructs the women to go tell the disciples to travel to Galilee, where they will see Jesus, raised from the dead. But the women flee the tomb and [in the last verse 16:8 we hear that the women] 'did not say anything to anyone, for they were afraid.'⁸

It becomes evident in Ehrman's summary of Mark 16:1-8 that Mark's gospel did not end as expected: the women or the first witnesses of Jesus' resurrection were required, at least, to go and break the news to others. For Westcott and Hort, "It is incredible that the evangelist [Mark] deliberately concluded either a paragraph

¹ Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 30.

² Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 33.

³ For more details on the various possible endings of Mark's gospel, confer Kurt Aland, "Der Wiedergefundene Markusschluss? Eine methodologische Bemerkung zur textkritischen Arbeit", in: *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche (ZThK)* 67 (1970), 10; Rudolf Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, in: *Herder Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament (HThK-NT)*, Band II, Erster Teil, (Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder Verlag: 1976), 41; Joachim Gnilka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (1. Auflage der Studienausgabe), in: *Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament (EKK-NT)*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2010), 350; D. C. Parker, *The Living Texts of the Gospels*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 126.

⁴ Cf. G. Strecker, U. Schnelle, *Einführung in die neutestamentliche Exegese* (3. Auflage), 27-28.

⁵ Apart from the majuscules Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, the minuscule-manuscript 304 (a manuscript which is a commentary on Matthew and Mark and dates from the 12th century CE), and 2386 (a minuscule dated from circa the 11th century CE) also present only Mark 16:1-8 as the ending of the gospel according to Mark.

⁶ Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 26.

⁷ Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, 46-47.

⁸ Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 26, 117.

with *ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ*, or the Gospel with a petty detail of a secondary event, leaving his narrative hanging in the air.”⁹

Ehrman again observes correctly that:

The ending comes as a surprise to many readers, who think that the women surely must have told somebody! After all, word of the resurrection did get out. And the other Gospels go on to tell the stories of Jesus’ appearances to his disciples after the resurrection. How could Mark’s Gospel end here [in 16:8], with the women not telling [the disciples or] anyone [about Jesus being raised from the dead, about his post-resurrection appearances and about his missionary mandate]?¹⁰

He asserts further that “Some copyists of this Gospel from the early church were so put off by the [original] ending that they added one of their own, appending twelve additional verses that describe some of Jesus’ [post-resurrection] appearances to his disciples.”¹¹

For Metzger, the phrase “for they were afraid” (*ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ*) in Mark 16:8 does not provide what the evangelist Mark wanted to put at the end of his gospel, and we do not know whether the last sheet of the original got missing before copies of the gospel were made.¹² Thus, the questionable character of the original ending of Mark (16:1-8) appeared to have created a vacuum that needed to be filled so as to get a more appropriate ending of the gospel.

On the solution to this problem, Ehrman draws attention to the fact that:

Ancient scribes were also surprised by this abrupt ending, so they did what scribes sometimes did: they added an ending that was more in keeping with their beliefs and with the other Gospels. The twelve new verses [i.e. Mark 16:9-20] that are appended describe what, in the scribes’ opinion, must have happened next: the women tell the disciples what they have seen and heard, and then the disciples travel to Galilee and meet with Jesus, who gives them their final instructions before ascending to heaven.¹³

In the other gospels, the final instructions Jesus gave to his disciples before he ascended into heaven was that they should proclaim the good news of salvation to “all nations or peoples” (see Matthew 28:19; Luke 24:47), and in the case of Mark 16:15, to “all creation.”

Although Mark 16:9-20 is a secondary ending to the last chapter of the gospel, the author or the scribes who appended these last twelve verses to Mark’s gospel undeniably did that for a good reason. Notwithstanding the doubts shed on the authorship, originality and authenticity of Mark 16:9-20, the church accepted it at the Council of Trent (1545-1563 CE). The text, therefore, became canonical and a part of the gospel, and it appeared in major manuscripts and translations or versions of the Bible.

Many Church Fathers such as St. Jerome (ca. 347-419 CE) and St. Chrysostom (ca. 349-407 CE) included or quoted passages from Mark 16:9-20 in their works. Mark 16:9-20 again won a place in the liturgical calendar of the Roman Catholic Church. That is, on the Feast of Ascension of the Lord into Heaven in Year B, Mark 16:15-20 is read. All these witnesses and references serve as evidence that Mark 16:9-20 was long held by the church to be canonical, authentic, and a part of Mark’s gospel.

One can notice that Matthew, Luke and John dedicate their last three chapters to give account principally on Jesus’ trial, suffering, crucifixion/death, resurrection, post-resurrection appearances, and his mandate to his disciples, his ascension, among others. (see Matthew 26-28; Luke 22-24; John 18-20 [+21]). Mark also dedicates the last three chapters to give an account of similar events in Jesus’ life (see Mark 14-16). However, in the last chapter of Mark (i.e. chapter 16) which originally ends with 16:1-8, one neither hears anything about Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances nor about his mandate or final instructions to his disciples nor about Jesus’ ascension into heaven. The addendum text of Mark 16:9-20, therefore, appears to fill in the theological and doctrinal gap in Mark’s account, and in this way, Mark’s narrative conforms perfectly to the similar narratives of the other three canonical gospels.

⁹ B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek (Appendix)* (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1896); Pieter Willem van der Horst, “Can a Book End with ΓΑΡ? A Note on Mark XVI. 8,” *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 1972, 121–24.

¹⁰ Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 26, 117.

¹¹ Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 117.

¹² Bruce Metzger, *Der Kanon Des Neuen Testaments: Entstehung, Entwicklung, Bedeutung* (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1993), Ehrman also draws attention to the view of modern scholars who assume that the final page of Mark’s gospel somehow got lost, See Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 117.

¹³ Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 26.

Structure of Mark 16:9-20

The last twelve verses of Mark can be structured into four main parts as follows:

- Verses 9-11: Jesus' post-resurrection appearance to Mary Magdalene.
- Verse 12-13: Jesus' post-resurrection appearance to two disciples.
- Verses 14-18: Jesus' mandate and his commissioning of the eleven apostles (and his other disciples)
- Verses 19-20: The ascension of Jesus into heaven.

The fourfold structure of the text itself proves that it supplies much more details about the events that took place after Jesus' resurrection. Moreover, the content and message of Mark 16:9-20 are in tune with other post-resurrection narratives of the canonical gospels, and also with Luke's account in Acts 1:1-11. The structure makes it more evident that there were indeed theological and doctrinal gaps that needed to be filled by appending the additional ending to Mark's gospel.

From the above broad division of Mark 16:9-20, one notices that Mark 16:15 can be located in Mark 16:14-18 which gives an account of Jesus' mandate and his commissioning of the eleven apostles (excluding Judas Iscariot) to, among other things, proclaim the good news of salvation to the entire creation. The next sections of this paper cover not only the exegesis or interpretation of Mark 16:15 by way of examining its content and message, but they also try to explore the significance of the text to evangelisation today.

Content and Message of Mark 16:15

In the original Greek text, Mark 16:15 reads as follows:

Καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς• πορευθέντες εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἅπαντα κηρύξατε τὸ εὐαγγέλιον πάσῃ τῇ κτίσει.

The Greek text translates as:

“And he [Jesus] said to them: ‘Go into all the world, proclaim the good news to the entire creation.’”

In this particular text, the target group of evangelisation or those to whom the gospel must be proclaimed is given in the Greek text as *pasē tē ktisei* (πάσῃ τῇ κτίσει) which translates as “to the entire creation.” Some versions of the Bible also translate it as “to all creation,” “to the whole creation,” or “to every creation.” In other passages found in the canonical gospels where the proclamation of the good news is the focus, the target group of evangelisation is not “the whole creation” but “all peoples” or “all nations.” For example, in both Matthew 28:19 and Luke 24:47 the target group for the proclamation of the good news is given as *panta ta ethnē* (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη) which can be translated as “all peoples” or “all nations.”¹⁴ It is interesting to note that just as Matthew and Luke, the author of the gospel of Mark also mentions “all people” or “all nations” (*panta ta ethnē*) as the target group of evangelisation in Mark 13:10 which reads, “But the good news must first be proclaimed to all peoples/nations.” This is said in the context of Mark chapter 13, the so-called Mark's apocalypse.

In the canonical gospels, therefore, it is only the author of the additional text of Mark 16:9-20¹⁵ who mentions “the entire creation” or “all creation” as the target group of the proclamation of the good news of salvation. This attests to the fact that the language and style of writing of the author of Mark 16:9-20 are different from those of the author of the gospel of Mark. In fact, by his use of *pasē tē ktisei* (“to the entire creation”), the author of the secondary ending of Mark does make his language and theology unique.

In the canon of the Bible, Colossians 1:23 also toe the line of Mark 16:15 by presenting the unique theology of proclamation of the gospel or the good news of salvation to the entire God's creation. The keyword to consider in both passages is the Greek *ktisis* (κτίσις) which can be translated as “creation” or “creature.” Mark 16:15 stresses the proclamation of the gospel “to the entire creation” (*pasē tē ktisei*) in the cosmos, and Colossians 1:23 also hammers home the same idea of preaching the good news “to every creature under heaven” (*pasē ktisei tē hupo ton ouranon*). Thus, the content and message of Mark 16:15 (and also of Colossians 1:23) is that the good news of salvation must be proclaimed to “the entire creation” or “every creature.”

An Analysis of Creation: The Target Group of Jesus' Mandate in Mark 16:15

Jesus' mandate to his disciples after his resurrection in Mark 16:15 consists of two parts: i) to go into *the whole world*, and ii) to proclaim (*kērussein*) the good news of salvation to *every creation or creature* (*pasē tē ktisei*). The adjectives “all”, “every”, “each”, “entire”, or “whole” used to describe or qualify the nouns “world” and

¹⁴ See also 1 Timothy 3:16.

¹⁵ Some scholars agree that it was the Presbyter Aristion who wrote this secondary ending of Mark's gospel. Frederick George Kenyon, *Der Text Der Griechischen Bibel* (2. Auflage) (Göttingen, 1961), 100; Knut Backhaus, “Aristion,” in *Lexikon Für Theologie Und Kirche* (Erster Band) (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 1993), 973.

“creation” or “creature” demonstrate the universal dimension of this mandate which also has a missionary character (see also Colossians 1:23). Jesus’ mandate in Mark 16:15 has a missionary character because it is given in a context where Jesus has decided to send his disciples to go into the whole universe and proclaim the gospel or the good news of salvation to all creation.

Also, in Matthew 28:19 the risen Lord Jesus commissions the eleven apostles (excluding Judas Iscariot) to go to the whole world and make disciples of all nations or peoples (see Luke 24:47; and also John 20:21). This mission has a universal character, and it is aimed at all peoples on earth. When one compares Mark 16:15 and Matthew 28:19, one realises (among other things) that though both missionary mandates come from the same risen Lord who wields power and authority, and both have a universal character, yet one way Mark 16:15 departs from Matthew 28:19 is that the mission in the former aims at “the entire creation in the whole world” while that of the latter rather focuses on “all peoples,” i.e., Gentiles and Jews alike. Thus so far as the target group of evangelisation is concerned, the word “creation” or “creature” becomes the main issue that strikes the difference between the text in the secondary ending of Mark and the parallel texts in Matthew and Luke.

The term “creation” in Mark 16:15 is rendered in the original Greek version of the New Testament as *ktisis* which can mean “creation,” “creature,” or “created thing.” The New Testament (NT) presupposes the Old Testament (OT) doctrine of creation. In the OT, *ktisis* principally means either “the act of creation” or “the created thing” (which is the result of the act of creation). The act of creation is a description of God’s creative activity par excellence. It recalls and expresses God’s decisive act of will that brings something into being. For instance, in Genesis (the Book of Creation) God spoke: “Let there be light”, and the result was that “there was light,” i.e., “light” came into existence when God willed that it may exist by speaking to that effect (see Gen. 1:3). It is worthy of note that in God’s creative activity, the word that God speaks or commands and the act of creation are one. By his word, God called the world and individual creatures into being (Gen. 1; Ps. 148:5; also Ps. 33:9; Judith 16:14). God created “heaven and earth” (Genesis 1:1; Psalm 89:12); he created “the mountains and the wind” (Amos 4:13); he created “humanity” (Genesis 1:26-27; Deuteronomy 4:32; also Malachi 2:10). The earth and the whole world is, indeed, full of God’s creatures (Psalm 104:24).¹⁶

God – who is Master of heaven and earth and King of everything he has created (Judith 9:12; also 3 Maccabees 2:2, 7) – continues to renew his creation in history through the Holy Spirit (Psalm 104:30). This means that it is the will of God, the creator, to sustain his creation (Sirach 39:16). God has created all things that they may exist and not be destroyed but remain wholesome (Wisdom 1:14). For his love and mercy, the creator God governs and rules all creation with compassion (3 Maccabees 6:2). This divine sovereignty over creation is also given to human beings so that they may take charge over created things and manage them justly and judiciously and with compassion (see Psalm 8:6-8; Genesis 1:26, 28; Wisdom 9:1-3).

This stewardship responsibility of human beings toward creation was even identified with Christ himself when he became man (see 1 Corinthians 15:27). Thus, so long as one remains a human being, he or she is bound by the divine command to be responsible and take good care of God’s creation or created things. N. T. Wright rightly hammers home this fact when he writes, “Humans were made to be God’s stewards over creation, so the one through whom all things were made, the eternal son [Jesus Christ], the eternal wisdom, becomes human so that he might truly become God’s steward, ruler over all his world.”¹⁷ This is evident in the Genesis narratives of creation where God gives men and women instructions to be good stewards of all of creation (see Genesis 1:26, 28; 2:15).¹⁸

In the text of Genesis 1:27-30, there are two main commands which God gives to humankind. The two divine commands define the basic tasks of the human race – i.e., i) to continue in existence through generation, and ii) to take possession [and proper care] of one’s God-given territory.¹⁹ God, the creator, who called every creation in the universe into being and cares so much for his creation, handed over his creation to human beings not only to control and have dominion over it but also to take good and proper care of it.

The unique theology of Mark 16:15 (and that of Colossians 1:23) appears to be in line with the OT understanding of God’s creation, God’s willingness to keep and renew his creation, and his entrusting his creation to the care of humanity. Mark 16:15 tries to create awareness of Christians’ and humanity’s responsibility for taking good care of God’s creation and ensuring the safety and survival of all created things. That being the case, it is expected of Christians and all religious leaders to include concrete measures in their evangelisation plans and processes to address environmental and ecological crises facing humanity today.

¹⁶ Verlyn Verbrugge, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology: Abridged Edition* (Zondervan Academic, 2017), 321.

¹⁷ Herbert Jr. Hash, *When All Hell Breaks Loose: The Implications of the Misinterpretation of Biblical Prophetic and Apocalyptic Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 101.

¹⁸ Hash, *When All Hell Breaks Loose: The Implications of the Misinterpretation of Biblical Prophetic and Apocalyptic Literature*, 101.

¹⁹ See the note on Genesis 1:28, in: Donald Senior, et al. (editors), *The Catholic Study Bible (The New American Bible) (Revised Edition)*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 13.

Nonetheless, in Christian missions and evangelisation activities, the norm or the common practice has been that more attention is paid to the salvation and well-being of souls or persons and less attention is given to the care and survival of other created things or the ecology. That means, while the texts of Matthew 28:19, Luke 24:47 and Mark 13:10 whose evangelisation aims at “all peoples” is more adhered to, the text of Mark 16:15 whose target group is “all creation” is more or less neglected.

Though all peoples of every nation are part of God’s creation, in the strict sense of the word, “creation” or “creature” comprises not only human beings but also animals, plants and other created things. When the author of the canticle of Daniel 3:57-90 invites all works or creatures of the Lord to bless, praise, extol and thank the Lord, he or she mentions heavens, waters, sun and moon, stars of heaven, winds, fire and heat, dew and rain, frost, snow, light and darkness, mountains and hills, seas and rivers, birds of the air, beasts and all mortals including human beings. These are all part of God’s works or creation. Whenever Christians especially, refuse or fail to take proper care of God’s gift of creation and ensure its survival and longevity, they neglect the divine command to proclaim the good news of salvation to all creation in the whole cosmos as enshrined in Mark 16:15 (and in Colossians 1:23). The onus lies on Christians and all religious leaders, therefore, to address ecological problems and challenges as part of their evangelisation and outreach programmes. The omission of created things in the church’s mission and ministry has its repercussions.

The Neglect of the Target Group of Evangelisation in Mark 16:15 and Its Consequences

It is so heart-warming to know that humankind is the pinnacle of creation and that the state of the created order is determined by human beings (see Genesis 1:28). All the hopes and longings of every creature or created thing (*ktisis*) are directed to humankind. Nonetheless, it is so pathetic and disappointing to see that human beings – in a large measure – have subjected nature and the ecology to devastation, degradation, depletion, and pollution. In most areas and instances human beings have failed in their duty to care for the environment and all the created things surrounding them. They seek and strive for their well-being and survival to the detriment of that of other creatures in their environment. Paradoxically, humanity also tends to suffer from the adverse effects caused by their irresponsible activities and attitudes toward nature and the ecology.

Due to so much air and atmospheric pollution in the environment caused especially by the increase of carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other particular gasses, societies now experience climate change and global warming. There is so much increase in the temperature of the earth’s atmosphere. There have also been changes in the earth’s weather, wind patterns, and rainfall. That is, most of humankind’s activities and attitudes towards the earth are not ozone-friendly: such irresponsible attitudes have caused depletion of the ozone layer which protects the earth from harmful radiation from the sun. Now the sun shines and its rays fall directly on the planet Earth. There is so much heat affecting the whole world (Global warming). This trend threatens natural habitats, ecosystems and some species of plants and animals with extinction. It can also be responsible for a very serious reduction in crop and animal yield in the agricultural sector. In effect, it has caused severe famine in some parts of the globe.

On the local front, Ghana has been experiencing an increase in small-scale gold mining activities popularly known as “galamsey” (a term derived from the phrase “gather them and sell” and means illegal small-scale gold mining). Though this illegal small-scale gold mining serves as a form of employment, a source of income and livelihood for many Ghanaian and foreign operators, this irresponsible mining business has had very serious effects on Ghanaians, especially on those living in and around the mining areas or communities. It has caused the pollution of rivers and lakes which has resulted in contamination of groundwater and the soil, land degradation, deforestation, floods, and other forms of environmental hazards, not to talk about its serious negative impact on human health conditions.

Apart from “galamseyers” (workers in galamsey), the general attitude of many Ghanaians to nature and the environment is nothing good to write home about. Citizens litter and dump rubbish, garbage and other waste materials on the streets, by the roadside, in the markets, and other public places. Whenever it rains, such waste materials littered on the surface of the earth are carried away by the rains and they choke gutters and prevent drainage. This eventually causes the massive floods some areas in Ghana experience from time to time. The stagnant waters not only become polluted and produce unpleasant smell, but they also breed mosquitoes which cause diseases like malaria. The filthy environment invaded by houseflies can again be a cause of cholera outbreaks. Irresponsible human activities and the lackadaisical attitude to nature and the environment, therefore, pose a major threat to the lives of humans, animals, and plants.

The adverse effects of climate change, global warming, environmental degradation, etc. which have come as a result of humanity’s failure to be good stewards of God’s creation have also their negative effects on the spirituality of Christians and other persons of different religious orientations.

It is evident in the canticle of Daniel 3:57-90 that human beings and all mortals bless, worship, praise, serve and thank God with other creatures around them. In fact, the beauty of God's creation inspires and motivates every religious person to reverently fear the Lord and extol him. Whenever this beauty wanes, fades, or is disfigured, the divinely created order is distorted and humanity's spirituality or relationship with God likewise becomes strained once there remains for the believer no conducive atmosphere for proper meditation and reflection on God's wonderful works of creation. The believer becomes more or less estranged from God.

Boakye Yeboah hits the nail right on the head when he remarks:

Normally, when it comes to Eucharistic Adoration, the atmosphere should be graced with silence so that people can encounter their God in silence. In our world full of noise, it seems that silent prayer is disappearing and we need to rediscover that rich tradition of the Church. The human race has stamped its authority over the planet Earth, not just by covering its surface with concrete and destroying its plant and animal life, but also by burying the natural sounds of the Earth beneath a cacophony of man-made noise.²⁰

Significance of Created Things and the Need to Ensure Their Survival

Creations help in knowing God, the creator better. The greatness and beauty of nature and created things enable humans to know, to reflect, to meditate and to draw conclusions regarding God, their creator (Wisdom 13:5). It is in this light that Saint Paul in the NT stresses that "Ever since the creation of the world, his [i.e., God's] invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he [God] has made" (Romans 1:20). What Wisdom 13:5 and Romans 1:20 want to put across is that "Since the creation of the world, God's invisible nature has been clearly seen and recognised in his works [of creation]." The proper attitude of humanity to creation, therefore, is to marvel at its wonders (Sirach 43:24-25), praise the creator (Tobith 8:5, 15), and serve fellow humans (Judith 16:14).²¹ Consequently, the church has to serve God and humankind and seek the salvation of human beings with an eye on nature and created things.

Saint Paul, for one, in his writings hammers home that God's salvation is not only meant for humankind but also for every created thing that groans and suffers now (Romans 8:22-24). For Paul, "Because of what humans have done, all creatures are dependent on the restoration of a right relationship between God and humans in the created world, which can come about only through his [i.e., God's] intervention (Romans 8:19)." Hence, "The hope of the final revelation of God's children [see Romans 8:19] is also the hope that looks for the liberation of all creatures from their bondage to decay (Romans 8:21-22)."²² It is for this reason that the gospel or the good news of salvation preached to humankind has also been proclaimed to every creature or created thing under heaven, and Paul was a minister of this inclusive and universal evangelisation (Colossians 1:23).

The church's mission is principally aimed at saving lives. Nevertheless, can Christians today "boast" of having chalked any meaningful successes in their missions in the face of a glaring polluted environment and a distorted ecosystem whose woes are a plague to humanity and everything that has life on this earth? The church's mission should aim also at saving created things and the environment from pollution, devastation, depletion, destruction, and total annihilation. Created things need not be neglected: the entire creation should be the focus and target of evangelisation as enshrined in Mark 16:15 and also in Colossians 1:23.

The Way Forward

This section seeks to suggest further measures by which Christians, other religious bodies, individuals, groups, government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can contribute to ensuring the proper care and survival of nature and the ecology.

Industries must be encouraged to produce eco-friendly products which do not tend to cause harm to the ecosystem. For example, instead of producing plastic materials which take a relatively long time to decay when dumped on the earth, materials and other products from wood and paper which easily decompose can be manufactured.

While unnecessary bush-burnings must be discouraged, people must also refrain from the practice of felling trees for the production of charcoals as a source of fuel or energy.

With effect from 1st February 2024, the Ghana Revenue Authority implemented the Emissions Levy Act 2023 (Act 1112), a levy or tax that sought to promote Eco-friendly technology and to eradicate or reduce carbon dioxide (emissions) in Ghana.²³ Though the tax met public uproar and disapproval, the purpose for which it was enacted into law and implemented is commendable.

²⁰ Michael Boakye Yeboah, *Vocational Accompaniment* (Kumasi: Graduate Standard Secretarial Services, 2020), 163.

²¹ Verbrugge, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology: Abridged Edition*, 322.

²² Verbrugge, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology: Abridged Edition*, 322.

²³ CitiTv Evening News, "Ghana Revenue Authority implemented the Emissions Levy Act 2023 (Act 1112)," February 1, 2024.

Again, the good and laudable works of individuals who have already expressed profound care and commitment to nature or created things in their writings, activities, and in their entire lives need to be emulated. Mention can be made of Saint Francis of Assisi (circa 1181/1182 – 1226) who sought to follow the example of Christ by living “in simplicity and perfect interaction with all created beings.” Pope Francis also in his encyclical *Laudato si* revisits Saint Francis’ friendly attitude to nature and recommends “a poor church for the poor, a church which practices what it preaches – to the praise of all creatures” By his encyclical, the Pope creates awareness that the church’s mission includes (or should include) proper care of nature.

Wangari Maathai (1940-2011) from Kenya also made a positive impact on the care for the environment and the ecosystem by founding the “Green Belt Movement,” an environmental non-governmental organisation which focused on the planting of trees, environmental conservation, etc. For her industry and laudable work, she deservedly became the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004.

While many churches and other religious bodies and NGOs have taken it upon themselves to plant trees and sow seeds – for example, during *Arbor Week* celebrations – governments also issue orders and enact laws to embark on these laudable efforts. All these are steps in the right direction which need to be encouraged and supported.

Nonetheless, all these measures seem not to be enough to achieve the ultimate goal of restoring nature to its purity. Environmental hazards, challenges and problems still linger on with their devastating and serious impacts on human, animal and plant life. Therefore, much more needs to be done so far as this combat for the survival of nature is concerned. Everyone must get involved in this enterprise.

This also calls for attitudinal change. Every person needs to refrain from the habit of littering the environment wherever they find themselves. Some people just pass water anywhere without regard to whether that place is appropriate or not. Others throw rubbish and other waste products even in gutters and they eventually cause floods and accumulation of stagnant water which stings, breeds mosquitoes, and is the cause of the outbreak of many diseases and deaths.

Those engaged in galamsey activities should see the danger they cause with their activities. They need not only to consider the money they get from this illegal mining business but also to think of the dangers imposed on the environment and on the lives of the populace due to their irresponsible mining business. They should be very responsible in their activities. While the state and law enforcement agencies need to back up in their efforts to control such unhealthy businesses, the culprits or those engaging in such environmentally unfriendly activities should be sanctioned and made to see the need to abide by the law and stop causing hazards to the environment, human, animal and plant life.

The role of traditional leaders in the fight against ecological disasters cannot be overlooked. Asiedu-Amoako, Ntiamoah, and Gedzi correctly remark in the abstract of their article that traditional leaders and ritual specialists or functionaries in African Traditional Religion (ATR) are custodians of ancestral lands; the leaders possess practical indigenous ecological knowledge for the protection and conservation of environmental resources, and they have also religious power to institute control mechanisms to regulate human activities with regard to the environment. The authors, therefore, recommend that “traditional leaders employ their religious power and indigenous ecological knowledge to conserve and protect the environmental resources within their jurisdictions.”²⁴ Awuah-Nyamekye also shares the view that Indigenous African religion and culture can assist people in adopting “a friendly attitude towards the environment.”²⁵ Thus traditional leaders and every person in a community or locality must shun apathy and rather show concern for the ecosystem.

By continually creating awareness of the dangers posed to the environment and getting involved in trying to control such challenges, citizens can surely save the created things, the environment and eventually their own lives. If for instance, the saying goes that “Water is life” and the rivers and water bodies are so polluted and contaminated as it is the state of affairs in Ghana now, then Ghanaians should know that their lives are in danger and short-lived so long as the rivers, seas, lakes and water bodies have not been salvaged from this danger.

Last but not least, churches and religious leaders must also know that it is a divine command and their responsibility to proclaim the good news of salvation to the entire creation in the whole universe. This means that Christians should not only seek the salvation of persons but also the survival of nature and all other created things. Some churches are doing well by engaging in seed and tree-planting exercises throughout the country. Such good works need to be encouraged. Pastors can also use the pulpit to conscientise their flock on the dire

²⁴ Samuel Asiedu-Amoako, Michael K. Ntiamoah, and Victor S. Gedzi, “Environmental Degradation: A Challenge to Traditional Leadership at Akyem Abuakwa in the Eastern Region of Ghana,” *American Journal of Indigenous Studies* 1, no. 1 (2016): 1–13.

²⁵ Samuel Awuah-Nyamekye, *Managing the Environmental Crisis in Ghana. The Role of African Traditional Religion and Culture with Special Reference to the Berekum Traditional Area* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016).

need to keep the environment tidy and also to take all possible measures to save the natural habitat from danger and destruction. The willingness and ability of Christians to do this will testify that they are indeed following the divine command to be responsible caretakers of God's creation.

CONCLUSION

Mark 16:15 belongs to the large pericope of Mark 16:9-20 which was long considered by scholars as an addendum to Mark's gospel. Its content and vocabulary, for example, depart markedly from those of the rest of the gospel of Mark. Despite the doubt initially cast on the authenticity of Mark 16:9-20, the church later declared it canonical and accepted it as a component part of Mark's gospel because it was suitable for building and nurturing faith in God.

While Matthew 28:19 and Luke 24:47 stress "all nations/peoples" (*panta ta ethnē*) as the target group of the proclamation of the good news of salvation, Mark 16:15 rather emphasises "the entire creation" (*pasē tē ktisei*). By stressing "the entire creation," the author of Mark 16:15 makes it clear that the target group of evangelization encompasses not only human beings but also all other created things in the universe. This means that the church's mission and ministry should necessarily aim at the salvation of both human beings and created things. The need for this kind of "inclusive evangelization" also echoes in Romans 8:19-23 and in Colossians 1:23.

The church cannot preach salvation to all peoples of all nations and effectively carry out its evangelization plans in a world that is not safe to live in. This can only be done well in a world where created things are nurtured and properly cared for; in a world where people can breathe fresh air free from pollution and drink potable water free from contamination; in a world where people can stay healthy and be in good health; in a world where people can be safe from the direct rays of the scorching sun which dry up almost everything on the surface of the earth; in a world where people can be very close to nature, see the beauty of nature and experience God's presence in created things. Christians and other religious groups can only worship well and serve God and humanity better in a sound environment free from danger, contamination, noise and other forms of environmental hazards.

The efforts made by religious bodies, governments, non-governmental organizations, concerned groups and individuals to fight and control ecological problems are a step in the right direction. Every individual is encouraged to join hands in these laudable efforts. By individually and collectively protecting and saving the environment and the created things, the entire human race can also be protected and saved from diseases and other hardships which confront humans in their daily lives due to global warming, climate change, and other ecological hazards. God's creation is so beautiful. The works of human hands should not disfigure this beauty but enhance it to God's glory.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aland, Kurt. "Der Wiedergefundene Markusschluß? Eine Methodologische Bemerkung Zur Textkritischen Arbeit." *Zeitschrift Für Theologie Und Kirche* 67, no. 1 (1970): 3–13.
- Asiedu-Amoako, Samuel, M K Ntiamoah, and V S Gedzi. "Environmental Degradation: A Challenge to Traditional Leadership at Akyem Abuakwa in the Eastern Region of Ghana." *American Journal of Indigenous Studies* 1, no. 1 (2016): 1–13.
- Awuah-Nyamekye, Samuel. *Managing the Environmental Crisis in Ghana. The Role of African Traditional Religion and Culture with Special Reference to the Berekum Traditional Area*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016.
- Backhaus, Knut. "Aristion ." In *Lexikon Für Theologie Und Kirche (Erster Band)*. Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 1993.
- Boakye Yeboah, Michael. *Vocational Accompaniment* . Kumasi: Graduate Standard Secretarial Services, 2020.
- Ehrman, Bart D. *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Gnilka, Joachim. "Das Evangelium Nach Markus/Teilband 1 Mk 1-8, 26." *Das Evangelium Nach Markus*, 1998.
- Hash, Herbert Jr. *When All Hell Breaks Loose: The Implications of the Misinterpretation of Biblical Prophetic and Apocalyptic Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Horst, Pieter Willem van der. "Can a Book End with ΓΑΡ? A Note on Mark XVI. 8." *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 1972, 121–24.
- Kenyon, Frederick George. *Der Text Der Griechischen Bibel (2. Auflage)*, Göttingen, 1961.

- Metzger, Bruce. *Der Kanon Des Neuen Testaments: Entstehung, Entwicklung, Bedeutung*. Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1993.
- Parker, D. C. *The Living Texts of the Gospels*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Pesch, Rudolf. *Das Markusevangelium*. Vol. 2. Herder Freiburg, 1976.
- Senior, Donald, et al. (editors),. *The Catholic Study Bible (The New American Bible) (Revised Edition)*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Strecker, G. and U. Schnelle, *Einführung in die neutestamentliche Exegese* (3. Auflage), 27-28.
- Verbrugge, Verlyn. *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology: Abridged Edition*. Zondervan Academic, 2017.
- Westcott, B. F., and F. J. A. Hort. *The New Testament in the Original Greek (Appendix)*. New York: Macmillan and Co., 1896.

ABOUT AUTHOR

Eric Owusu, the author of the article, holds a Licentiate and Phd in Biblical Theology. He is a Roman Catholic Priest of Kumasi Archdiocese, Ghana, and a part-time lecturer in New Testament-related courses and Biblical Greek at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). His research areas include Contextualisation of Biblical Interpretation, Inter-Faith Dialogue, etc.