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*Making a Case for Mainstreaming Environmental Justice
Concerns in the Mission of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone in
Light of Laudato Si'.*

SOWA ROBERT MICHAEL (Rev) STB, STL

**Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Theology and Religious Studies**

Theology and Religious Studies
School of Critical Studies
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ABSTRACT

Recent research indicates that there is an increasing acknowledgement of the role of religious communities in promoting environmental care and sustainability. However, on the African continent, concern for the environment has had much less traction amongst the continent's religious traditions, despite the continent being one of the world's most vulnerable areas to the ecological crisis.

With regards to the African Catholic Church, many have wondered aloud, since the ecological crisis poses immediate and enduring threats to the African continent, why the issue has not commanded decisive attention in the vast majority of the local churches of Africa. I would ask this question more pointedly: Why has the environmental question not gained much traction in the African Catholic Church – a church that prioritises the image of church as a 'family of God' and works within the framework of the church at the service of 'reconciliation, justice and peace'? Both the model of Church as a 'family of God' and the missionary framework of the church at the service of reconciliation, justice, and peace' emphasise the intricate link between the well-being of the human community and the well-being of the environment.

This research thesis seeks to assess environmental justice concerns or the lack thereof in the pastoral priorities of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone and to argue for the integration of environmental concern and care in its mission. Through critical engagement with Pope Francis' landmark encyclical, *On the Care of our Common Home – Laudato Si'* (2015) in concert with an analysis of my empirical research that I carried out in the four dioceses comprising the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone on the current state of Catholic Church's engagement with environmental justice issues, I make the case that the environmental challenge confronting Sierra Leone is not only a socio-economic and political problem, but also a moral and spiritual problem that requires an urgent pastoral response from the Catholic Church and by extension other religious communities in the country. I argue that Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'* offers a rare opportunity for the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone to reprise its prophetic role and respond to the *cry of the earth* together with the *cry of the poor*. In line with the goal of Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*, namely the cultivation of ecological virtues, I will propose that if the Catholic Church in Sierra

Leone is to effectively engage with environmental justice issues, it should seek to re-enhance and promote ecological awareness, ecological conversion and environmental sustainability practices in Catholic institutions – parishes, schools, development agencies – and in its outward engagements in ecumenical and interfaith spaces, with governmental and non-governmental agencies, and civil society groups.

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Ad Gloriam Dei



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ABBREVIATIONS

- CCC *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
- CiV *Caritas in Veritate*, Benedict XVI (2009)
- EG *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis (2013)
- GS *Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)*, Vatican II (1965)
- ITCABIC Inter-Territorial Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Gambia and Sierra Leone
- KCCB Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops
- LE *Laborem Exercens*, John Paul II (1981).
- LG *Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)*, Vatican II (1964)
- LS *Laudato Si'*, Francis (2015)
- MM *Mater et Magistra*, John XXIII (1961)
- NA *Nostra Aetate (On the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions)*, Vatican II (1965)
- OA *Octogesima Adveniens*, Paul VI (1971)
- PP *Populorum Progressio* Paul VI (1967)
- PCID Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue
- QA *Qudragessimo Anno*, Pius XI (1931)
- RH *Redemptor Hominis*, John Paul II (1979)
- SDGs *Sustainable Development Goals*, United Nations (2015)
- SRS *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, John Paul II (1987)

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Many theological research interests are borne from personal experiences and the circumstances of the researcher. For example, the theological interests of the prominent German Protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann, especially his 'Theology of Hope' evolved from the tragedy of World War II. Writing in his autobiography, *A Broad Space: An Autobiography* (2007), Moltmann recounts how the horrors of the war raised critical questions in his mind, including where God in the midst of the terrors of war was. Having encountered a well-meaning army chaplain who introduced him to the Bible in a prisoner-of-war camp in the United Kingdom after his capture by the British Army on the western front, he narrates how reading the book of Psalms, especially Psalm 39 and the Gospel of Mark especially the cry of anguish by Jesus on the cross transformed his vision of life. In the context of suffering and hardship, Moltmann discerned that God is always present in the human story even in situations of hopelessness and meaninglessness.¹ This profound discovery set him on the way to theological studies which culminated in developing the central theme of his theological vision – the theology of hope.² Similarly, the personalist approach to theology adopted by Pope Saint John Paul II was borne from the horrors of World War II and the dictatorship of communism he had experienced as a young man in his native Poland. In response to the indignities which Poland had suffered at the hands of Nazi Germany and the ironclad communist dictatorship which followed after the end of the War, the future Pope Karol Wojtyla developed a personalist-oriented theological anthropology that was deeply rooted in Thomistic philosophy and the phenomenological ethics of Max Scheler.³

As a child, I experienced the long-term structural violence that eventually led to the outbreak of a decade-long brutal civil war in my home country of Sierra Leone. I witnessed first-hand how human interests can harm the lives of the poor and harm the environment. It is from this context that my theological interests have evolved. The need to put my experience into a

¹ Cf. J. Moltmann, *A Broad Space: An Autobiography*, SCM Press, London, 2007, 30

² Cf. R. Gibellini, *La Teologia del Venti secoli*, Querina, Brescia, 2003, 305-306; J. Moltmann, *The Theology of Hope*, SCM Press London, 1964.

³ Cf. A. Dulles, *The Splendor of Faith: The Theological Vision of Pope John Paul II*, Cross Road Publishing, New York 2003, 1-3; see also John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery, On the Fiftieth Anniversary of my Priestly Ordination*, Doubleday, New York, 1996, 66-67.

theological context began to take shape when I was introduced to the arts of theology in 2004 as a fourth-year seminarian in St. Paul's Major Seminary, Freetown by Rev. Dr. Edward Tamba Charles, the current Catholic Archbishop of Freetown. In his introductory statement to the course – *Fundamental Theology* – Dr. Charles described theology in the national lingua Franca of Sierra Leone– Krio language – as '*God talk*' – talk about God. He furthered that, *God talk* is not done in a vacuum or empty space for the God who took human flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth is not a distanced, unconcerned God who is apathetic about the plight of humans and the world's problems. Rather through the incarnation, he has demonstrated that he is a God for us. With this background, Dr. Charles pointed out that we were doing theology in a resource-rich country, in a region and a continent that is plagued by dehumanising poverty, bad governance, socio-economic exclusion, wars and civil strife, environmental degradation etc. Fast-forward to 2009, as a newly ordained Priest, I was assigned to St. Columba's Parish Moyamba – a rural town in the Southern Province of Sierra Leone. My ministry in the Moyamba community and its environs brought me close to the harsh and dehumanizing realities that Dr. Charles had talked about during my studies and formation. I saw people die especially women and children due to malnutrition and poor healthcare delivery services. However, in the same district, about thirty miles from the Moyamba Township, is the location of the Sierra Rutile Limited, a mining company engaged in Rutile and Bauxite extractions. While the multinational company reaps vast economic rewards from the extractions of minerals, leaving in its wake a damaged and degraded environment, poverty and hardship is the reality for the indigenes who own the land. My deep sense of connection with these issues especially the pressing environmental challenges facing Sierra Leone, is what this theological research aims to give voice to. As a student of theology, I believe theological reflection cannot be divorced from the reality and context of the faith community. And for this work, the context is the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone.

This general introduction offers a prelude of the central argument of the research. The discussion is divided into three sections. In the first section, I will provide an overview of the background to the research; a statement of the problem, the aims and outline of the study, methodological approaches and research questions. In the second section, I will discuss the

theological parameters in which the study is located. The third section provides the synopsis and structural outline of the thesis.

I. **BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH**

The African continent has been identified as one of the most vulnerable areas of the world to the environmental crisis. African countries face a wide array of environmental problems namely, extreme weather patterns (floods, long dry spells) air, land and water pollution, deforestation, soil erosion, etc. However, concern for the environment has had much less traction amongst the continent's religious traditions. Beyond the high-level crafted statements by faith leaders, environmental concern is yet to be fully an important agenda issue in faith communities.

With regards to the African Catholic Church, many have wondered aloud, since the ecological crisis poses immediate and enduring threats to the African continent, why the issue has not commanded decisive attention in the vast majority of the local churches of Africa? I would ask this question more pointedly: Why has the environmental question not gained much traction in the African Catholic Church – a church that prioritises the image of church as 'a family of God' and works within the framework of the church at the service of 'reconciliation, justice and peace'? Both the model of Church as a 'family of God' and the missionary framework of the Church at the service of reconciliation, justice, and peace' emphasise the intricate link between the well-being of the human community and the well-being of the environment.

a) **Problem Statement**

There is an increasing acknowledgement of the role of religious communities in promoting environmental care and sustainability. The Catholic Church in Sierra Leone has had a profound influence on the emergence and development of the country since its early days. The Church plays a leading role in education, healthcare delivery, and other development-related programmes. However, despite Sierra Leone's severe environmental challenge, and its grave impacts on the livelihood of the poor in deprived communities, it seems concern for environmental issues has yet to arouse serious interest in the Catholic Church and other Faith communities in the country.

b) **Aims, Brief outline of the research and methods of study**

This research thesis seeks to assess environmental justice concerns or the lack thereof in the pastoral priorities of the local Catholic Church in Sierra Leone and to argue for the integration of environmental concern and care in its mission. The research is divided into two main parts; empirical research and theoretical systematic theological research.

Part one: The first part of the research seeks to understand the extent to which environmental justice concerns are evident in the local Catholic Church in Sierra Leone. The discussions in the first part include the following: Firstly, I will present a historical background and highlight some of the current socio-ecological challenges confronting the research context. Secondly, I will present the results and analysis of the data generated from an empirical research I conducted in four dioceses comprising the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone on the current state of the Church's engagement with environmental issues.

Methodology: I use both secondary and primary data. In presenting the secondary data, I adopt a historical and descriptive analysis of key historical texts and empirical resources from local and international organisations. In the presentation of the primary data, I will adopt both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Part two: In the second part, the data generated from my empirical research will form the basis of my ethical argument. I will endeavour to make a case for the urgent need to integrate and prioritise environmental care and concern in the mission of the local Catholic Church of Sierra Leone by critically engaging and drawing from Pope Francis' environmental-themed encyclical, *Laudato Si'* and the wider Catholic Social Teaching on the environment.

Hypothesis

Given the interrelated connection between poverty and environmental degradation in Sierra Leone, this research is premised on one of the main tenets of Catholic Social Teaching namely, social justice. That is, the Church's commitment to social justice – which demands standing in solidarity with the poor and giving voice to their concerns. And as the environmental question is seen as a question of social justice, I shall argue that the social ethics of the church as articulated in *Laudato Si'* and other Catholic social teaching documents task the Church of Sierra Leone to be

part of the process in addressing the structural causes of environmental degradation in the country.

Methodology: To achieve the aim of the second part of my research, I will generate relevant theological insights through textual analysis of *Laudato Si'* and other ecclesiastical documents (Scriptures, conciliar documents, encyclicals, apostolic exhortation etc.) and other scholarly publications including books, encyclopaedia, journals, magazines and newspaper. Here, I shall adopt the methodological approach of systematic theology. i.e. I shall engage relevant documents from a historical, descriptive, analytical and contextual point of view.

Research Questions

In realising the aims and objectives of both the empirical and theoretical parts of the research, the following research questions shall guide the path ahead.

The first part of this work will be guided by the first research question:

1. To what extent is the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone engaging with environmental issues in its ecclesial space?

The second part of the work will be guided by research questions two to five:

2. In view of the pressing socio-environmental challenges facing Sierra Leone, how can the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone use the teachings of the Church to enhance an ecological awakening and responsibility in both within and outside the Church?
3. How can the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone operationalise the teaching of the Church on ecology in its social mission and development agenda in view of its organisational structure, its influence and widespread membership?
4. How might the Church advance care for the environment as a vehicle for conflict prevention and consolidating peace in Sierra Leone?
5. How might the Church advance care for the environment as a common platform in its ecumenical and interreligious outreach and engagements?
6. What concrete contribution can the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone make in addressing the environmental challenges facing the country?

II. SITUATING THE STUDY: POPE FRANCIS' CALL FOR A DECENTRALISED AND SOCIALLY ENGAGED CHURCH IN LIGHT OF VATICAN II

This study stands at the intersection of Catholic ecclesiology and Catholic Social ethics. I particularly situate it within the context of Pope Francis' reforming agenda and its emphasis on a decentralised and socially engaged Church.

It has been widely acknowledged that the pontificate of Pope Francis has initiated a new phase of the reception of the Second Vatican Council.⁴ I use the word 'reception' in the ecclesial context which refers to the acceptance of ecclesiastical or conciliar teachings or decisions by members of the church.⁵ Pope Francis' call for a decentralised and socially engaged Church has to be understood within the context of Vatican II's conciliar teaching and its call for reform. The Council which was convoked by Pope John XXIII and held from 1962-1965, marked a watershed moment in the history of the Catholic Church.⁶ It was the Catholic Church's attempt at a global level in finding ways to constructively engage with the modern world.⁷

The aftermath of the council set the Catholic Church towards a new ecclesiological vision that is still being interpreted today.⁸ Among the many contributions of Vatican II conciliar teachings, I will now consider two of the elements that are consistent in Pope Francis' reception of the council and are of relevance to this research, namely the council's teaching on decentralization of church authority and on a socially engaged church.

⁴ Cf. B. E. Hinze, "The Ecclesiology of Pope Francis and the Future of the Church in Africa," in *Journal of Global Catholicism*, Vol. II, Issue 1 (December 2017) 6-33; M. Faggioli, "Evangelii Gaudium as an Act of Reception of Vatican II" in G. Mannion (Ed), *Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism: Evangelii Gaudium and the Papal Agenda*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2017, 38-54.

⁵ M. G. Lawler, *What Is and What Ought to Be: The Dialectic of Experience, Theology and Church*, Continuum Int. Publishing, New York, 2005, 121.

⁶ Cf. R. McBrien, *Catholicism*, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1994, 655-657; Raymond F. Bulman "Introduction: Historical Context" in Raymond F. Bulman & Frederick J. Parrella (Eds), *From Trent to Vatican II: Historical and Theological Investigations*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2006, 3-17.

⁷ Cf. R. Latourelle, "Vatican II" in René Latourelle & Rino Fisichella (Eds), *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, The Crossroad Publishing, New York, 1994, 1151-1162.

⁸ Cf. O. Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II*, Paulist Press, New York, 2004.

i) **The Reception of Vatican II in Pope Francis' Pontificate**

How is the pontificate of Pope Francis carrying forward Vatican II's reform project? In my view, Pope Francis' pontificate is a *kairos* moment in the reception of Vatican II's conciliar teachings. The priorities and theological vision of every pope is shaped by their historical, religious, and socio-cultural background. Born in Argentina to Italian immigrant parents in 1936, Jorge Mario Bergoglio – who took the name Francis after his election to the papacy in 2013 in honour of Saint Francis of Assisi – brings a unique perspective to the papacy. As the first pope from the Global South, the first Jesuit pope and the first pope in the post-conciliar era who was not a participant of Vatican II, Francis brings a fresh reception of Vatican II.

Currently, it is impossible to fully evaluate Francis' reception of Vatican II since his pontificate is still in progress, however from the programmatic templates he has provided about his papacy, it is evident that Vatican II's conciliar teachings form the basis of his reform agenda.⁹ Francis' reclaim of Vatican II conciliar teachings is evident in his call for a church that is missionary, collegial, synodal, inculturated and consultative, and a church where doctrine is pastorally oriented. For the purpose of this thesis, I will focus on two of the conciliar themes in Francis's vision that are relevant to this work namely, a decentralised and socially engaged church.

a) ***Ecclesial decentralisation***

It has become increasingly clear that the papacy of Francis is moving towards a more collegial form of governance in the Church. Taking a cue from Vatican II's conciliar teachings especially the *Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium, hereafter referred to as LG)*, Pope Francis has set in motion a reorientation of church governance structure from what he refers to as excessive centralisation to a more decentralised church authority. Francis' call for a decentralised church in which local churches and regions are encouraged in assuming greater responsibility for their own pastoral concerns is clearly spelt out in his apostolic exhortation, '*Evangelii Gaudium* (2013, hereafter referred to as EG). While officially EG is a product of the 2012 worldwide Synod of

⁹ Cf. G. O'Collins, "Pope Francis and the second Vatican council (1962-65)" in *The Australasian Catholic Record*, vol. 93, no. 2, 2016, 209–216; M. Faggioli, *The Liminal Papacy of Pope Francis: Moving Toward Global Catholicity*, Orbis Book, Maryknoll NY, 2020, 51-71.

Bishops on the *New Evangelization*, the apostolic exhortation also serves as a programmatic document for Francis' pontificate. In the introductory section of the document, Francis indicates his preference for a decentralised church which allows for a more collegial form of decision-making.¹⁰ Invoking the spirit of Vatican II's conciliar constitution on the church, LG as the basis and context of his reform agenda,¹¹ Francis notes that the need to promote structural reforms should be seen in the light of the church's mission.¹² Francis warns that "Excessive centralization, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church's life and her missionary outreach".¹³ To enhance decentralisation in the church's governance structures, Francis has called for the empowerment of continental, regional and national Bishops' conferences and a return to synodality.

Greater authority to episcopal conferences

To enhance a high degree of decision-making authority in the local churches, Francis has called for the strengthening of continental, regional and national bishops' conferences. Unlike his two immediate predecessors (John Paul II and Benedict XVI) who restrained the role of episcopal conferences,¹⁴ Francis' pontificate is pushing for greater authority for episcopal conferences. In EG, Francis indicated his intention to reform governance structures of the church with particular reference to a greater devolution of decision-making to national, regional and continental episcopal conferences. Citing Vatican II's Constitution on the Church, LG paragraph 23, Francis underscores the importance of episcopal conferences in the devolution of church governance.

The Second Vatican Council stated that, like the ancient patriarchal Churches, episcopal conferences are in a position "to contribute in many and fruitful ways to the concrete realization

¹⁰ Cf. Francis, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium – The Joy of the Gospel*, (Nov. 24, 2013), n.16.

¹¹ Cf. *ibid.* n. 17.

¹² Cf. *ibid.* n. 27.

¹³ *Ibid.* n. 32.

¹⁴ Cf. F. A. Sullivan, "The Teaching Authority of Episcopal Conferences" in *Theological Studies*, Vol. 63, Issue 3, 2002, 472-493; *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church*. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger with Vittorio Messori (Trans. From Italian by Salvator Attanasio & Graham Harrison), Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1985, 59-60.

of the collegial spirit.” Yet this desire has not been fully realized, since a juridical status of episcopal conferences which would see them as subjects of specific attributions, including genuine doctrinal authority, has not yet been sufficiently elaborated.¹⁵

In keeping with the intention of Vatican II, Francis has expressed confidence in episcopal conferences and local Churches in the exercise of doctrinal authority and in seeking solutions to problems that are proper to their own localities. One recent measure Francis has initiated to offset excessive centralism in the church is the granting of greater authority to national episcopal conferences in determining how to best translate the Latin liturgical texts of the Church into local languages.¹⁶ Another indication Francis has shown that he values the voice of local churches in the governance of the Church is the integration of the teachings of local and regional churches into the papal magisterium.¹⁷ In his major writings, Francis has cited documents from bishops' conferences from around the world.

Francis' call for the fostering of collegiality in the Church has received further boost with the issuing of his 2022 Apostolic Letter titled *Competentias Quasdam Decernere* (Assigning certain Competences). In his bid to enhance the authority of bishops' conferences, Francis modified the Code of Canon Law for the Latin and Eastern Catholic Churches in the letter.¹⁸

A return to a synodal Church

Although the word synodality is nowhere found in the corpus of Vatican II, the principle is one of the fruits of Vatican II's conciliar reforms.¹⁹ The principle of synodality was a vital feature of the early church and it stresses the sharing of responsibility in the life and mission of the church. As elaborated in the 2018 document of the International Theological Commission

¹⁵ EG n. 32.

¹⁶ Cf. Francis, Apostolic Letter '*Magnum Principium*' (September 9, 2017).

¹⁷ For instance, in his teaching on the environment in his first social encyclical, '*The Care for our Common Home* (2015) Pope Francis showed an appreciation of a collegial vision of the church by quoting from twenty-one episcopal conferences from all over the world. Also, in his apostolic exhortation on family life, *Amoris Laetitia* (2016), he cites the documents of regional episcopal conferences ten times.

¹⁸ Cf. Francis, Apostolic Letter, *Competentias Quasdam Decernere* (February 11, 2022).

¹⁹ The principle of synodality is not explicitly found in the conciliar teaching of Vatican II. However, the root of the concept can be traced to the ecclesiology of the 'People of God' outlined in Vatican II's constitution on the Church. The ecclesiology of the people of God emphasises the common dignity and mission of all the baptised, in contributing to the mission of the church according to their various charisms, vocations and ministries. Cf. LG n. 12-17.

document titled; *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, the principle of synodality speaks to a process of participation and consultation.²⁰ From the inception of his papacy, Francis has made synodality a recurring theme of his pontificate. In a 2013 extensive interview with Antonio Spadaro, the editor of the Italian Jesuit-run Journal *La Civiltà Cattolica*, Francis expressed the intention to promote a synodal church. He declared, “We must walk together: the people, the bishops and the pope. Synodality should be lived at various levels. Maybe it is time to change the methods of the Synod of Bishops, because it seems to me that the current method is not dynamic”.²¹

Since his election, Francis has convoked multiple synods; on Family (2014, 2015), on Youth (2018) and on the Amazon (2019). And in October 2021, the Pontiff formally launched a two-year worldwide synodal process under the theme “*For a Synodal Church: Communion, participation, and Mission*” The process will culminate with the Synod on synodality in October 2023.²² The synodal church as envisioned by Francis goes beyond the expression of episcopal and hierarchical collegiality. It is a process that involves the entire ‘people of God’ at all levels – universal, continental, national, diocesan and parish levels.²³ Thus, a common thread in Francis’ vision of a synodal church is the idea of involving listening to the voice of all the baptised in the mission of the church, an idea he has repeatedly emphasised or alluded to in his major speeches or writings. In EG Francis does not directly address the theme of synodality, however, in the document Francis alludes to the idea of listening to the voice of all the baptised and involving them in the life and mission of the church.²⁴ Francis also echoed similar thoughts in the opening speech of the 2014 Synod on the Family when addressing the issue of open and honest speech at the synodal gathering. Using the Greek word *parrhesia* (which means to speak candidly or honestly

²⁰ Cf. International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* (March 2, 2018), nn. 1-3.

²¹ A. Spadaro, “A Big Heart Open to God: An interview with Pope Francis” in *America* (September 30, 2013), Vol. 209, No. 8, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis>, date accessed 05/09/2021.

²² Cf. R. Gomes, “Pope on Synod: The participation of everyone, guided by the Holy Spirit” in *Vatican News*, (09 October 2021), <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-10/pope-francis-discourse-moment-reflection-eve-inauguration-synod.html> , date accessed 11/10/2021.

²³ Cf. International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, op. cit.

²⁴ Cf. EG nn. 120, 171.

and without fear), Francis exhorted the synodal delegates not to shy away from speaking candidly.²⁵ In this context, Francis is emphasising the importance of open debate and free and honest speech bound up with humility in listening to others even in the face of disagreement.

Francis establishes more emphatically the call for the entire people of God, irrespective of their status in the church, to be agents rather than passive recipients of the church's mission in his landmark speech delivered during the fiftieth anniversary of the institution of the synod of bishops in 2015. Referencing paragraph 12 of *Lumen Gentium*, Francis spoke of the synodal church as a listening church:

A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening "is more than simply hearing." It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the "Spirit of truth" (Jn 14:17), in order to know what he "says to the Churches" (Rev 2:7)... The Synod process begins by listening to the people of God, which "shares also in Christ's prophetic office," according to a principle dear to the Church of the first millennium: "*Quod omnes tangit ab omnibus tractari debet*" (What affects everyone must be deliberated by everyone).²⁶

The art of listening occupies an important place in Francis' lexicon. In *Let us Dream: The Path to a Better Future* (2020) co-authored with his biographer, Austen Ivereigh, Francis identifies listening as the first stage of synodality; "we need a respectful, mutual listening, free of ideology and predetermined agendas. The aim is not to reach agreement by means of a contest between opposing positions, but to journey together to seek God's will, allowing differences to harmonize"²⁷. By emphasising the dynamic of listening to the voice of the entire people of God, Francis is eschewing the top-to-bottom approach that has stripped the local churches and lay faithful of any decision-making power in the Church. To this end, Francis appeals to the image of an 'inverted pyramid'. This image stresses the authority of service, and it is antithetical to the centralised structure of authority. The Irish Theologian Gerry O'Hanlon in his book *The Quiet*

²⁵ Cf. Francis, Opening Speech of the 2014 Synod on the Family (October 6, 2014), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141004_incontro-per-la-famiglia.html, date accessed 05/09/21.

²⁶ Francis, Address: Fiftieth Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops (October 17, 2015), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html, date accessed 05/09/21. English translation of the Latin expression is mine.

²⁷ Pope Francis in conversation with Austen Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2020, 93.

Revolution of Pope Francis: A Synodal Church in Ireland (2018) has provided an insightful description of the church as an inverted pyramid. The church as an inverted pyramid O’Hanlon writes, is a church “in which people of God are primary and the hierarchy in all its forms are there to serve the People in whom the Holy Spirit is present”.²⁸ In other words, Francis is proposing a new way of being a church in which decisions are not predominantly made at the centre but one that encourages shared decision-making among all the baptised members of the church.

Although Francis’ vision of a synodal church focuses on shared decision-making through mutual listening, discernment, participation, and co-responsibility, it should be noted that it is not a Catholic Church-style exercise in parliamentary democracy. Francis has continually warned against the temptation to see synods as parliaments of the Church.²⁹ In this respect, the synodal model of church being promoted by Francis seems to be centred less on the hierarchical church and more open to the greater participation of the laity in the process of decision-making in the church.³⁰

In Francis, we are witnessing a church that is willing to allow the peripheries to speak to and challenge the centre. To achieve the process of sound decentralisation that he envisions for the church, he is promoting synodality not only within the ranks of bishops but at all levels of the church and empowering local and regional episcopal conferences and individual diocesan bishops to assume responsibilities to govern their local churches in consultation with all the faithful. As Francis himself has spelt out in *Amoris Laetitia* (2016), “not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium. Unity of teaching and practice is certainly necessary in the Church, but this does not preclude various ways of interpreting some aspects of that teaching or drawing certain consequences from it”.³¹

²⁸ G. O’Hanlon, *The Quiet Revolution of Pope Francis A Synodal Church in Ireland*, Messenger Publications, Dublin, 2018, 9-10.

²⁹ Cf. Francis, Introductory Remarks at the 2015 Synod for Family (October 5, 2015), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151005_padri-sinodali.html, date accessed 05/09/21.

³⁰ Cf. Francis, *Episcopalis Communio* (September 15, 2018).

³¹ Francis, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* – The Joy of Love (March 19, 2016), n. 3, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia.html, date accessed 08/09/21.

b) Pope Francis and the renewed emphasis on heeding the ‘signs of the times’

Vatican II’s vision of a socially engaged church that scrutinises ‘the signs of the times’ as articulated in the conciliar document *Gaudium et Spes* (hereafter referred to as GS),³² has found renewed emphasis in the pontificate of Pope Francis. This is no coincidence as Francis is a product of Latin America, a region where the prophetic call of GS to engage with the plight of the world by reading ‘the signs of the times’ profoundly inspired the pastoral and theological priorities of the church. In his bid to make the church more responsive to the social challenges facing the church in the twenty-first century, Pope Francis has repeatedly drawn from the image of church that is socially engaged as imagined by Vatican II’s *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*.³³

A survey of Francis’ writings on social issues indicates that the dialogical engagement with societal issues that is so central to GS is being received in the social magisterium of Pope Francis. In EG where Francis dedicates the entire fourth chapter to “The Social Dimension of Evangelisation”, the emphasis of GS on the Church looking outward to the rest of the world is alluded to in four principles which Francis believes are required in the “building of fraternal, just and peaceful societies’: “Time is greater than space”; unity prevails over conflict”; “realities are more important than ideas”; and “the whole is greater the part”. (EG 222-237). These principles reflect Pope Francis’ attempts to read the signs of the times and interpret them in light of the Gospel.³⁴ Francis’ EG also echoes the call of GS for solidarity between the church and the rest of humankind: “We want to enter fully into the fabric of society, sharing the lives of all, listening to their concerns, helping them materially and spiritually in their needs, rejoicing with those who

³² Cf. Vatican Council II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World – Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965) n. 4, 11 & 44; B. Di Martino, *La Dottrina Sociale Della Chiesa: Sviluppo Storico*, Monolateral, Plano Texas, 2017, 135-143; M. Heath, “Signs of the Times” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 13, Thompson/Gale, Detroit, 2003, 117-118; Oliver P. Rafferty, “Vatican II: A Retrospective” in *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 99, No. 394, 2010, 153-167; Marie-Dominique Chenu, *La Chiesa nel Mondo: I Segni dei Tempi*, Editrice Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1965, 7.

³³ Cf. M. Faggioli, *The Liminal Papacy of Pope Francis*, op. cit.

³⁴ D. Christiansen, “The Church Encounters the World” in *America Magazine* (November 27, 2013), <https://www.americamagazine.org/content/all-things/church-encounters-world>, date accessed 08/09/21.

rejoice, weeping with those who weep; arm in arm with others, we are committed to building a new world".³⁵

The blueprint which Vatican II conciliar document GS provides in engaging with social issues of special urgency at the present historical moment in light of the Gospel is reflected in the two social encyclicals Pope Francis has published so far: *Laudato Si'* (*On Care for our Common Home*, 2015) and *Fratelli Tutti* (*On Fraternity and Social Friendship*, 2020). The encyclical *Laudato Si'* – which pointedly deals with the socio-ecological challenges facing the planetary community and our shared responsibility for our common home – draws from the worldview of GS and its post-conciliar reception especially as received in Pope Paul VI's 1967 encyclical, *Populorum Progressio* (LS 120).³⁶ Francis' 2020 encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* is also consistent with the 'vision of solidarity' which GS so passionately speaks to (GS 1). Published in response to the current religious, social and political context of our world characterised by bitter divisions and polarisation, the rise of political demagoguery and populism, anti-immigrant rhetoric and a deadly global pandemic (covid-19) – which has laid bare the deep-seated issues of injustice, poverty, and inequality – the encyclical calls for a new path forward for humanity to help heal the bitter divisions that have fractured our humanity.³⁷

To sum up, Pope Francis has renewed Vatican II's call to engage with 'the signs of the times' as a medium for openness to the world and creatively imbuing it with Gospel values. It should be noted that the reform agenda of Francis has some blind spots including a lack of proper articulation of the role of women in the Church. Despite these blind spots, Francis is envisioning and giving expression to the full meaning of Catholicism as universal yet diverse. Through speeches, gestures and writings, Francis is engendering a move towards an inclusive Catholic identity as a global Church, away from being a Eurocentric Church. Thus, the reforming agenda of Pope Francis' pontificate offers a *Kairos* moment for the African (Sierra Leone) Church to be

³⁵ EG no. 269.

³⁶ Although Francis has shown a full and unequivocal reception of Vatican II, however his writings, as Massimo Faggioli has observed, are not overloaded with conciliar textual references. Rather, Francis references to conciliar documents are mostly mediated through post-conciliar teachings, a process Faggioli has labelled generative reception: Cf. M. Faggioli, *The Liminal Papacy of Pope Francis*, op. cit. 51-71.

³⁷ Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship* (October 4, 2020).

truly *missionaries to themselves* as echoed by Pope Paul VI during his apostolic visit to Africa (the first papal visit to the continent).³⁸ But is worth asking: How proactive is African Church in support of the changes the pontificate of Francis is trying to bring about in the global Church? In my view, many in the ranks of the African Church's leadership are yet to embrace the reforms that Francis has proposed.

ii) **Ecological concern as one of the signs of the times**

Having discussed Pope Francis' decentralising agenda and his emphasis on a socially engaged Church, I now examine the emergence of ecological awareness and care for the environment as one of the urgent *signs of the times*. The task of this discussion is to start laying the foundation of my argument on the need for the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone to prioritise environmental justice concerns in its mission.

One of the hallmarks of the closing decades of the second millennium was the growing ecological awareness among the various Christian denominations and other religious traditions. In this section, I will briefly discuss the emergence of ecological awareness in contemporary religious discourse.

Prior to the emergence of ecological consciousness, concern for the well-being of the environment was not a special area of interest among the adherents of the Abrahamic faiths. The religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam were largely influenced by anthropocentric interests – which view the rest of the creation as evidence of God's creativity and providence for human needs. As a result of the anthropocentric emphasis on the soteriology of the Abrahamic faiths traditions, Christianity and other faith traditions were faulted for being complicit in the wanton exploitation of the earth's resources and the rise in ecological related disasters around the world by the emerging ecological movements in the 1960s.³⁹ Lynn White's 1967 article "The

³⁸ During his visit to Africa, the first pope to do, Paul VI exhorted Africans; "Missionaries to yourselves" : in other words, you Africans must now continue, upon this Continent, the building up of the Church." Paul VI, *Homily at the Eucharistic Celebration at the Conclusion of the Symposium of Bishops of Africa*, Kampala, 31 July 1969, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/homilies/1969/documents/hf_p-vi_hom_19690731.html, date accessed 07/09/21.

³⁹ Cf. J. F. Haught, "Theological Aspects of Ecology" in R. P. McBrien (Ed), *Encyclopaedia of Catholicism*, Harper Collins Publishing Inc, New York, 1995, 449-450.

Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis” typifies the charge of complicity against the Abrahamic Faiths. In the article Lynn identified Christianity in its Western form as the most anthropocentric religion in the world.⁴⁰

Although the criticism of White and the larger ecological movement made a wholesale generalisation and a reductionist view of Christian creation theology,⁴¹ it prompted many faith-leaders, scholars and commentators in the late 1960s and early 70s to start advocating for a radical response to the ecological crisis. At a theological level, the heightened awareness of the threats the human-induced environmental degradations pose to the health of the planetary community, particularly to the poor and those living in the most deprived areas of the world, occasioned theological interest in ecological issues. The awaking of theological interests in ecological issues – an awakening Celia Deane-Drummond has called ‘a turn to ecology’⁴² – initiated a re-evaluation of traditions, re-reading and reinterpretation of scriptural and other classical texts in light of the environmental issues. The constructive and critical engagement between the disciplines of theology and ecology resulted in the emergence of the branch of theology known today as ‘eco-theology’.⁴³

Within mainline Christian churches, the complaint against the Christian faith for being complicit in the environmental degradation around the world and the call for a radical response in the face of the disproportionate effects of widespread destruction of the environment on the poor by ecologically-minded theologians gave rise to environmental advocacy among the leaders of Church denominations. In the Catholic Church, concern for environmental issues and

⁴⁰ Cf. L. White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis” in *Science*, vol. 155, 1967, 1203-1207.

⁴¹ Cf. A. M. Clifford, “Creation” in F. Schüssler Fiorenza & J. P. Galvin (Eds) *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, Vol. 1, Fortress Press, Minneapolis MN, (201-253) at 246.

⁴² Cf. C. Deane-Drummond, *Eco-theology*, Dalton, Longman & Todd, Ltd., London, 2008, ix

⁴³ Eco-theology is a form of practical theology which focuses on the interrelationship of Religion and Nature particularly in light of environmental concern. It begins with the premise that there is a nexus between the human religious/spiritual worldview and the degradation of nature. The discipline began as a result of the increasing awareness of the environmental crisis wreaking the world, bringing about a profound reflection on the interconnectedness between the human family and the rest of the created order; Cf. R. S. Gottlieb, “Introduction: Religion and Ecology – What is the Connection and Why Does it Matter?” in R. S. Gottlieb (Ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, Oxford University Press, 2006, 3-16; see also I. Kanu, “The Implications of Igbo-African Eco-Bio-communitarian Spirituality for Global Ecological Concerns” in M. Masaeli et al (Eds), *African Perspectives on Global Development*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle, 2018, 75-91.

environmental-related themes began to gradually emerge in post-Vatican II official documents beginning with Pope Paul VI's apostolic letter, *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971).⁴⁴ In the letter, Paul VI warned that the "ill-considered exploitation of nature" by humankind risks turning humanity itself into "the victim of this degradation".⁴⁵ In the same year, the World Synod of Catholic Bishops meeting in Rome released a statement entitled *Justitia in Mundo* (1971) which drew attention to the root causes of structural injustice and identified environmental degradation as one of the concrete manifestations of structural injustice. Within the framework of justice, the synod laid the blame for the widespread environmental degradation at the feet of the richer industrialised nations, whether capitalist or socialist and called on them "to accept a less material way of life, with less waste, in order to avoid the destruction of the heritage which they are obliged by absolute justice to share with all other members of the human race".⁴⁶

Since the publication of *Octogesima Adveniens* and *Justitia in Mundo*, several statements by way of papal interventions and other church documents concerning safeguarding the environment were issued during the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. These papal interventions and ecclesiastical documents – which I will discuss in more detail in one of the chapters of this work – firmly situate ecological issues within the tradition of Catholic social teaching.

The pontificate of Pope Francis has brought unprecedented attention to the church's concern for the environment. Reflections on the environment have featured prominently in his magisterial teaching more than any other pope before him. He has elevated the subject to one of the highest and most authoritative official teaching in the Catholic Church namely, an encyclical.⁴⁷ In 2015 Francis released his first social encyclical on the subject of care for the

⁴⁴ Cf. C. Deane-Drummond, "Joining in the Dance: Catholic Social Teaching and Ecology" in *New Blackfriars*, Vol. 93, Issue 1044 (March 2012), 193-212.

⁴⁵ Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens – On the 80th anniversary of the encyclical Rerum Novarum* (May 14, 1971), n. 21 in David J. O'Brien & Thomas A. Shannon (Eds), *Catholic Social Thought: Encyclicals and Documents from Pope Leo XIII to Pope Francis*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 2018, 288.

⁴⁶ Second Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Justitia in Mundo – Justice in the World*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana (November 30, 1971), nn. 11, 70.

⁴⁷ At the top of the ranking of authoritative documents of the Catholic Church are acts of ecumenical councils such as the constitutions, decrees and declarations of Vatican Council II. This followed by papal teaching documents; encyclicals, apostolic letters, apostolic exhortations, and *motu proprio*. With regards to papal documents, encyclicals

environment entitled '*Laudato Si'* (*On Care for Our Common Home*). Hereafter '*Laudato Si'*' will be referred to as LS).⁴⁸ By elevating care for the environment to one of the most authoritative levels of papal magisterium, Francis has firmly established the subject as one of the signs of the times to which the church at all levels must respond.

In summary, I am relying on the vision of Church discussed above to argue in this research thesis that the environmental challenges facing the socio-ecclesial context of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone are urgent pastoral problems that demand concrete action from the local Catholic Church of Sierra Leone.

III. DIVISION OF THE STUDY

This work is divided into two main parts. The first part has two chapters, chapters one and two. The first chapter deals with the context of the research. This chapter details the historical, socio-religious context that informs the research and highlights some of the social and environmental challenges facing Sierra Leone. Chapter two presents the data results and analysis of my empirical research on the current state of environmental justice concerns in the local Catholic Church in Sierra Leone. The chapter provides insights on the place of environmental justice in the pastoral priorities of the four dioceses that comprise the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone.

The second part comprises six chapters. In this part, having introduced the research context and presented the analysis and interpretation of my empirical research, I argue for the urgent need of integrating concern and care for the environment in the pastoral priorities of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone by appealing to Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si* and the wider Catholic Social Teaching (CST) on the environment. It begins with the third chapter which focuses on the emergence of ecological awareness and the safeguarding of the natural environment in Catholic Social Teaching before the advent of Pope Francis as a global advocate for environmental justice.

carry the highest level of authority. Cf. K. W. Irwin, *A Commentary on Laudato Si: Examining the Background, Contributions, Implementation, and Future of Pope Francis's Encyclical*, Paulist Press, New York, 2016, 1-10.

⁴⁸ To date, the document represents the highest level of Catholic teaching on ecological issues. Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si' – On Care for our Common Home* (May 24, 2015), Libreria Editrice, Vatican City. Unless otherwise stated all citations from encyclical will be taken from this translation.

In this chapter, I will trace and examine environmental-related themes in Catholic social magisterial teaching prior to the pontificate of Pope Francis.

The fourth chapter addresses the theological grounding of my argument namely, an integrated approach to social and environmental justice in the social mission of the local Catholic Church in Sierra Leone in view of the socio-ecological challenges facing the ecclesial context of Sierra Leone. I will be drawing on Pope Francis' line of argument in his delineation of integral ecology as articulated in his environmental-themed encyclical *Laudato Si'*, I will demonstrate that since social and environmental injustice is intricately linked, concern and care for the environment should be integrated into the pastoral priorities of the local Catholic Church in Sierra Leone.

The fifth chapter examines environmental justice in relation to sustainable development and the promotion of integral peace. Further delving into Pope Francis' integral ecology, I argue in this chapter for the integration of an ecological component of development and the promotion of peace in the work of the development wing of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone.

The sixth chapter discusses environmental justice from the perspective of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and cooperation. In view of the religious context of Sierra Leone, I argue in this chapter that the environmental challenges facing the country require ecumenical and interfaith interventions.

In the final chapter, I narrow down the focus of my discussion of environmental justice concerns in the socio-ecclesial context of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone to the practical implications of my research. In this concluding chapter, I argue for an urgent need for an ecologically conscious and eco-praxis Catholic Church in Sierra Leone by proffering some practical recommendations and suggestions for concrete action.

The general conclusion will provide a recapitulation of the general goals of my research and the intended objectives of each chapter. The general conclusion also highlights the possible contribution of my research thesis to the emerging field of study on the connection between religion and ecology. This will be followed by brief notes on the limitations of the study and opportunities for future research.

CHAPTER ONE

THE POLITICAL, RELIGIOUS AND SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN SIERRA LEONE

Introduction

The overall aim of this work is to assess environmental justice concerns or the lack thereof in the pastoral priorities of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone and to argue for the incorporation of concern and care for the environment in its mission.

Having discussed the background to the research and the theological framework in which the research is situated in the general introduction, this opening chapter provides the contextual background that informs the research. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first two sections are historical in nature. Section one will discuss the historical emergence of the nation of Sierra Leone from its precolonial history, independence and post-independence. The second section examines the history of the arrival of the two dominant religions practised in Sierra Leone – Christianity and Islam. With regards to Christianity, emphasis will be placed on the history and the development of the Catholic Church from pre-colonial times to its present state. This leads to the final section on the social and environmental challenges confronting Sierra Leone.

The aim of this chapter is to give a broader perspective of the socio-political and environmental conditions of Sierra Leone – the context in which the Catholic Church ministers. The discussion in this chapter aims to provide justificatory evidence for the central argument of this study, i.e., the need for the local Catholic Church in Sierra Leone to make ecological concern an integral part of its mission.

1.1 SIERRA LEONE: A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Sierra Leone, a country in West Africa, is one of the smaller countries in Africa covering a total of 186,479.14 square kilometres.⁴⁹ It is flanked on the north-east by the Republic of Guinea, on the south-east by the Republic of Liberia and on the south-west by the Atlantic Ocean. According to the latest census figures (2021), Sierra Leone has an estimated population of 8.1 million people.⁵⁰

Sierra Leone is among one of the first countries on the West Coast of Africa to have had contact with Europeans in the fifteenth century. In 1462, a Portuguese explorer Pedro da Cintra in search of fresh water arrived on the coast of the present-day Freetown peninsula. Awestruck by the mountainous terrain that resembled the shape of a lion, Pedro da Cintra named the peninsula *Sierra Lyoa* – which means lion mountain – from which the name Sierra Leone was adapted. Sierra Leone has one of the longest recorded modern histories in Africa due mainly to her links with the Transatlantic Slave Trade.⁵¹ However, the history of the territory predates the slave trade and European colonisation. Historical evidence shows that the territory has been continuously inhabited by indigenous Africans of diverse ethnic groups. These groups operated in well-structured tribal kingdoms.⁵²

The American War of Independence (1775–1783) and the abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively played a significant role in the establishment of the country that is today known as the Republic of Sierra Leone. Following the defeat of Britain in the American War of Independence (1775–1783), enslaved African loyalist soldiers who had fought on the side of British forces fled to Canada and England. In England, many of them ended homeless on the streets of London. Perturbed by the appalling living conditions of the ‘Black Poor’ as they were labelled, some philanthropists and anti-slavery

⁴⁹ The works of the following authors provided valuable information for the historical sketch of the emergence of Sierra Leone; J. A. D. Alie, *A New History of Sierra Leone*, Macmillan Pub. Ltd., Oxford, 2016., 1-27; D. J. Francis, *The Politics of Economic Regionalism: Sierra Leone in ECOWAS*, Ashgate Pub. Ltd., London, 2001, 76-79; D. Harris, *Sierra Leone: A Political History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2014.

⁵⁰ Cf. Statistics Sierra Leone, *2021 Mid-Term Population and Housing Census Results* (December 2021), <https://www.statistics.sl/index.php/census/mid-term-population-census.html>, date accessed 20/01/2022.

⁵¹ Cf. J. A. D. Alie, *A New History of Sierra Leone*, op. cit. 29-34.

⁵² Cf. D. J. Francis, *The Politics of Economic Regionalism: Sierra Leone*, op. cit. 77.

activists (abolitionists) developed a plan to resettle the ‘Black Poor’ in Africa. The current-day Freetown Peninsula which became known as “Province of Freedom” was chosen as the permanent resettlement hub for the impoverished blacks. In 1787 the first group of about four hundred men and women arrived from Great Britain. The settlement was later joined by other groups of former slaves from Nova Scotia in 1792 and from the Caribbean (the Jamaican Maroons) in 1795. In 1808 the settlement, which was mainly confined to a small coastal area of the Freetown Peninsula officially became a crown Colony of Great Britain. Following the official ban on British participation in the slave trade in 1807, the newly established Freetown Colony became the depot for thousands of captured West Africans, known as the ‘recaptives.’ The British Naval Patrol which had its base in Freetown was charged with the mandate of intercepting slave ships on the West African Coast. The Naval Patrol rescued many captured Africans on the high Seas – who were bound to the Americas for slave labour on the plantations – and brought them to Freetown.⁵³

In the wake of the scramble for Africa and the Berlin Conference of 1884 which partitioned and divided the African Continent among European powers, Britain expanded its sphere of influence beyond the Freetown peninsula to the hinterlands of Sierra Leone. In August 1895, the British government proclaimed a protectorate over what constitutes present-day Sierra Leone. During the colonial period Sierra Leone was regarded as the unofficial capital of British West Africa, the first country to have a Western style of University (the Fourah Bay College Founded in 1827), which until 1967 was an affiliate college of Durham University.⁵⁴

The colonisation of Sierra Leone, as is the case of the rest of the African continent, was not borne purely from altruistic motives but for reasons of self-interest, notably for the exploitation of its resources. The European powers’ exploitative system created a system of governance that was inherently autocratic and ‘anti-people’ which was eventually bequeathed to post-independence African leaders.⁵⁵ The wind of change generated by agitations for self-government

⁵³ Cf. D. Harris, *Sierra Leone: A Political History*, op. cit. 10-12; . A. D. Alie, *A New History of Sierra Leone*, op. cit. 43-54.

⁵⁴ Cf. . Harris, *Sierra Leone: A Political History*, op. cit. 14-15.

⁵⁵ Cf. G. K. Kieh Jr., “Introduction: Framing the African Condition” in G. K. Kieh Jr. (Ed), *Contemporary Issues in African Society: Historical Analysis and Perspective*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham Switzerland, 2018, 1-28.

in Africa forced the British establishment to grant Sierra Leone independence on 27th April 1961.⁵⁶

In post-colonial Africa, Sierra Leone was regarded as a beacon of hope with a relatively healthy democratic credential, vibrant civil service and a hub for quality education (Athens of West Africa). However less than a decade after independence, the country's political elites chose to lead the country on a path of perdition.⁵⁷ Like the many other newly independent states in Africa, Sierra Leone's ruling elite continued the governance paradigm that was bequeathed to them by the colonial powers, a paradigm which allowed the emergence of predatory political leaders who – to borrow the words of G. K. Kieh – treated state resources as a buffet-like service to be eaten as they wished.⁵⁸ In the closing decades of the twentieth-century, Sierra Leone was exhibiting signs of a state on the verge of becoming a failed state; widespread corruption at all levels of governance, collapse of the economy and public services, worsened poverty, state-sponsored use of excessive force against dissenting voices etc. By the late 1980s, essential commodities such as rice – the main staple food of the country, fuel (petroleum products such as petrol, gasoline, and kerosene) and other commodities were basically a luxury for many in Sierra Leone. As a primary school child in that period, I saw my adult guardians queueing for long hours just to acquire few kilos of rice for the daily meal. By this period, the dream of a better life that had greeted the attainment of independence gave way to disillusion which forced many of the country's bright minds and young people into self-imposed exile in neighbouring countries, Europe and North America. The social and economic malaise created by bad governance provided the breeding ground for civil unrest which culminated in an 11-year civil war (1991-2002). There were several other factors responsible for the outbreak of the conflict. However, since it is not the aim of this work to go into the detail of the causative factors of the war, I will highlight the main causes of the war as articulated in the report of the post-civil war Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was created to look into the country's past, which concluded that:

⁵⁶ Cf. D. J. Francis, *The Politics of Economic Regionalism: Sierra Leone*, op. cit. 77.

⁵⁷ J. A. D. Alie, *A New History of Sierra Leone*, op. cit. 169-190.

⁵⁸ Cf. G. K. Kieh Jr., "Introduction: Framing the African Condition", op. cit. 1-28.

While there were many factors both internal and external, that explain the cause of the civil war, the Commission came to the conclusion that it was years of bad governance, endemic corruption and denial of basic human rights that created the deplorable conditions that made conflict inevitable. Successive regimes became increasingly impervious to the wishes and needs of the majority. Instead of implementing positive and progressive policies, each regime perpetuated the ills and self-serving machination left behind by its predecessors. By the start of the conflict the nation had been stripped of its dignity. Institutional collapses reduced the vast majority of the people to a state of acute deprivation. Government accountability was non-existent. Political expression and dissent had been crushed...Democracy and the rule of law were dead. By 1991, Sierra Leone was a deeply divided society, and full of potential for violence. It required only a small spark for this violence to be ignited.

The context provided ripe breeding ground for the conflict and mayhem that was to sweep through the country. Many Sierra Leoneans, particularly the youth lost all sense of hope in the future. Youths became easy prey for unscrupulous forces who exploited their disenchantment to wreak vengeance on the ruling elite. The Commission holds the political elite of successive regimes in the post-independence period responsible for creating the conditions for the conflict.⁵⁹

The war which has been described as one of the most horrific in Sub-Saharan Africa, led to the death of more than 50,000 civilians, maiming of many more, destruction of infrastructure and property and the displacement of half of the country's population.⁶⁰

Following the end of the war in 2002, the country continues to make remarkable progress in its peace and state building process. Sierra Leone has been hailed as one the most successful stories of post-conflict recovery in Africa (2002-).⁶¹ The country has made notable strides with help from international partners in consolidating peace, fostering democratic governance and rebuilding its infrastructure. However, notwithstanding the notable strides the country has made to improve the standard of living of her citizens, Sierra Leone is regarded as a fragile state riddled with many socio-economic and environmental problems.⁶² In the third section of this chapter, I will outline and discuss some of the current social and environmental challenges facing Sierra Leone.

⁵⁹ Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Report*, Vol. 2, nn. 12-18, <https://www.sierraleonetrsc.org/index.php/view-report-text-vol-2/item/volume-two-chapter-two>, date accessed 22/11/2020. Hereafter will be referred to as SLTRC

⁶⁰ L. Gberie, *A Dirty War in West Africa: The RUF and the Destruction of Sierra Leone*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington IN, 2005.

⁶¹ Cf. D. J. Francis, *When War Ends: Building Peace in Divided Communities*, Routledge, New York, 2016, 15.

⁶² Cf. H. Mcleod & B. Ganson, "The underlying causes of fragility and instability in Sierra Leone", LSE-Oxford Fragility Commission's report July 2018, <https://www.theigc.org/publication/underlying-causes-fragility-instability-sierra-leone>, date accessed 23/11/2020.

1.2 THE RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE OF SIERRA LEONE

Religion is a vital force in both private life and the public sphere in Sierra Leone and the country takes pride in its status as one of the most religiously tolerant countries in the world. By way of religious demography, Sierra Leoneans largely identify as either Muslim or Christian with a minority of adherents of the African Traditional Religion (ATR). According to the 2020 Pew Research Centre estimates, 78.5 percent of Sierra Leone's population are Muslims, 20.4 percent are Christians, and adherents of African Traditional Religions (ATR) constitute 1.1 percent.⁶³ It is worth noting that although Christianity and Islam are the dominant religions in Sierra Leone (and sub-Saharan Africa as a whole), African traditional religious beliefs and practices remain a permanent feature of the country's religious landscape. In fact, it (ATR) provides the context in which Christianity and Islam are inculturated. This section presents a historical overview of how the two dominant religions were introduced into the country.

2.2.1 *Christianity in Sierra Leone – Brief Historical Overview*

Sierra Leone has had contact with Christianity since 1600 when Portuguese explorers started making contact with Africa.⁶⁴ Christian missionary activities in Sierra Leone can be categorised into three main phases. Firstly, the pre-colonial attempt to plant the faith by Catholic missionary orders (the Jesuits and Capuchins) from 1605-1680 – which failed to make any substantial impact due to infectious tropical diseases that led to the death of almost all of them. The second phase of Christian missionary activities coincided with the creation of the settlement 'Province of Freedom' in 1787 which eventually evolved into a British colony in 1808. A coalition of anti-slavery groups and ex-slaves brought with them a variety of Protestant orientations. Most of the ex-slaves had already encountered the Christian faith in North America and brought with them Protestant spiritualities. They relied on their faith to carve out a new social and economic

⁶³ Cf. Pew Research Centre, Religious Composition by Country (December 2022), https://www.pewresearch.org/topic/religion/religious-demographics/pew-templeton-global-religious-futures-project/?_regions_countries=sub-saharan-africa, date accessed 3/01/23.

⁶⁴ The following works provided useful information on the history of Christianity in Sierra Leone; G. Caglioni, *Sierra Leone: Quattro Secoli di Evangelizzazione*, Editrice Missionaria Italiana, Bologna, 2002 & L. E T. Shyllon, *Two Centuries of Christianity in an African Province of Freedom A Case Study of European Influence and Culture in Church Development*, Print Sundaries, Freetown, 2009.

identity for themselves. During this period Protestant missionary groups competed among themselves in order to make inroads in the new territory. Notable among the missionary groups that sent missionaries to Sierra Leone were the Baptist Missionary Society (B.M.S), Church Missionary Society (Anglican), Glasgow Missionary Society (Presbyterian), Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society etc. The Church Missionary Society was one of the most successful missionary groups. From 1804 onwards it began to establish churches and schools. In 1827, CMS founded Fourah Bay College to train African Christian leaders- the institution eventually became the first Western style of university in sub-Saharan Africa.

Following the failure of Catholic missionary groups to gain a foothold in Sierra Leone in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries, the Roman Catholic Church was completely absent in Sierra Leone for more than a century. The reintroduction of Catholic missionary activity started with the creation of an Apostolic Vicariate of Sierra Leone in 1858. Monsignor Melchior de Marion-Brésillac who had founded the Society for African Missions (SMA) was entrusted with the task of re-introducing the Catholic faith in Sierra Leone. On May 14, 1859, a group of six SMA missionaries headed by Monsignor Brésillac arrived in Sierra Leone. However, a few weeks after their arrival all of them died as a result of Yellow Fever. After the demise of the SMA fathers, the Vatican dicastery responsible for mission territories (Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples) handed on the responsibilities of the Apostolic Vicariate of Sierra Leone to the Holy Ghost Missionaries who began their missionary activities in 1864. Following the lead of the Holy Ghost Missionaries, the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Cluny arrived in Freetown in 1866 to help the Holy Ghost Missionaries in the evangelization enterprise. The main focus of the Cluny Sisters' work was the education of girls and the provision of healthcare services especially to women. Meanwhile, the Northern half of the country was largely neglected until the arrival of the Xavierians missionaries in 1950 who set about spreading the Catholic faith through education and catechetical formation.

The third phase of Christian missionary activities in Sierra Leone coincided with the period of decolonisation and self-governance. This period witnessed the indigenisation of the leadership of the various ecclesial communities in the country, hitherto led by expatriate missionaries from Europe and North America. The new church leaders like their contemporaries in the political

spheres were products of the missionary era and had witnessed the de-legitimization of African values by the expatriate missionary workers. In their formative years in the mission schools, they were taught to despise everything African and to dress and behave like Europeans. Upon taking over the leadership of their respective Christian communities, they embarked on a project of indigenisation and inculturation of the Christian the Christian faith - to make the Christian faith accessible to the indigenous population of Sierra Leone using the medium of their culture and language. Today Sierra Leone has a vibrant Christian community with a profound influence on the social and cultural dynamics of the country. The Christian community continues to play a leading role in education, health care provision and other developmental programmes.

The current structure of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone

Although most Christians in Sierra Leone are Protestants with a growing number of Evangelical Christians, the Catholic Church is the largest single Christian community constituting five percent of the country's population. The Church is present in all the four geographical regions of the country. It comprises four dioceses under the ecclesiastical province of Freetown: The Metropolitan Archdiocese of Freetown - covering the Western Area of Sierra Leone and has 10 parishes; the Diocese of Makeni – covering the entire northern flank of Sierra Leone and as of 2020, it has 28 parishes; the Diocese of Kenema – covering the entire Eastern province of Sierra Leone and has 16 parishes; and the Catholic Diocese Bo (to distinguish it from the Anglican Diocese of Bo) – covering the entire Southern Province of the country and has 11 parishes.⁶⁵

All the Catholic dioceses in Sierra Leone are part of the joint Episcopal Conference of Sierra Leone and the Gambia – the Inter-Territorial Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Gambia and Sierra Leone (ITCABIC). Each of the dioceses has an indigenous Sierra Leonean Bishop.

The Catholic Church in Sierra Leone is deeply rooted in the socio-cultural lives of the country. The Church's social mission is visible in the spheres of education, healthcare delivery and other human empowerment programmes. In the post-war reconstruction of Sierra Leone,

⁶⁵ The data on the current composition of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone is taken from the 2020 annual directory of the Holy See (Vatican City): Cf. Pontifical Yearbook (2020), Libreria Editrice Vaticana; see Also Valentine U. Iheanacho, *Historical Trajectories of Catholicism in Africa: From Catholicae Ecclesiae to Ecclesia in Africa*, Wipf & Stock Publishers, Eugene OR, 2021

the Catholic Church in collaboration with other faith groups has contributed to Sierra Leone's physical and moral rebirth. Through its development wing – Caritas Sierra Leone – the Church has assumed greater responsibility in the fight against poverty, disease and illiteracy.

1.2.2 *Islam in Sierra Leone – Brief Historical Background*

Sierra Leone has had contact with the Islamic world since the 1700s.⁶⁶ Islam was introduced in Sierra Leone in the eighteenth-century through the activities of Muslim clerics and traders of the Susu, Fulah and Mandinka tribes from the Futa Jallon Mountains territory in current-day Guinea. Islam gained inroads and spread in the North and South-East of present-day Sierra Leone through trade, forced conversion and Qur'anic education. Also, through intermarriages the itinerant Muslim preachers and traders settled permanently in their host communities. Some of them married into prominent ruling families and clans among the various ethnic groups which gave them considerable influence over local politics. As permanent settlers, Muslim clerics and traders established Islamic places of worship (mosques) and learning centres – where students were taught Qur'anic education and Islamic rituals. By the late eighteenth-century before Britain assumed political control over the Freetown colony, Islamic institutions and socio-cultural practices were already established in the hinterland of Sierra Leone.

In the early nineteenth-century, the Freetown colony – which was intended from the beginning to be a Christian settlement – had a noticeable presence of the Islamic faith which increased substantially due to the large number of indigenous Muslim traders and Muslim Creoles (*Aku* – Yoruba speaking Muslims who were part of the last group of settlers known as the recaptives). The colonial authority in the Sierra Leone colony viewed the Muslim community with suspicion and embarked on an aggressive strategy of containment which led to minor skirmishes in Freetown. Notwithstanding the repressive tactics employed by the colonial government, the

⁶⁶ This brief historical sketch of Islam in Sierra Leone has been informed by the works of D. Skinner, "Islam in the Northern Hinterland and its Influence on the Development of the Sierra Leone Colony" in A. Jalloh & D. Skinner (Eds) *Islam and Trade in Sierra Leone*, Africa World Press, Trenton NJ, 1997, 1-20; D. Skinner, "The influence of Islam in Sierra Leone History: Institutions, Practice and Leadership" in *Journal of West African History*, Volume 2 (November 2016) 27-71; M. B. Sillah, "Islam in Sierra Leone: The Colonial Reaction and the Emergence of National Identity" in *Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs Journal*, Volume 15, Issue 1-2, 121-143.

Islamic faith spread steadily in the colony, especially in the eastern part of Freetown. Recognising the growing strength of the Islamic community, some leading Christians appealed to the colonial government to adopt a tolerant disposition towards the Muslim community. The Reverend Edward Wilmot Blyden (1832-1912), a Presbyterian Minister, was one of the notable figures who played a leading role in fostering interfaith dialogue among the two faith communities in nineteenth and twentieth century Sierra Leone Colony. Through the efforts of Blyden and others, the colonial administration enacted legislations which allowed for parallel systems of Christian and Islamic education.

Both Christian and Muslim missions in addition to the propagation of their respective faiths, also helped to build up the human development capital of Sierra Leone through education, healthcare service delivery and other social programmes. Most of those who were at the forefront of the country's struggle for independence were formed in Christian missions and Islamic Schools. The post-independence period witnessed a rapid indigenisation of Christianity which led to the emergence of indigenous Church leaders. Also, the Muslim community has produced vibrant and resourceful leaders who continue to play leading roles in the socio-cultural and economic development of Sierra Leone. Both faith communities continue to live in relative harmony.

1.3 SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

As indicated earlier, Sierra Leone has made slow but remarkable progress in recovering from the ravages of the 11-year civil-war. In 2014, the country's recovery was dealt a huge blow when a major health crisis – the Ebola epidemic erupted, gripping the Mano River Basin of West Africa comprising Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. The Ebola crisis not only derailed Sierra Leone's post-war recovery efforts, it further exacerbated the daunting socio-political, economic and environmental challenges the country has grappled with in its post-independence history. Although the country has made notable strides in its civil-war and post-Ebola crisis, a cursory look at some indicators of the country's human development index and environmental profile reveals a disturbing picture of multidimensional poverty and environmental challenges. In this section, I discuss the current social and environmental challenges currently facing the country.

1.3.1 *Social Challenges*

As one of the most impoverished countries in the world, Sierra Leone is plagued by a plethora of social challenges. In this subsection, I briefly discuss some of the social challenges confronting Sierra Leone.

- **Poverty**

Sierra Leone is considered as one of the poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa and in the world. The vast majority of Sierra Leoneans live in extreme dehumanising poverty and deprivation.⁶⁷ Almost three-quarters of people live below the poverty line especially those in the rural areas of the country. The 2018 report of *The Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey* conducted by Statistics Sierra Leone paints a grim picture of endemic multidimensional poverty in the country. The overall poverty rate (one of the indicators of human development) stands at almost 57 percent. An increasing number of Sierra Leone's population lack the minimum basic needs required for living a decent and dignified life.⁶⁸ The reality of poverty is even grimmer in the rural areas where the majority of the country's population – who largely depend on subsistence agriculture – live. Although the rural populace is engaged in hard physical agricultural activities, they barely grow enough nutritious food to live a healthy life. Also, with the exception of the capital Freetown (including the Western Area Urban and Rural) – which has a significantly lower poverty rate of 22.8 percent – poverty is concentrated in the other urban centres with combined poverty rate of 49.3 percent.

- **Food insecurity**

Sierra Leone like most West African countries has a widespread problem of food insecurity. The country has an enormous potential and opportunities for sustainable agricultural development and food security, with diverse fertile environment ranging from rain forests,

⁶⁷ Cf. UNDP Human Development Index Report for Sierra Leone (September 8, 2022), <https://www.undp.org/sierra-leone/press-releases/2021/2022-human-development-report-9-out-10-countries-fall-backwards-human-development>, date accessed 20/10/2022.

⁶⁸ Cf. Sierra Leone Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey Report (October 2018), https://www.statistics.sl/images/StatisticsSL/Documents/SLIHS2018/SLIHS_2018_New/sierra_leone_integrated_household_survey2018_report.pdf, date accessed 23/11/2020.

swamps, “bolilands” and savannah grassland. With a predominantly agricultural driven economy, Sierra Leone registered high food production, especially its staple food – rice in the late 1960s and 1970s. However due to bad governance and misplaced priorities, Sierra Leone has had to rely heavily on imported food. The agricultural sector employs almost 80 percent of the country’s labour force, yet hunger and malnutrition remain pervasive in the country. The problem is even acute for rural communities who largely depend on subsistence farming for their livelihood. These rural farmers rely on rudimentary tools like hoe, cutlass, and knife among others to perform farming activities which generate little yields that can barely feed them for six months. Also, alterations in rainfall pattern, seasonal flood and drought due to global climate change have impacted negatively on food production in Sierra Leone.

- ***Inadequate healthcare service***

Sierra Leone’s healthcare system – provided by the Government and the private sector – is largely underdeveloped, understaffed and under-funded. The *World Health Organisation* categorises Sierra Leone as one of the countries with the worst health indicators in the world. Sierra Leone has one of the highest rates of child mortality and the average life expectancy is 53.5/55.1 male/female.⁶⁹

Following the end of the civil war – which completely destroyed the healthcare system of the country – successive post-civil war governments initiated various reforms aimed at improving the healthcare system. For instance, in 2010, the Parliament of Sierra Leone passed the *Free Health Care Initiative* (FHCI) legislation which abolished healthcare charges for pregnant women, lactating mothers and children under five years of age. Notwithstanding the significant gains scored by the Government and its international partners in the implantation of the FHC, the programme has been fraught with various challenges such as lack of personnel, underfunding and imbalance in the distribution of pharmaceutical products especially in the remote rural areas.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Cf. UNDP Human Development Index Report for Sierra Leone (September 8, 2022), op. cit.

⁷⁰ Cf. S. Witter et al “The free healthcare initiative in Sierra Leone: Evaluating a health system reform, 2010-2015” in *The International Journal of Health Planning and Management*, Volume 33, Issue 2, 04/2018, 434-448.

The outbreak of the Ebola virus epidemic (2014-15) further weakened the capacity of healthcare delivery in Sierra Leone. The epidemic decimated the country's already fragile healthcare system, greatly reducing access to healthcare for the most vulnerable of Sierra Leones especially children, pregnant women, and others with chronic and acute health concerns.⁷¹ Following the end of the epidemic, the Government of Sierra Leone launched its post-Ebola recovery plan. The plan outlined four priority areas one of which has to do with the revival of the healthcare sector.⁷² However, recent surveys of the healthcare system in Sierra Leone show a distressing picture. The inequalities between rural and urban areas in accessing and utilising health facilities persist. Whilst residents of the capital Freetown and the other major provincial towns have reasonable access to healthcare services – however inadequate they are, for the vast majority of rural people, access to healthcare means travelling long distances and paying more for access to healthcare without any certainty of being cured. In the rural areas, the health centres are acutely understaffed, lack essential drugs and equipment, and lack electricity power and water or sanitation.⁷³

- ***Problem of adequate and affordable housing***

The problem of affordable and decent housing has been a perennial problem in post-independent Sierra Leone. This problem is directly related to the chaotic land management in the country. Since the attainment of independence and self-governance, the provision of affordable housing in Sierra Leone has on the whole not been prioritised. Various attempts at implementing the very few housing policies developed by successive post-independence governments have mostly ended in failure. Steven N. Rogers in his illuminating article “Rethinking ‘Expert Sense’ in International Development: the case of Sierra Leone’s Housing Policy” (2016) provides an accurate description of Sierra Leone’s housing policy sector;

...the country’s housing policy sector has been at the crossroads of several changes since independence, with a chaotic shift from government-provided housing schemes to an increasing

⁷¹ Cf. Farouk Chothia, “Ebola drains already weak West African health systems”, *BBC News Africa* (September 24, 2014), www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-29324595, date accessed 26/01/2021.

⁷² U. Fofana, “Sierra Leone Post Ebola Recovery Launched”, *Politico Newspaper Sierra Leone*, (July 28, 2015), <https://politicosl.com/articles/sierra-leone-post-ebola-recovery-plan-launched>, date accessed 26/01/21.

⁷³ Cf. World Health Organisation, *Sierra Leone Annual Report* (2018), <https://www.afro.who.int/publications/who-sierra-leone-2018-annual-report>, date accessed 27/01/2021.

accentuation of pro-market enablement with diffused state role. Decades of implementation have proven unsuccessful.⁷⁴

Between 1961 and the onset of the civil war in 1991, government intervention in the provision of affordable housing in Sierra Leone was few and far between. One of the concrete manifestations of such interventions was the Kissy Low-cost Housing Estate in the east end of Freetown - completed in 1963, which today has an almost slum-like appearance. In a bid to address the problem of affordable housing, especially in the urban centres, the Sierra Leone Housing Corporation (SALHOC) was established by an act of parliament in 1982. As one of its multipurpose functions, SALHOC was charged with the responsibility of constructing affordable housing and the provision of loans to families for the construction of homes. However, the corporation proved to be ineffective in implementing its strategies and plans.⁷⁵

The country's housing burden was further compounded by the civil war which destroyed almost the entire social infrastructure. Combatants on all sides of the conflict targeted houses in both rural and urban centres, destroying approximately 400,000 dwellings. Following the end of the war, the Sierra Leone Government in its post-war recovery plan through policy statements committed itself to addressing the housing problem.⁷⁶

In the last twenty years, various schemes aimed at implementing policy statements such as the one mentioned above, have not yielded any tangible result as far as ameliorating the housing problem is concerned. A case in point is the pilot housing project undertaken by the National Social Security and Insurance Trust (NASSIT) in the last ten years. The Trust was established in 2001 to administer Sierra Leone's pension fund. As one of its investment projects, the Trust directed some of its funds to a housing scheme with the aim of providing affordable housing for low-income earners. However, an investigation into the scheme carried out by the

⁷⁴ S. N. Rogers, "Rethinking 'Expert Sense' in International Development: the case of Sierra Leone's Housing Policy" in *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 43:150, (576-591) 580.

⁷⁵ Cf. *ibid*

⁷⁶ In the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, the Government of Sierra Leone with assistance from its development partners pledged to undertake reforms over the years aimed to mitigating the housing problem especially for poor and low-income families in the urban and rural areas; Government of Sierra Leone: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper* (February 2005) nn. 357-358, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2005/cr05191.pdf>, date accessed 28/01/2021.

Parliamentary Committee on Labour and Industrial Relations in 2015, found out that the houses built by the Trust are not affordable for low-income earning and middle-class Sierra Leoneans.⁷⁷

Currently access to decent and affordable accommodation in both rural and urban areas of Sierra Leone is at crisis level. With the rapid growth in population and the failure to decentralise access to basic resources, Sierra Leone is witnessing an unprecedented upsurge in rural-urban migration in the last two decades. A situation that has caused a huge housing deficit in the urban areas, especially, in the capital Freetown. The report of the 2015 population and housing census conducted by Statistics Sierra Leone (SSL) shows that housing is a major public issue. The summary of the report depicts a distressing portrait of the country's housing problem:

The findings show there was a huge regional disparity in the housing stock. Moreover, the majority of houses in the country were inadequate with many households in such poor housing conditions that they were constantly living under threat. Housing inadequacy is exacerbated by overcrowded conditions with a national average of 1.6 households per house; an average of 8.8 people per household countrywide, and over half of these households (55 per cent) living in just one or two rooms.⁷⁸

In addition to overcrowding, the housing deficit has led to the proliferation of informal settlements in urban areas. Most of these structures are located on waterways, mountain slopes and flood-prone areas and they lack basic sanitation, exposing the residents to contagious diseases and environmental disasters.

- **Limited access to clean water**

The problem of the scarcity of and access to clean water constitutes a major challenge – which predate the devastating civil war. The insufficient supply of safe drinking water has been recognised as one of the key impediments to the country's socio-economic development. Despite reforms and substantial investments in the water resource sector in post-conflict Sierra Leone, delivery outcomes in terms of access and quality remain disappointing.

⁷⁷ Cf. J. S. Bangura "MPs unimpressed with NASSIT housing scheme" *Concord Times Newspaper*, (November 10, 2015), <https://allafrica.com/stories/201511110751.html>, date accessed 29/01/2021.

⁷⁸ Statistic Sierra Leone, *Sierra Leone 2015 Population and Housing Census: Thematic Report on Housing Condition* (October 2017), https://www.statistics.sl/images/StatisticsSL/Documents/Census/2015/sl_2015_phc_thematic_report_on_housing_conditions.pdf, date accessed 30/01/2021.

Sierra Leone has one of the highest rainfalls in West Africa, numerous rivers and spring water sources, and lush natural vegetation. Nonetheless, access to clean and safe drinking water has been a long-standing problem which predates the civil war. A large percentage of the country's population collect water for drinking and domestic use from polluted sources which accounts for the prevalence of waterborne diseases and the high mortality rate in the country.⁷⁹ In the mid-1990s, I spent some of my formative years in Wilberforce Village, a hilly neighbourhood of Freetown known for its water scarcity. The problem was so acute that we had to get up as early as 4 am to fetch water for drinking and domestic use. In 2017, I went back to my old neighbourhood and to my disappointment I saw children carrying jerrycans in search of water as I had done 25 years earlier.

Despite promises of reform and increase in investment in the water provision sector in the last ten years aimed at meeting the Millennium Development Goals,⁸⁰ the performances of the institutions charged with the responsibility of providing water are abysmal partly due to infrastructural and organisational challenges. We are two decades into the twenty-first century yet almost 40 percent of Sierra Leone's population cannot access clean and safe drinking water. As a result of the limited access to safe drinking water and the fear of contracting water borne diseases such as cholera, there has been a proliferation of the sale of plastic packaged water and bottled water – some of the brands from questionable sources – in the country's urban centres.

- **Poor state of Education**

In Sub-Saharan Africa, Sierra Leone ranks as one of the worst performing countries in the educational sector with a literacy rate of 42.3 percent.⁸¹ The country has a rich educational legacy,⁸² being one of the first countries to have a thriving Western-style educational system in colonial sub-Saharan Africa. With the University of Sierra Leone – the Fourah Bay College –

⁷⁹ B. P. Sesay et al, "Assessment of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Practices Among Households, 2019 – Sierra Leone: A Community-based Cluster Survey" in *Environmental Health Insights*, Volume 16, (September 2022), 2-11.

⁸⁰ Cf. Government of Sierra Leone, *Millennium Development Goals progress report* (2010), https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/279542021_VNR_Report_Sierra_Leone.pdf, date accessed 30/01/2021.

⁸¹ Cf. UNESCO "Global Education Monitoring Report" (2019), <https://gem-report-2019.unesco.org/>, date accessed 30/01/2021.

⁸² Cf. World Bank, *Education in Sierra Leone: Present Challenges, Future Opportunities*, Washington, 2007, 33-35.

established in 1827, the first school for boys founded in 1845 and the first school for girls in 1849, Sierra Leone was regarded as a bastion of education in the West Africa sub-region. Unofficially christened as the “Athens of West Africa”, Sierra Leone became a magnet for higher education, attracting students from all over Anglophone West Africa and beyond.⁸³ In the immediate decades following the attainment of independence in 1961, Sierra Leone had promising educational opportunities with relatively high standards compared to other post-independent African Nations. However, the educational system was highly elitist and skewed in favour of the urban middle class and inaccessible to the vast majority of the population. Although the post-independence political system – characterised by patrimonialism and cliental connections – expanded access to education, especially at the primary level, it failed to reform the 7-5-2-4 model of education – consisting of seven years of primary education, five years of secondary education, two years in the sixth form (optional), and four years of tertiary education. Promotion to the next level was determined by public examinations; the selective Entrance Examination after primary education, the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary Level after five years of secondary education, and the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Level after two years of sixth form (lower and upper 6). This was inherited from colonial Britain, a model that provided little room for the development of technical and vocational education. As rightly observed by Kingsley Banya, by the 1980s, the standard of education in Sierra Leone was on a downward trend due to neglect of the education sector. Government budgetary allocation to the education sector was reduced as a result of misplaced governance priority. This created a host of problems such as delayed payments of salaries for teachers and lecturers, neglect of educational infrastructures and the lack of essential school materials. The consequences of the systemic neglect of the educational sector were apparent in the low rate of enrolment in primary schools, poor performance in public exams and the high rate of school dropouts. By the beginning of the 1990s prior to the start of the civil war, the state of education in Sierra Leone was in complete meltdown.⁸⁴

⁸³ Cf. D. J. Paracka, *The Athens of West Africa A History of International Education at Fourah Bay College, Freetown, Sierra Leone*, Routledge, New York 2004.

⁸⁴ K. Banya, “Illiteracy, Colonial legacy and Education: The Case of Modern Sierra Leone” in *Comparative Education*, Vol 29, no.2, 1993, 159-170.

Against the backdrop of poor performance in public exams, the high rate of school dropouts and the problem of youth unemployment, the Government of Sierra Leone, encouraged by the trends in other English-speaking West African nations, adopted the 6-3-3-4 system of education in 1993 (six years of primary education, three years of junior secondary, three years of senior secondary and four years of university education. Promotion to the next level is determined by success in three public examinations: National Primary School Examinations (NPSE) at primary six, Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) at JSS3 and the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) at SSS 3). One of the underlying reasons for adopting 6-3-3-4 system of education was to move away from the grammar school centred education system inherited at independence to a more inclusive system that catered for all including the development of a technical and vocational education sector. However, in a bid to catch up with the other West African nations that had earlier adopted the same system, the Government of Sierra Leone seems not to have rigorously planned for the implementation of the project and also failed to provide necessary requirements for the programme such as the setting up of vocational and technical institutions.⁸⁵ As a result, the system was doomed to fail even before it started.

The attempt at reforming the educational system in Sierra Leone was further hampered by the eleven-year civil war which resulted in the destruction of almost the entire educational system and forced out 67 percent of all school-aged children and young adults from the educational system in the year 2001. Following the end of the war in 2002, the Government of Sierra Leone embarked on various reforms aimed at strengthening the educational sector in its post-war reconstruction projects.⁸⁶

The education system has made a remarkable recovery in post-civil war Sierra Leone. The 2013 Sierra Leone Education Country Status Report highlighted some of the achievements made from 2004 -2011: increase in the government's budget allocation to the education sector; increase in enrolment at all levels, especially at the secondary school level and some visible

⁸⁵ Cf. World Bank, *Education in Sierra Leone: Present Challenges, Future Opportunities*, op. cit.

⁸⁶ Cf. J. T. Lebbie "The Gbamanja Commission: From where to where?" *Politico Newspaper Sierra Leone* (June 20, 2013), <https://politicosl.com/node/1343>, date accessed 15/02/20.

noteworthy impact of education on human development, especially in the area of maternal and child health. In its thematic analysis of the education sector in the 2015 Census, Statistics Sierra Leone also pointed out that post-conflict Sierra Leone has made remarkable gains in the education sector.⁸⁷ The current government elected in 2018, has made free and quality education its flagship programme. On August 19, 2018, the government officially launched the *Free Quality Education Project*. With support from donor partners, the government set aside 21 percent of its budget to the education sector, the highest budgetary allocation ever made to the sector. With this new initiative, the government has waived tuition and admission fees and committed itself to providing teaching and learning materials.⁸⁸ It is still early to make any conclusive assessment of the success of the free education project. However, Sierra Leone's educational system continues to face significant challenges; such as low enrolment rates, unequal access to quality education, the challenge of girl child education, massive failure in public exams, high dropout rates especially among females at higher levels, the poor working condition of teachers and other educators etc.

1.3.2 **Environmental Challenges**

The social problems discussed in the previous subsection are being further compounded by Sierra Leone's myriads of environmental problems.

With a sluggish economy and increase in population, the demand for resources has also increased with the resultant effects of the irrational use of the environment. Sierra Leone's environment is under increasing threat from human activities and natural disasters. The most critical

⁸⁷ Cf. UNESCO, *Sierra Leone Education Country Report: An analysis for further improving the quality, equity and efficiency of the education in Sierra Leone system in Sierra Leone* (September 2013), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000226039>, date accessed 16/02/2020; Statistics Sierra Leone, *Sierra Leone 2015 Population Census Thematic Report on Education* (October 2017), https://www.statistics.sl/images/StatisticsSL/Documents/Census/2015/sl_2015_phc_thematic_report_on_education_and_literacy.pdf, date accessed 16/02/2020.

⁸⁸ Government of Sierra Leone State House Media and Communications Unit, "President Bio Launches Free Education, Calls on Parents and Teachers to Support the Initiative" (August 20, 2019), www.statehouse.gov.sl/, date accessed 17/02/2020.

environmental challenges facing Sierra Leone today are deforestation, and pollution of land, rivers and water catchment areas.⁸⁹

The impact of mining on the environment

Environmental degradation on a larger scale is also being perpetuated by transnational mining corporations in connivance with the ruling elites. Successive Governments have entered into dubious mining contracts with some transnational mining companies essentially giving them a *carte blanche* to carry out extractive mining activities without regards for the environmental and social consequences. The effects of large-scale corporate mining have taken a heavy toll on rural communities where extractives mining of iron ore, bauxite and diamond are in operation. Mining activities in the south-eastern part of the country – in Kono, Moyamba and Bonthe Districts - have caused soil erosion, led to deforestation, and forced local populations to relocate. Priscilla Schwartz in her analysis of environmental justice in the context of Sierra Leone succinctly sums up the effects of corporate mining on the country's environment:

The environmental impacts of corporate mining activities in Sierra Leone have extensive effects beyond physical damage to the natural environment and extend to severe impact on social and cultural well-being of mining communities. These communities have among other things been deprived of their traditional way of life. They have also been subjected to the inequitable allocation of resources and distribution of mining proceeds, pollution of the environment, health hazards, and enforced physical relocation with all the attendant economic and social consequences. The most devastating effects are borne by the natural environment, the silent subjects of systematic abuse and mismanagement.⁹⁰

The failure by successive governments and the mining corporations to mitigate the impact of their activities on the environment and invest some of the revenue being generated from the mining sector into the local communities in whose lands extractions are taking place, continue to breed anger and resentment towards these corporations and the government which in turn leads to sporadic violent protests.⁹¹ In response to the concerns and protests from local communities

⁸⁹ Cf. M. J. Simsik, "Sierra Leone" in S. G. Philander (Ed), *Encyclopedia of Global Warming and Climate Change*, Sage Publications, Los Angelis, 2012, 1250 -51.

⁹⁰ P. Schwartz, "Corporate activities and environmental justice: perspectives on Sierra Leone's mining" in J. Ebbesson (Ed), *Environmental Law and Justice in Context*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2009, (429-446) 430-31.

⁹¹ A case in point was the December 13, 2007, violent demonstration by residents of Koidu, the largest city in the diamond-rich Kono district in Easter Sierra Leone against Koidu Holdings Mining Company. The protest was precipitated by the mining operations' impact on living conditions, water contamination and damage to dwelling

whose lands, rivers and lakes are being contaminated and destroyed by mining activities, the corporations rely heavily on the argument that they make direct foreign investments to the Government of Sierra Leone, and it is the government who has the responsibility to invest in the social needs of those communities. However, due to a lack of transparency and the weak regulatory framework within which these mining companies operate, the local communities whose resources are exploited, are not only excluded from the benefits of the extracted resources but are also left to suffer the environmental impact and consequences of large-scale mining activities.

The impact of Climate change

The aforementioned challenges are being further compounded by the climate change crisis and its related environmental problems such as increasing dry spells and hot temperatures, drought, flooding, coastal erosion and loss of biodiversity.⁹² In a 2016 report on Sierra Leone Climate Action released by Irish Aid, Sierra Leone was identified as one of the countries on the African coastal zone where climate change will exacerbate existing environmental and socioeconomic challenges.⁹³ In a 2019 speech delivered on the occasion of the State Opening of the Second Session of the Fifth Parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone, the current president of Sierra Leone, Julius Maada Bio, expressed a similar worrying trend whilst acknowledging the gravity of the environmental challenges facing the country:

Sierra Leone is presently ranked at the bottom of the Environmental Performance Index and is ranked as the third most vulnerable to climate change in the world or is one of the countries in the world with the least capacity to respond or adapt to environmental change. About 13% of the country's area and more than 35% of the population are at risk of disasters.⁹⁴

houses from blasting at the mine, and the government's failure to protect affected families. The dispute was later taken to the West African regional court – the ECOWAS Court of Justice. Cf. The New Humanitarian News, *Government Probes Unrest in Diamond-mining Area* (December, 20, 2007), <http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/report/75952/sierra-leone-government-probes-unrest-diamond-mining-area>, date accessed 20/02/2021.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Cf. Irish Aid, *Sierra Leone Climate Action Report* (September 2017), <https://www.climatelearningplatform.org/sierra-leone-country-climate-action-report-2017>, date accessed 18/02/20

⁹⁴ Government of Sierra Leone State House Media and Communications Unit, *“Presidential Address on the Occasion of the State Opening of the Second Session of the Fifth Parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone”* n.190 (May 2, 2019), <https://statehouse.gov.sl/>, date accessed 19/02/2020.

In a country where the economic, social and political systems people depend on for food, safety and income are severely weak, the impact of climate change is already adversely affecting the poor who constitute the greater majority of the country. Its effects are particularly evident in the agro-based communities in the country, where people depend on subsistence farming for their livelihood. Coastal communities around the country are also suffering from the impact of the climate crisis with rising sea levels.

In recognition of the seriousness of the environmental challenges facing the country, various initiatives have been launched at both governmental and non-governmental levels aimed at protecting the environment. For instance, in 2008 the Government of Sierra Leone created the Sierra Leone Environment Protection Agency by an act of parliament as the coordinating body for the protection and management of the environment and its resources.⁹⁵ Although there has been an increasing environmental awareness drive spearheaded by the Sierra Leone Environment Protection Agency and other non-governmental organisations, environmental problems remain a critical challenge in Sierra Leone. Among the many environmental challenges Sierra Leone has had to contend with is the annual flash flooding especially in the coastal areas of the country, the most devastating being that of the August 14, 2017, when flooding and mudslides led to the death of one thousand people, forced ten thousand people from their damaged homes, destroyed schools, and other social infrastructures and caused the spread of contagious diseases like cholera and typhoid.⁹⁶

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have offered an overview of the research context – Sierra Leone; its geographical, socio-political and religious background and some of the current social and environmental challenges confronting the country. I traced the historical emergence of the nation state of Sierra Leone, identifying the historical precedents which laid the foundation for the current social and environmental challenges the country is grappling with. In the discussion

⁹⁵ Cf. Sierra Leone Environment Protection Agency Act, 2008, <https://sierralii.org/sl/legislation/act/2008/11>, date accessed 20/02/2020.

⁹⁶ Cf. *BBC News Africa*, *Sierra Leone Floods Kills Hundreds as Mudslides Bury Houses* (15 August 2017), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-40926187>, date access 20/02/2020.

on the religious landscape of Sierra Leone, it emerged that religion is a vital force in the country's social fabric. With regards to the Catholic Church, it has been established that the Church has contributed to the human development capital of Sierra Leone since its humble beginnings and continues to play a leading role in the education sector, healthcare provision and other developmental programmes.

In the assessment of Sierra Leone's current social and environmental challenges, it has been established that the environmental problems affecting the country are not only exacerbating the existing social problems, they are having outsized effects on the livelihood of the poor. And in light of the recognition that the environmental crisis is not only a political, economic and social challenge but also a moral and spiritual challenge, it is worth asking: How concerned is the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone about the environmental challenges confronting its ecclesial space? In the next chapter, I will discuss the Catholic Church's engagement with environmental issues in the country.

CHAPTER TWO

AN ASSESSMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE CONCERNS IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH OF SIERRA LEONE: EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Introduction

The overall aim of my research is to assess environmental justice concerns or the lack thereof in the pastoral priorities of the local Catholic Church in Sierra Leone and to argue for the integration of environmental concern and care in its mission.

Following the presentation of the historical and socio-religious context in which the study is situated, this chapter focuses on the empirical research that I carried out in the four dioceses that comprise the local Catholic Church of Sierra Leone on the current state of the Church's engagement with environmental issues. This empirical part of the study sought to respond to the first research question of this study: To what extent is the Church engaging with environmental issues?

This chapter will contribute to the study by providing evidence-based data on the Catholic Church's engagement with environmental issues in Sierra Leone. The discussion in this chapter is divided into four main sections. The first section provides the background and aims of the empirical research. The second section focuses on the preparatory phase of the research and data collection. The third section analyses and reports the raw data results from the empirical research. And the fourth section interprets the data generated from the empirical research and highlights some of the key findings of the research. The concluding remarks will provide a summary of the chapter and lay the foundation for the second part of the study.

2.1 BACKGROUND AND AIMS OF THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The empirical research attempted to investigate the level of awareness of the impact of environmental challenges on the lives and livelihoods of Catholic churchgoers in Sierra Leone and their perception of the link between their religious faith and environmental care and responsibility. It further examined the place of environmental justice concerns in the pastoral and development agenda of the Catholic Church of Sierra Leone. In this section, I shall outline

the aims of the empirical research. This will be followed by a brief description of the research audience and selected research locations.

2.1.1 Aims of the Empirical Research

Developing and formulating the aims and objectives of a study forms an important part of the planning stage of a research project. It helps the researcher to map out a clear direction for the research study.⁹⁷ For the purpose of my empirical research, for which the object of study was the assessment of environmental justice concerns or the lack thereof in the Catholic Church of Sierra Leone, the following aims guided my study:

- i. To gain a greater, in-depth understanding of the level of environmental awareness among Catholics in Sierra Leone and their perception of the threats environmental challenges pose to their livelihood in relation to other social problems.
- ii. To understand the influence of the religious faith of Catholics in Sierra Leone on their concern and care for the environment.
- iii. To assess the current place of environmental concern or the lack thereof in the pastoral plans and priorities of the local Catholic Church and to determine the level of attention the Church is paying to the issue.
- iv. And to gain some insights into how other religious traditions (other Christian communities and the Muslim communities) are engaging with environmental issues or the lack thereof.

2.1.2 Research Audience and Study Areas

The main audience who participated in my research are members of the local Catholic Church of Sierra Leone, which comprises four ecclesiastical regions: the Archdiocese of Freetown, the Diocese of Makeni, the Diocese of Kenema, and the Diocese of Bo. The study was conducted in four selected parish communities. These parishes cut across the ecclesiastical and geographical regions. I selected these communities on the strength of the palpable human-made environmental challenges facing them. They include:

⁹⁷ Cf. M. I. Franklin, *Understanding Research: Coping with the Quantitative–Qualitative Divide*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2013, 54-57.

- ***St. Paul's Quasi Parish, Regent, Archdiocese of Freetown***

Established in the early 2000s, the parish is located in Regent Village, a mountainous town in the Western Area Rural District of Sierra Leone, approximately six miles east of Sierra Leone's capital Freetown.⁹⁸

In addition to being the official chapel of the St. Paul's Major Seminary (an inter-territorial seminary that trains candidates for the priesthood in Sierra Leone and the Gambia), the Church is currently the Parish Church of the Catholic Community of Regent and its environs.



Image 1a: Shows a photo of the parish church of St. Paul's Quasi Parish, Regent⁹⁹

As recently as the early 2000s, the Regent community was a protected green-belt forest area with a wide variety of plants and animal species, some of them endangered. The lush green thickly forested hillside overlooking Freetown had existed for hundreds of years until sometime around 2005 when unregulated housing construction on the steep hills stripped the forest bare. The deforestation of the area made the hills less stable, stripping away the trees and the topsoil

⁹⁸ Unless otherwise stated, the backgrounds and historical profiles of the selected parishes were obtained from parish records and focal persons in the four parishes.

⁹⁹ The illustrative images in this chapter were taken by the researcher during the collection of data in Sierra Leone between May 6th and 31st 2022.

that once protected the area from erosion. This rendered the area and its environs prone to possible human-induced environmental disasters waiting to happen.

In August 2017, the Regent Village was one of the communities that experienced a devastating flash flood and mudslides killing more than one thousand residents.



Image 1b: This shows how the unchecked construction of housing has led to the deforestation of the landscape of the Regent area.



Image 1c: This picture shows the aftermath of the August 14, 2017, flooding and Mudslide in the Regent Community which led to the death of hundreds of residents and the destruction of properties.

- ***St. Peter Claver Parish, Lunsar, Diocese of Makeni***

The Parish Community of St. Peter Claver Lunsar town is located in Port Loko District, Northern Sierra Leone. A strategic town about 70 miles from the capital Freetown, Lunsar has a thriving Catholic presence which dates back to the early 1950s.¹⁰⁰



Image 2a: A photo of St. Peter Claver's Parish Church Lunsar.

The town of Lunsar hosts one of the Catholic Hospitals in Sierra Leone, the St. John of God Hospital which provides healthcare services to hundreds of rural people in the area and beyond. The main economic activities in the town and its surroundings include subsistence agriculture, small-scale trading and mining of iron ore. The history of Lunsar is inextricably tied to the Marampa Mines, established in the 1930s. In post-independent Sierra Leone, the mining of iron ore has been a major source of employment in the area and neighbouring communities. However, despite its economic import, the environmental impacts resulting from mining activities continue to pose grave challenges to the livelihood of residents of Lunsar and its environs.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. G. Cagliani, *Sierra Leone: Quattro Secoli di Evangelizzazione*, op.cit. 321-422.



Image 2b: Shows heaped and leached soil, the aftermath of iron ore mining in Lunsar, northern Sierra Leone. .

- ***Uganda Martyrs Parish Koidu, Diocese of Kenema***

The Parish of Uganda Martyrs Koidu is located in the municipality of Koidu also known as Sefadu, the district headquarters town of Kono District, in the Eastern Province of Sierra Leone. Prior to becoming a parish in 1963, The Uganda Martyrs Parish was an outstation to Christ the King Parish Yelena (est. in the 1950s).



Image 3a: A photo of Uganda Martyrs Parish, Koidu City

Approximately 155 miles from Freetown, Koidu is a major trading and diamond mining centre in Sierra Leone. The Koidu area (and Kono District as a whole) is renowned for its rich deposit of alluvial and kimberlitic diamonds. Diamonds were first discovered in the district in the 1930s and since then the diamond trade has played an important role in the socio-economic activities of both the indigenes of the district and other migrants from other parts of Sierra Leone. As a result of the diamond trade, Kono District is one of the most ethnically diverse townships in Sierra Leone.¹⁰¹

Although the diamond trade in Koidu and other areas in Kono District has been a major source of income for the Sierra Leone economy in the post-independence era, nevertheless it has not been ecologically friendly. In addition to its diamond deposits, the district is enveloped in lush green forests.



Image 3b: *This image shows a landscape covered by lush green forest in Kono District.*

However, the diamond mining activities in Koidu and the other mining areas in Kono District over the years have led to serious environmental degradation in the district including deforestation, destruction of farmlands and water sources, air and noise pollution etc. This is particularly

¹⁰¹ Cf. W. Forde, *The Story of Mining in Sierra Leone*, Xlibris Bloomington IN, 2011, 41-62.

evident in Koidu city as ominous shreds of evidence of ecological destruction can be seen in and around the township.



Image 3c: Shows a large open pit, the result of industrial kimberlite diamond mining around Koidu, Eastern Sierra Leone



Image 3d: Shows one of the huge heaps of gravel waste as a result of corporate diamond mining in and around Koidu, Eastern Sierra Leone.

- ***St. Mary's Parish Moriba Town, Catholic Diocese of Bo***

St. Mary's Parish Community is located in Moriba Town, the largest town in Imperi Chiefdom, Bonthe District in the Southwestern part of Sierra Leone. Established in the early 1980s, the parish serves two chiefdoms, Imperi Chiefdom in Bonthe District and Lower Banta Chiefdom in Moyamba District.



Image 4a: A photo of St. Mary's Parish Church, Moriba Town, Lower Banta Chiefdom, Bonthe District.

Moriba Town and the cluster of villages around the Mokañji Hills and its environs covering the Moyamba and Bonthe Districts, have served as a centre for the extraction of Bauxite and the titanium mineral – Rutile – for over 50 years. Unlike in diamond mining areas such as Koidu (mentioned above) where there is a high degree of awareness about the value of the mineral and locals are directly involved in the exploration, in the case of the mining of Bauxite and Rutile in the Mokañji Hills area, there is little knowledge of the value of the minerals. Also, the extraction process for these minerals are highly mechanised and technical. Therefore, there are limited employment opportunities for locals in the mining companies. Despite the enormous economic benefits of the minerals mined in the area, the communities remain one of the poorest and least

derdeveloped parts of Sierra Leone. In addition to the harsh socio-economic conditions facing these communities, the area also suffers from startling environmental degradation.

There is limited available data on the social and environmental impact of the operations of the mining companies, however, the few scholarly research studies conducted over the years have highlighted a number of significant social and environmental problems resulting from mining activities in the area. The findings of some of the studies have enumerated a wide range of socio-ecological problems including the destruction of land and wildlife habitats, serious pollution of air, water, and land, the prevalence of water-borne diseases, displacement of local communities without adequate compensation etc.¹⁰²



Image 4b

¹⁰² Cf. D. Williams Ntiri, "The Impact of Rutile Mining on Family Life, Subsistence, Land Ownership and Female Roles Among the Mendes of Southern Sierra Leone" in *International Journal of Sociology of the Family*, Vol. 22, Issue 2 (October 1992) 83-95; S. A Wilson, "Mining-induced displacement and resettlement: The case of rutile mining communities in Sierra Leone" in *Journal of Sustainable Mining*, Vol. 18, Issue 2, (May 2019), 67-76; M. Fayiah, "Mining and Environmental Degradation: A Gift Brings Grief Scenario for Mining Communities in Sierra Leone" in *Journal of Mining and Environment*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2020, 347-36.



Image 4 c.

Images 4 b & c Show large artificial lakes following the extraction of Rutile in Imperi Chiefdom, Bonthe District.

Although the focus of my research is the Catholic Church of Sierra Leone, I also explored the extent to which the other mainline Christian traditions and Muslim communities in Sierra Leone are engaging with environmental issues by means of interviews and informal discussions.

2.2 THE PREPARATORY PHASE OF THE RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION

The preparatory or design stage of a research project constitutes an important component of the research process. At this stage, the researcher determines the kind of research to be conducted and sets about developing and formulating the research questions, study objectives, conceptual framework, selecting the research tools and methodology and outlining the ethical principles guiding the research.¹⁰³ This section discusses the preparatory phase of my empirical research.

2.2.1 Nature and Conceptual Foundation of the Study

The closing decade of the twentieth century ushered in a sense of ecological awareness in both secular and religious circles due to the pervasive trend of human-induced ecological

¹⁰³ Cf. M. Hennink et al, *Qualitative Research Methods*, Sage Publications, London, 2020, 30-44; Gina Wisker, *The Postgraduate Research Handbook*, Red Globe Press, London, 2008, 48-103.

problems around the world. The impacts of environmental-related problems particularly on the poor in the deprived areas of the world initiated an awakening in religious traditions and institutions. In the context of Christianity, a growing number of theologians and ethicists started engaging with the 'environmental question' and its place in the mission of Christian Churches.¹⁰⁴ To address the environmental question, Christian theologians and ethicists have outlined various ethical approaches. For example, Laurel Kearns and Willis Jenkins have provided perceptive insights on some of these ethical approaches. In her 1996 Article, "Saving The Creation: Christian Environmentalism in the United States", Kearns identified three Christian approaches that have emerged in addressing the environmental problem: a Christian stewardship ethic, an eco-justice ethic and a creation spirituality ethic.¹⁰⁵ According to Kearns, Christian stewardship has its basis in the biblical mandate (Genesis 1:26-28) which gives humans dominion over the earth and is now interpreted as a directive to humans to take care of the earth and to be good stewards. The second ethical approach, eco-justice ethics views the environmental problem from the perspective of injustice and appeals to Christianity's traditional concern for social justice in addressing the problem. And the third approach, creation spirituality presents humans as a part of the broader order of creation and therefore should strive to preserve creation.¹⁰⁶ Jenkins in his work, *Ecologies of Grace* (2008), builds on and broadens Kearns' models of Christianity's engagement with the environmental problem situating them within the Christian soteriological categories of redemption, sanctification and deification.¹⁰⁷

In the context of the Catholic Church, the environmental question is increasingly being seen as a question of justice. Against this backdrop, the Church with its corpus of social teaching emphasises the model of eco-justice ethic in its engagement with environmental issues. The

¹⁰⁴ Cf. C. Deane-Drummond, *A Primer in Ecotheology: Theology for a Fragile Earth*, Cascade Books, Eugene OR, 2017, 1-17; B. Taylor & L. F. Johnston, "Religion and the Rise of Environmental Politics in the Twentieth Century" in Barbara A McGraw (Ed), *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Politics in the U.S.*, John Wiley & Sons Ltd., Chichester, 2016, 350-368.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. L. Kearns, "Saving the Creation: Christian Environmentalism in the United States" in *Sociology of Religion*, 1996, Vol. 57, Issue 1 (55-70).

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 57.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. W. Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2008.

theme of social justice in relation to the environmental question has received renewed emphasis since the promulgation of Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'* (2015).

Conceptually, this study draws on the ongoing academic conversation with Catholic Social Teaching on the environment as especially articulated in *Laudato Si'*. It is within the framework of eco-social justice that I sought to conduct an empirical research about the phenomenon of environmental justice concerns in the Catholic Church of Sierra Leone.

2.2.2 Methodology and development of research tools

Design of the research

There are three main research methods: qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods.¹⁰⁸ Since my research was aimed at understanding and gaining insight into the phenomenon of environmental justice concerns or the lack thereof in the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone, qualitative research was considered appropriate for the study. The qualitative research method generally explores people's experiences and perceptions about a problem or phenomenon using specific sets of research tools.¹⁰⁹

At this phase of the research process, the researcher's goal is to study and understand a particular phenomenon in its many nuances and complexities.¹¹⁰ Thus, qualitative research helps the researcher to gain insights into complex human situations. To address the research questions and aims, the research was designed to assess the awareness and perception of ordinary churchgoers, Church and other religious leaders and heads of Catholic development agencies in Sierra Leone.

Development of Research tools

To this end, I developed the research tools which I deemed appropriate for the focus of the study namely questionnaires (closed and open) and semi-structured interviews.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. John W. Creswell & J. David Creswell, *Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*, Sage Publications Inc. London, 2018, 3-22.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Monique Hennink et al, *Qualitative Research Methods*, op. cit. 10-11

¹¹⁰ Cf. Paul D. Leedy & Jeanne Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, Pearson Edu. New York, 2019, 83-123. 7.

- *Questionnaires*

As a research instrument, the questionnaire is widely used for those engaged in both quantitative and qualitative research.¹¹¹ The two types of questionnaires (one with closed questions and the other with open-ended questions) both entitled, *The place of environmental justice in the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone* were developed in order to address the aforementioned aims of the research.

The closed questionnaire, which targeted parishioners of the selected parishes mentioned above, is divided into three sections: 'Relationship to the Church'; 'Level of environmental awareness' and 'The engagement of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone with environmental issues.' The aim of this first category of the questionnaire was to understand how 'ordinary churchgoers' understand the link between faith and care for the environment.

While the closed questionnaire focused on the perception of ordinary churchgoers about the link between faith and environmental justice, the open-ended questionnaire sought to gain in-depth information on the experiences and perceptions of priests, religious (Members of Catholic Religious Orders) and seminarians (theology students) about pressing environmental challenges facing their communities. This second category of questionnaire consisted of eleven questions. It sought information on a wide range of environmental-related issues ranging from awareness of the problem to the extent to which care for the environmental factors in the training of priests and religious.

- *Interviews*

Interviews have been firmly established as credible means of obtaining detailed information about a subject under investigation in the social sciences and humanities.¹¹² For this study, semi-structured interview guides were developed to draw out the perceptions of Religious Leaders (Catholic Bishops and other senior clerics from other Christian traditions and Muslim communities) and officers of the Catholic development Agency (Caritas) about the pressing

¹¹¹ Cf. David Wilkinson & Peter Birmingham, *Using Research Instruments: A Guide for Researchers*, RoutledgeFalmer, London, 2003, 7-11.

¹¹² Cf. *ibid.* 43-47.

environmental challenges facing their communities and their engagement with the said challenges.

The research tools (questionnaire and interview guides), the ethics application form and its accompanying participants' information and consent documents were prepared in collaboration with my lead supervisor and submitted to the Ethics Committee of the University of Glasgow. In line with the feedback and instruction received from the Ethics Committee, I further amended the relevant documents before embarking on the process of data collection.

Ethical considerations

In line with the ethical guidelines stipulated by the University of Glasgow, I indicated in the participants' information document a clear process of invitation and the informed consent required to participate in the research. Respondents were informed that their participation was completely voluntary. With regards to the two sets of questionnaires, respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. In the case of the interviews, participants were not only assured of confidentiality but were also informed that the contents of the interviews in part or in whole would not be quoted in my write-ups without their express permission. My contact details and those of my lead supervisor and the lead reviewer of the Ethics Committee of the College of Arts of the University of Glasgow were provided in the participants information sheet.

2.2.3 Collection of Data

Data collection or the empirical phase is the second essential component of the research process regardless of the field of study. It involves the gathering of information on variables of interest to the researcher through the medium of already designed research instruments. Essential to the data collection process is the recruitment of participants for the research.¹¹³

Data for this study were collected through the research tools mentioned above. Prior to embarking on the data collection process, I made useful contacts with the gatekeepers (ecclesiastical and civil authorities) of the communities selected for the study (questionnaires) and the respondents for the semi-structured interviews. Also, I sought permission from the

¹¹³ Cf. M. Hennink et al, *Qualitative Research Methods*, op. cit. 89.

ecclesiastical authorities of the four dioceses where the research was conducted before going to the various research locations mentioned above.

- ***Administration of questionnaires***

A total number of 200 paper copies of self-administered closed questionnaires were randomly distributed to respondents (parishioners) in the selected parishes on different dates between May 6th and 31st 2022. Prior to my visits to the selected parish communities and the distribution of the questionnaires, the invitations to participate in the research were read out at the end of Sunday liturgical assemblies. Also during my visits to these communities, I was granted permission to preside over Sunday Masses and I used the occasions to sensitise the parishioners to the purpose of my research. To minimise the possibility of channelling undue influence and potential bias to the research participants, I also reinforced the ethical principles guiding my research, particularly voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality.

A total of 50 hard copies of open-ended questionnaires were randomly distributed to Priests, Religious and Seminarians across the four ecclesiastical regions of Sierra Leone. A period of three weeks was given to respondents who received this category of questionnaire to provide their responses (May 6th – 31st 2022).

- ***One-on-one semi-structured interviews***

Data for this study was also collected through semi-structured interviews. The core participants selected for the semi-structured interviews were drawn from i) Catholic Bishops and senior Clerics from other Christian Traditions and from the Muslim Communities and ii) Focal persons of the Catholic Development Agency (Caritas Sierra Leone). The participants were approached through official channels (official email addresses and telephone numbers). Through these channels, I carefully informed the participants of the goal of my research and the ethical principles guiding the study.

The interviews focused on a wide range of issues, from awareness and perception of environmental challenges facing participants' communities to specific strategies/ways environmental care and concern can be integrated into the developmental and pastoral plans,

from community involvement to prospects of interfaith initiatives in addressing environmental challenges. All the interviews were conducted in English and in safe spaces selected by the participants. The interviews were conducted between May 3 and 25, 2022. Each interview session lasted for 30-45 minutes and was audiotaped with express permission from the participants.

In addition to the formal interviews, I also had many informal conversations with residents of the various communities I visited.

2.3 DATA ANALYSIS AND REPORT OF THE RAW DATA RESULTS

The analytic phase constitutes the third important stage of the research process.¹¹⁴ In the words of M. D. LeCompte and J. J. Schensul, the analytic phase aims at reducing the data into smaller details in order to be able to interpret and derive insights. In other words, this phase helps the researcher to make sense of the data generated so as to tell the readers what the research means.¹¹⁵ As the most crucial part of the research process, this phase involves sorting through and systematically categorising the data so that it can be interpreted and analysed.

In this section, I will outline and report the raw data results generated from the empirical research. Given the nature and focus of this research, the discussions in this section will primarily focus on responses to those questions or issues that are critical to the aims and objectives of my research. The exclusion of certain responses in the research instruments does not mean a neglect of the information they contain but is rather oriented towards the expositions of information that are vital to the goal of my research. The section is divided into two subsections; the first subsection presents the summary of the questionnaire and in the second subsection, I will present the data generated from the one-on-one semi-structured interviews.

¹¹⁴ Cf. M. Hennink et al, *Qualitative Research Methods*, op. cit. 208-234.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Margaret D. LeCompte & Jean J. Schensul, *Analysis and Interpretation of Ethnographic Data: A Mixed Methods Approach*, AltaMira Press, New York, Lanham, MD, 2013, 1-4.

2.3.1 Presentation of data results from the Questionnaires

As I have indicated above, two sets of questionnaires were developed and administered. The closed questionnaire targeted parishioners in the selected parishes mentioned above and the open-ended questionnaire targeted priests, members of religious orders and seminaries from across the four dioceses that comprise the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone.

It should be noted that while this study is qualitatively oriented, the data collected by means of the questionnaires were analysed using quantitative methods. The data were thematically analysed using the IBM - Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). I decided to add this quantitative element to the study in order to strengthen the arguments in the theoretical chapters of my research.

2.3.1.1 Results of closed questionnaire data

- ***The response rate of the number of closed questionnaires distributed***

Out of 200 self-administered questionnaires that were randomly distributed to respondents in the selected parishes (50 per parish), 139 were returned equivalent to 69.5 percent.

Parishes	Number of questionnaires distributed	Number of questionnaires returned	Proportion of the total number of questionnaires returned (%)
St. Paul's Quasi Parish Regent – Archdiocese of Freetown	50	26	18.8%
St. Peter Claver's Paris Lunsar – Makeni Diocese	50	43	30.9%
Uganda Martyrs' Parish Koidu – Kenema Diocese	50	47	33.8%
St. Mary's Parish's Moriba Town – Catholic Diocese of Bo	50	23	16.5%
	Total: 200	Total: 139	Total: 100%

Table 1: Response rate of respondents by parish

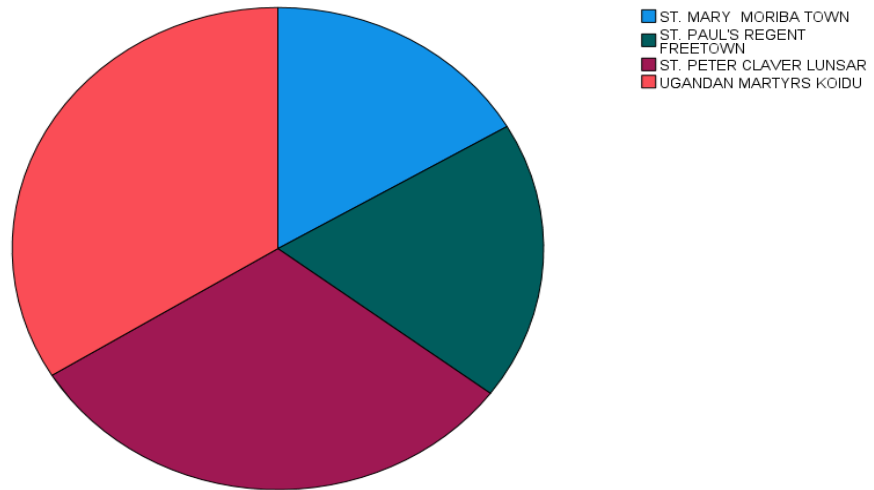


Figure 1: Response rate of respondents by parish.

Table 1 and figure 1 above show the response rate of the number of questionnaires distributed by parish.

- **Demographic Characteristics of respondents**

Of the 139 closed questionnaires returned, the majority (58.3 percent) of the respondents were male and 47.1 percent were female. With regards to age, most of the respondents were within the age range of 25-34 years (26.6 percent) followed by those within the age bracket of 55-65 representing 25.9 percent and those within the age range of 35-44 (20 percent). Thus, there was a bias towards the young and middle age groups.

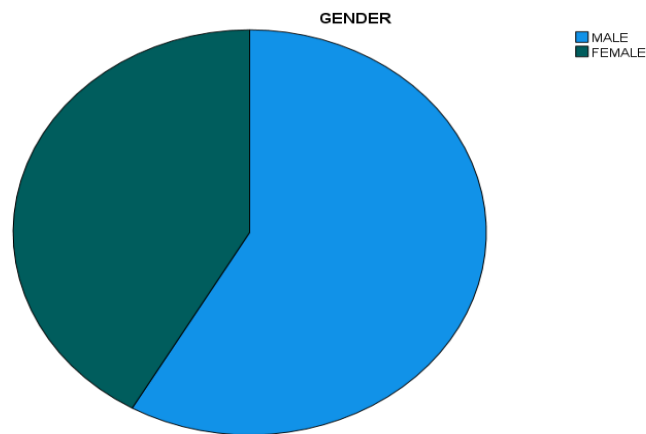


Figure 2. Depicts profile of respondents by gender

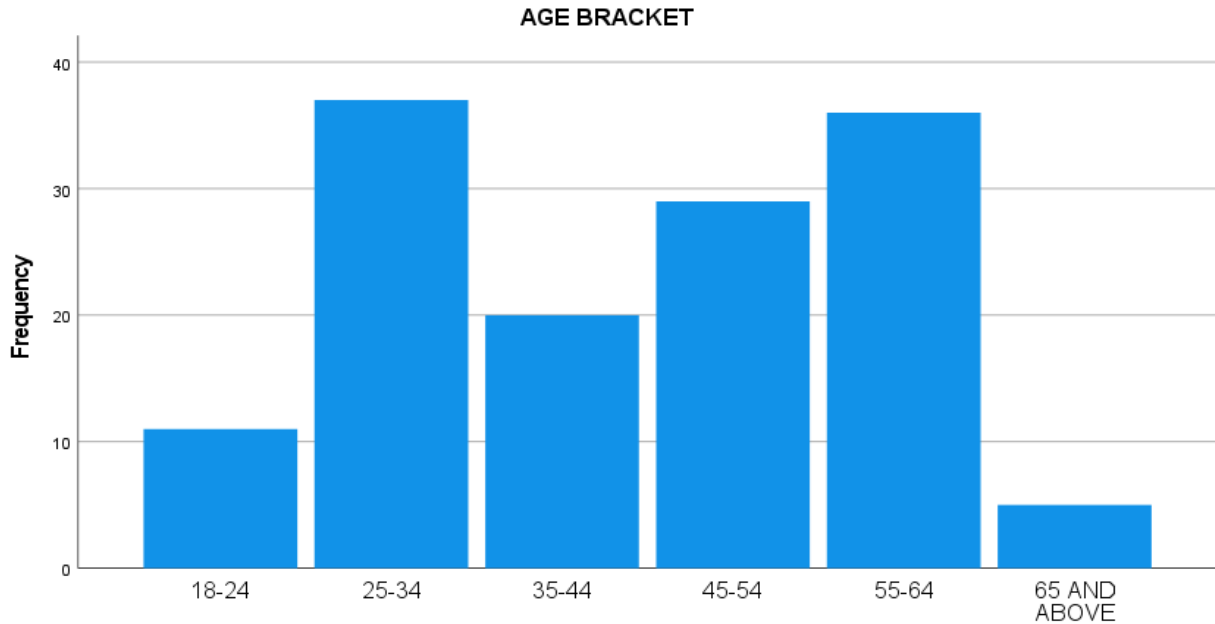


Figure 3. *Depicts profile of respondents by age*

- ***Section one of the Questionnaire: Relationship with the Catholic Church***

With respect to the religious identity of the closed questionnaire respondents, 124 participants representing 89.2 percent identified as full-fledged Catholics while 15 percent of them claimed they intend to become Catholics.

In reflecting upon their relationship with the Catholic Church, 33.8 percent indicated that their relationship was one of the most important aspects of their lives, while 57.6 percent noted that it was very important to their lives.

- ***Section two of the Questionnaire: Respondents' level of awareness and perception of environmental issues.***

When asked to categorise their level of awareness and perceptions of environmental issues facing their communities, the results revealed that the majority of the respondents (62.6 percent) were very aware, while 18.7 percent stated that they were moderately aware. Approximately 11 percent claimed that they had very little awareness in contrast to 2.9 percent who stated they were not at all aware. With regards to differences within the individual parish variables,

respondents in St. Peter Claver’s Parish Lunsar and St. Paul’s Quasi Parish Freetown recorded a higher level of awareness of environmental issues, 60.5 percent and 50 percent respectively.

With regards to their knowledge of the pressing environmental challenges facing their communities, the combined results of the four parish communities reveal that the respondents cited deforestation as the most pressing environmental issue facing their respective communities, representing 21.6 percent. Air, land and water pollution and extreme weather patterns were cited as the second most pressing environmental challenges in the results. 83 percent indicated more than one of the options (extreme weather patterns, air land and water pollution, deforestation and soil erosion) as the most impactful challenges facing their communities.

In terms of perception of the reality of climate change, the results revealed a high degree of belief in the phenomenon of climate change (86.3 percent). With regards to the level of threat that climate change poses to crop/food security, on a scale of one to ten, 22.3 percent of the respondents opted for the scale of 8 on 10 followed by 9 on 10 representing 20.1 percent. When asked to indicate the level of threat climate change poses to the availability of safe drinking water and life expectancy in their communities, the results show that majority of the respondent saw climate change as a very serious threat to those variables.

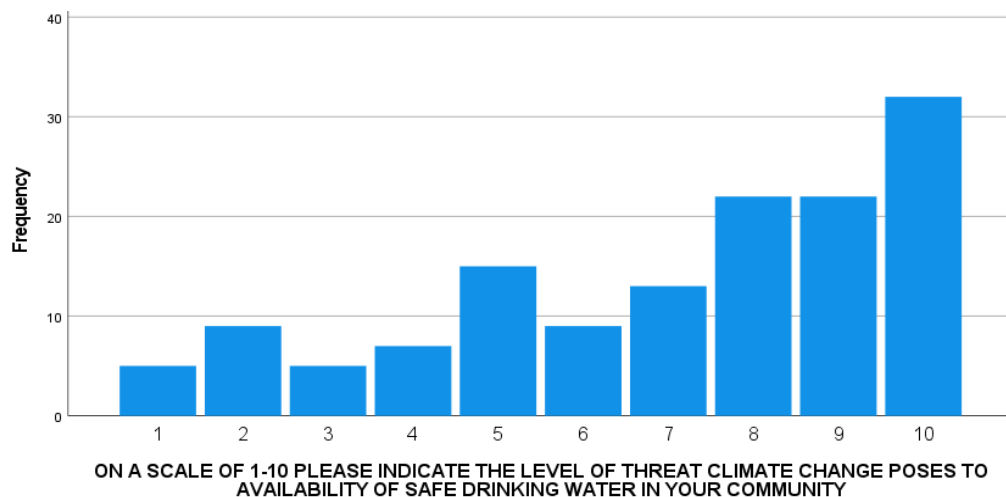


Figure 4. Showing the respondents’ perception of the threat of climate change to the availability of safe drinking water

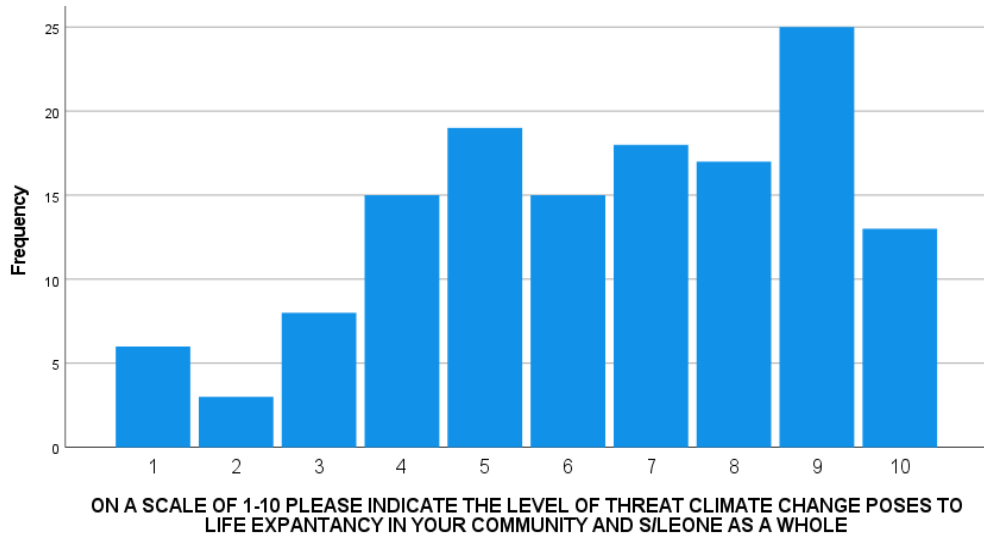


Figure 5. Showing the respondents' perception of the threat climate change poses to life expectancy.

When asked whether they were aware of the causes of environmental challenges facing their communities, 97.1 percent responded in the affirmative, while 2.9 percent responded in the negative. In identifying the major causes of environmental harms, timber logging (11.5 percent) and poor farming methods (9.5 percent) were found to be the most prevalent causes of environmental destruction in the combined results. Mining (8 percent) and unregulated housing construction (8 percent) were cited as the second most prevalent causes. 90 percent of the respondents cited more than one of the options suggested on the questionnaire.

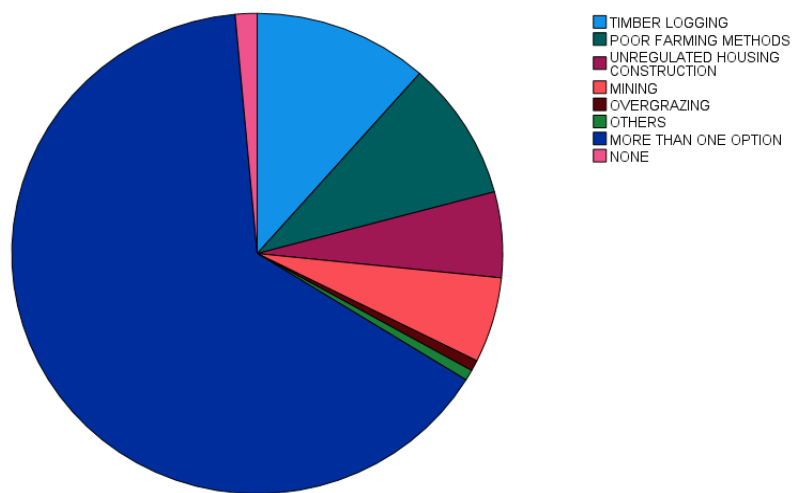


Figure 6. Showing causes of environmental destruction cited by respondents

Community-wise, mining was identified as the leading cause of environmental destruction by participants in the parish communities of St. Peter Claver Lunsar, Uganda Martyrs, Koidu and St. Mary’s Moriba Town, whilst respondents in the parish community of St. Paul’s Regent identified unregulated housing construction as the main cause.

- **Section two of the Questionnaire: Respondents’ perception of the engagement of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone with environmental Issues**

The questions in this section of the questionnaire were intended to capture the participants’ perception of how the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone is engaging with environmental issues across the four ecclesiastical and geographical regions of Sierra Leone.

On the subject of how concerned the Church is about environmental issues in general, 27.3 percent of respondents noted that the Church is somewhat concerned. Furthermore, 23.7 percent of the participants indicated that the Church is very concerned and 23 percent indicated that the Church is concerned. The combined percentage of those who stated that the Church is ‘neither concerned nor unconcerned and ‘not concerned at all’ stands at 26 percent.

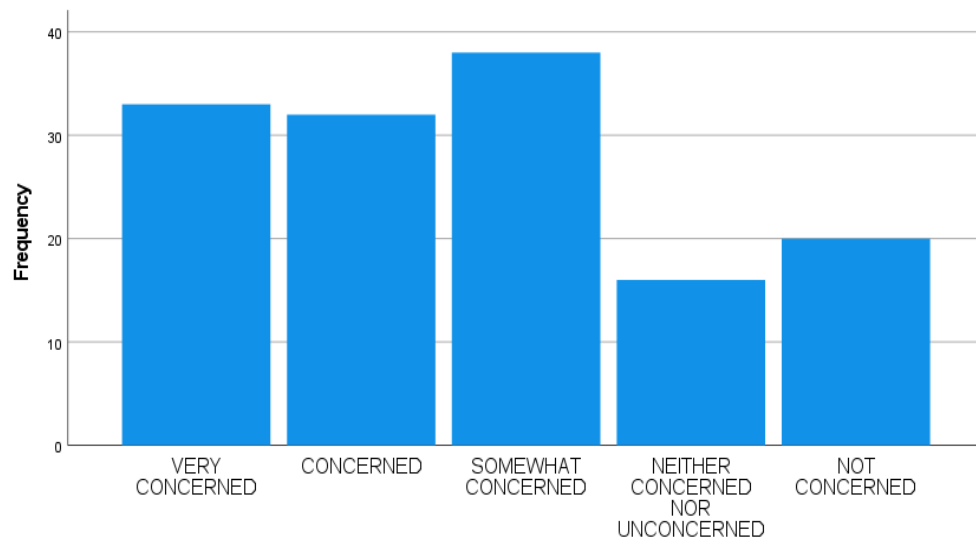


Figure 8. Participants’ perception of the level of the Catholic Church’s concern for environmental issues

When asked whether concern for the environment should occupy an important place in the Church's pastoral priorities in light of the socio-ecological problems facing Sierra Leone, about 83.5 percent of the respondents stated that concern for the environment should be included in the Church's pastoral agenda.

At the local parish level, when asked whether their local clergy or religious orders working in their communities were concerned about care for the environment, the respondents were somewhat divided, as the combined results of the four parish communities show: a little over 15 percent claimed they were 'very concerned', 30.2 percent noted that they were 'concerned', 25.9 percent reported that they were 'somewhat concerned' and 28.1 percent stated that they were 'not concerned'. In terms of individual responses per parish, there were no significant differences.

With regards to education and raising awareness about environmental care and responsibility, again the responses were mixed: 53.2 percent of respondents agreed that there was some form of environmental education and sensitisation about caring for the environment while 46.8 disagreed. Among the parishes, the majority of the respondents at St. Mary's Moriba Town (65.2 percent) and St. Paul's Regent (61.5 percent) agreed that their parishes were engaged in environmental education, followed by St. Peter Claver Lunsar at 58.1 percent. Uganda Martyrs Koidu registered the highest number of respondents who claimed that their parish was not engaged in environmental education or raising awareness about caring for the environment (61.7percent). In terms of specific means or methods employed in the parish communities in educating or raising awareness about environmental care and responsibility, 26.6 percent of respondents cited homilies or sermons as the most common method, followed by engagement with schools. However, almost 30 percent of respondents reported that there was no environmental awareness raising programmes in their parishes.

When asked if they have heard about the first-ever papal encyclical to be entirely devoted to care for the environment, Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*, the results were as indicated below:

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	67	48.2
No	72	51.8
Total	139	100

Table 2. Result showing whether participants have heard about Laudato Si' or not

With regards to their level of awareness of the encyclical's content, results were as indicated below:

Level of awareness	Frequency	Percentage
Very aware	25	18
Moderately aware	36	25.9
Very little awareness	29	20.9
None at all	49	35.2
Total	139	100

Table 3. Result showing level of participants awareness of Laudato Si'

When asked to choose from the suggestions provided as what best captures Pope Francis' teaching in the encyclical, the participants responded as shown in the table below:

Suggestions	Frequency	Percentage
Humans are created by God to dominate the earth.	55	39.6
Humans have unlimited right to exploit the resources of the earth.	11	7.9
God will always take care of the earth regardless of what humans do.	15	10.8
By virtue of their creation in God's image and likeness, humans are called to till and keep the garden of the world.	37	26.6
The earth has unlimited resources to support human consumption.	1	0.7
None of the above.	20	14.4
Total	139	100

Table 4. showing suggestions regarding what best captures the teaching of Laudato Si'

In reflecting upon ways to integrate Pope Francis’ teaching on the care for the environment into parish ministry, the participants responded as indicated in the table below:

Suggestions	Frequency	Percentage
Policy advocacy on environmental degradation.	10	7.2
Planting trees for reforestation.	4	2.9
Community engagement on sustainable land management.	9	6.5
Youth engagement in environmental protection initiatives.	7	5
Conducting environmental cleaning campaigns.	7	5
All of the above.	83	59.7
More than one	19	13.7
Total	139	100

Table 5. showing suggestions regarding ways to integrate the teaching of *Laudato Si’* in parish life.

On participants’ views about how they would like their diocesan development offices to contextualise and operationalise the proposals of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si’* into their development projects, the results were as shown in the table below:

Suggestions	Frequency	Percentage
To develop practical ways to respond to <i>Laudato Si’</i> .	12	8.6
To advocate for environmental justice in community-based projects.	4	2.9
To strengthen community involvement in developmental projects and responsiveness to environmental problems.	21	15.1
To assist and complement projects intended to lessen the impacts of environmental problems in communities overburdened by large scale mining activities.	6	4.3
To collaborate with other civil society groups to encourage government and civic leaders to enact/enforce	8	5.8

environmental protection laws.		
Engage parishes, schools, and higher institutions of learning in promoting ecological awareness and responsibility.	6	4.3
All of the above	82	58.9
Total	139	100

Table 6. showing suggestions regarding how participants' diocesan development should operationalise *Laudato Si'* in their agenda

The final question sought participants' views on the idea of the Catholic Church forming ecumenical and interfaith coalitions in order to speak to the environmental challenges facing the country. When asked if they would like the Catholic Church to dialogue and collaborate with other Churches and the Muslim Communities in addressing the environmental challenges facing the country, the majority of the respondents (93.5 percent) responded in the affirmative compared with 2.9 percent who neither agreed nor disagreed and 3.6 percent who disagreed.

2.3.1.2 **Results of Open-ended Questionnaire Data**

The open-ended questionnaire for Priests, Religious (male and female) and Seminarians was mainly intended to elicit their awareness and perception of the various environmental challenges confronting their communities and their views of the place and importance of environmental justice concern in the mission of the local Catholic Church in Sierra Leone.

Out of 50 questionnaires distributed to the targeted participants across the four ecclesiastical regions working in various parishes, ministries and institutions, 24 were returned. By way of demographic characteristics, 66.7 percent of respondents were male, and 33.3 percent were female. The majority of respondents were within the age group 25-34, followed by those within the age bracket of 44-54.

As in the case of the closed questionnaire, the data generated from this category of questionnaire were analysed thematically. The responses to the questions raised in the open-ended questionnaire generated the following results:

- **Participants' knowledge of environmental problems**

Almost all the participants (99.5 percent) who responded to the open-ended questionnaire noted that they were aware of the pressing environmental problems facing their communities. When asked to highlight the problems, the following were outlined as indicated in table 2 below.

Pressing environmental problems	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Excessive heat/humidity	4	16.7
Pollution	3	12.5
Poor waste management	8	33.3
Flooding	9	37.5
Total	24	100

Table 7. Environmental problems facing participants' communities

- **Causes of environmental degradation/problems**

With respect to respondents' knowledge of the causes of environmental degradation in their communities, cutting of trees (deforestation) and unregulated housing construction were ranked as the major causes of environmental degradation in their communities as shown in table 3 below.

Causes of environmental problems	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Changes in weather patterns	3	12.5
Deforestation	6	25.0
Improper disposal of wastes	5	20.8
Unregulated housing construction	6	25.0
Mineral extractions	4	16.7
Total	24	100

Table 8. Causes of environmental problems in participants' communities

- **Participants' perception of the effects of climate change**

With regards to participants' personal experiences of the effects of climate change, as presented in table 4, the results show long dry spells and heavy rainfalls as the major manifestations of climate change effects.

Effects of climate change	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Excessive heat	4	16.7
Heavy rainfalls	6	25.0
Long dry spells	7	29.2
Low crop yields	2	8.3
Water shortages	5	20.8
Total	24	100

Table 9. Effects of climate change as experienced by respondents and their communities

- **Mitigation measures taken by participants to address environmental problems/challenges**

In view of the first question on the questionnaire, i.e., participants' knowledge of the environmental problems confronting their communities, the study sought to find out mitigation measures taken by respondents to address the adverse effects of the environmental problems in their localities. In this regard, water management, tree planting and waste management topped the list of measures taken by respondents as shown in figure 10 below.

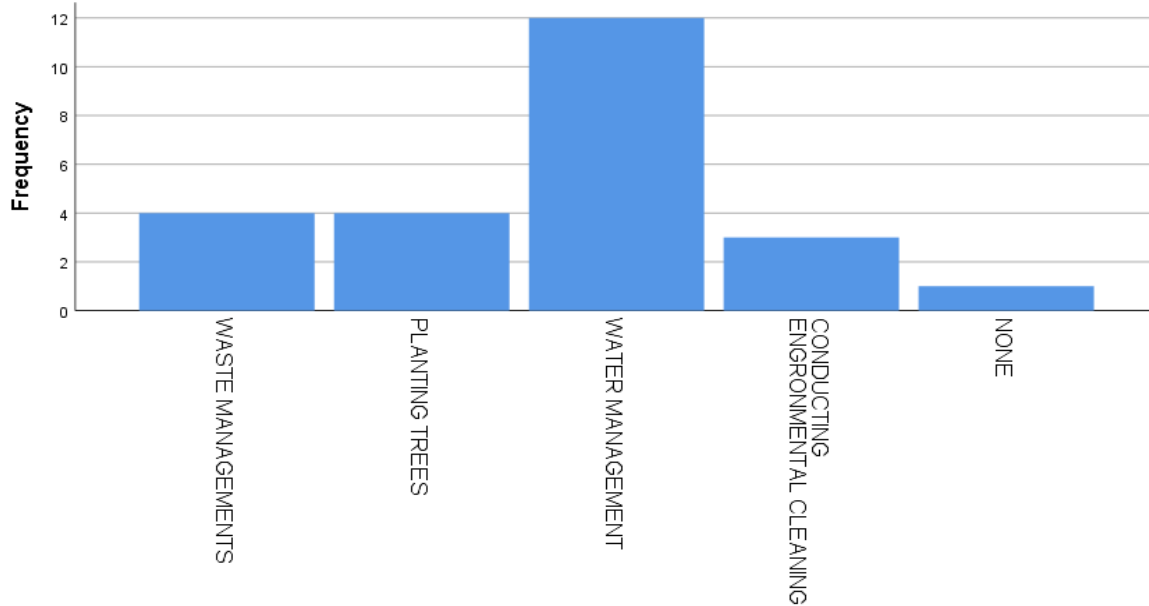


Figure 10. Measures taken by participants to mitigate the adverse effects of environmental problems in their localities

- **Participants’ awareness of the Catholic Church’s teaching on environmental care and responsibility especially Pope Francis’ Encyclical, *Laudato Si’***

In terms of participants’ awareness of the Church’s teaching on the environment, all who responded to this category of research instrument reported that they have quite a lot of knowledge of the Church’s teaching on environmental issues.

With regards to Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si’*, the results found that the degree of knowledge of the document varied among the various subsets of participants who responded to the questionnaire. All the seminarians indicated that they have quite a lot of knowledge of the document, whereas 83.3 percent of priests and 75 percent of religious indicated that they have moderate knowledge of the encyclical.

- **Community involvement in environmental awareness and responsibility**

With respect to community involvement in raising awareness and promoting environmental responsibility, 95.5 percent of respondents noted that their communities were involved in some form of environmental awareness-raising programme. When asked to specify, seminars/

workshop (discussion-based sessions) was reported as the only means of community involvement programme as shown in figure 11 below.

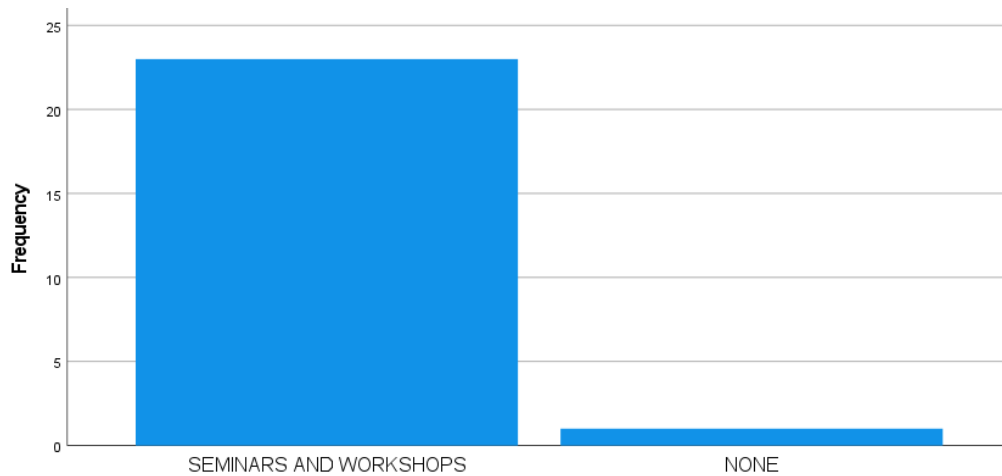


Figure 11. Initiatives taken by participants to involve their local communities in environmental awareness and responsibility

- ***Diocesan/Religious Orders’ engagement with environmental issues and programmes oriented towards contextualising and implementing Laudato Si’***

With regards to engagement with environmental issues in general, half of the respondents indicated that there was no coordinated or systematic engagement with environmental issues in their dioceses/orders, while the other half reported that their dioceses/orders were engaged in environmental-related campaign projects.

On the question of programmes that were oriented towards contextualising and implementing the contents of *Laudato Si’*, all the respondents stated that their dioceses/orders did not have any specific or systematic programme directed at implementing *Laudato Si’*.

- ***Ways in which participants have utilised Laudato Si’ in their pastoral ministries***

Asked about how they have utilised the themes and contents of *Laudato Si’* in their respective pastoral ministries, all respondents identified sermons/homilies and seminars/retreats as ways in which they have made use of the encyclical’s themes and contents.

- ***The extent to which environmental concern and care factor into the training of Priests, and Religious and the need for environmental education/theology in the formation curriculum of candidates for the priesthood and religious life***

According to the data results, 54.2 percent of respondents reported that environmental concern and care forms part of their formation, whereas 45.8 percent noted that it is included in some measures in their curriculum.

Given the growing awareness among young people about the threat environmental degradation poses to their aspirations and well-being, participants were asked whether environmental education should be included in the formation programmes. The results indicate that 66.7 per cent of respondents agreed that environmental education in one form or another should be included in the formation /study programmes for candidates for the priesthood and religious life, while 33.3 percent disagreed.

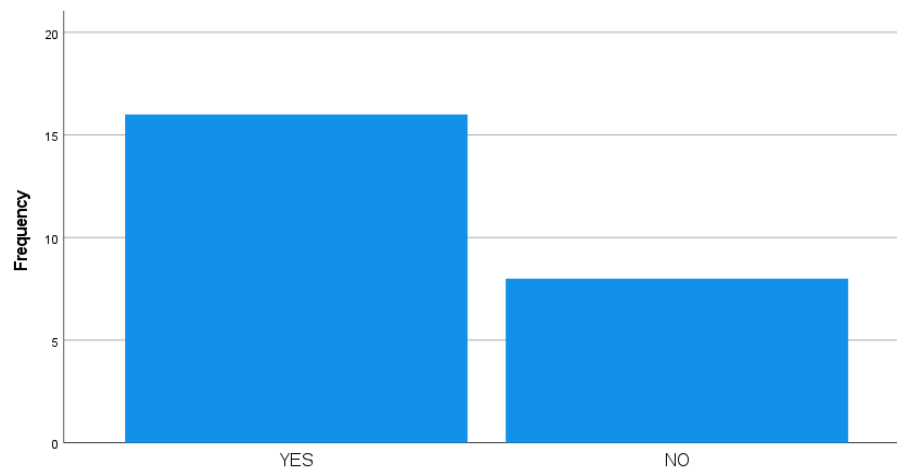


Figure 12. *Participants’ view on the inclusion of environmental education in the curriculum of candidates for the priesthood and religious life*

2.3.2 Presentation of data Results from Interviews

Interviews are a common instrument for collecting qualitative data. As I stated earlier, I employed semi-structured interviews in this study to gain a more in-depth understanding of environmental justice concerns in the Catholic Church and other Faith Traditions in Sierra Leone. The interviews were organised and conducted with four religious’ leaders (two Catholic Bishops, an Anglican Bishop and a Muslim Cleric) and two focal persons from Caritas (one from the

national office and one from one of the diocesan offices). All the participants of the interviews were male and fell within the age bracket of 55 and above.

Through these interviews, the participants shared their experiences, perceptions, and privileged insights, and further provided contextual background on the place of environmental justice in the Catholic Church and other Religious Traditions in Sierra Leone. This section presents the results of the data collected by means of the semi-structured interviews conducted during my field trip to Sierra Leone in May 2022.

All the interviews were conducted face-to-face with individual participants and recorded digitally. Initially, I used the Descript software to transcribe the interviews. However, since both the interviewees and I are not native speakers of English, the software could not pick up some of the words we used in our discussions, therefore I mostly transcribed the interviews myself.

2.3.2.1 Analysis of Data from the Interviews

In analysing the data generated from the interviews, I attempted to use the NVIVO software to sort and code the data from the transcripts of the interviews, but I found it too mechanical and time-consuming.¹¹⁶ Therefore, I instead opted for manual coding using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

In relation to developing codes during the process of data analysis, I employed both deductive and inductive approaches in analysing the data.¹¹⁷ Since the participants were more or less asked the same set of questions, I started with the deductive approach using the themes from the interview guides to code the data. However, as I read the transcripts analytically, I realised some of the interviewees did not directly respond to the questions as per the interview guides. In view

¹¹⁶ NVIVO is one of many computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) packages that helps researchers manage, sort and code both qualitative and quantitative data. Cf. Monique Hennink et al, *Qualitative Research Methods*, op. cit. 230-231.

¹¹⁷ Deductive and inductive approaches are the two main approaches to analysing qualitative data. While the deductive approach involves using topics/themes/concepts from a predetermined structure/framework, the inductive approach on the other hand involves using the data itself to generate themes/topics/concepts. Cf. Monique Hennink et al, *Qualitative Research Methods*, op. cit.219-224; P. Burnard et al, "Analysing and Presenting Qualitative Data" in *British Dental Journal*, Vol. 204 No. 8 (April 4, 2008), 429-432; David R. Thomas, "A General Inductive Approach for Analysing Qualitative Evaluation Data" in *The American Journal of Evaluation*, Vol. 27, Issue 2 (June 2006), 237-246.

of this, I assigned codes to segments or paragraphs of the transcripts during my thorough re-reading of the transcribed texts.

2.3.2.2 *Summation of Data from Interviews*

In my theming of the data generated from the texts of the interview transcripts, emphasis was placed on the words used by the participants to express their perception of and insights into the subject investigated. In this regard, I will include direct quotes from the interviewees in this report. Although the individual names of the participants will not be mentioned here, I nevertheless sought and received express permission from the interviewees to quote their responses in this thesis. From the analysis of the data derived from the interviews, I have thematised the results as follows:

- ***Acknowledgement of the gravity of environmental problems***

All the interviewees acknowledged their awareness of the various environmental problems confronting their communities. They noted that environmental degradation was a major problem in their communities and the country as a whole. According to one participant in an interview conducted in Eastern Sierra Leone, ecological destruction is a manifest reality in the region. The interviewee had this to say:

I am very much aware of the environmental challenges that this region is going through. How I wish you had time to go to Koidu in Kono District. There is a diamond company mining right in the city of Koidu. They are doing deep mining and dumping the rocks in the city. They have created huge mountains of stones right in the middle of the town, regardless of the environmental damage or risk to the people. So, ecological destruction is very glaring in Kono. And in Tongo as well, you can see the devastation that has been wrecked on land there. Now the diamonds are finished and the miners have left, the Tongo looks very much like a ghost town. Also, large-scale deforestation caused by mass logging is another major environmental problem in this region.

With regards to the various environmental problems in the country, a clear pattern emerged from my reading of the interview transcripts; the participants' identification of the problems varied considerably across the regions in Sierra Leone. For instance, in the Western Area, where the capital Freetown is located, participants placed emphasis on pollution arising from poor waste management and flooding due to unregulated housing construction. One participant in Freetown reported:

...the hills overlooking the city of Freetown were covered with green, really green forest. Today, when you look up all is gone. People have cleared almost all the forest to build houses. More so in the last 10 or 15 years when the government in its bid to address the overpopulation of the city released State Lands so that people could build their private homes and move out of the city centre, they sold lands in the green belt overlooking the city. And that has caused a lot of damage to the environment so much so that in 2017 we had a very serious mudslide that caused the death of hundreds of people and the loss of property.

Another major environmental problem confronting us is the indiscriminate disposal of domestic and industrial wastes. Poor waste management in the major urban centres in the country, especially here in Freetown has affected the waterways. And our parastatals and service delivery outfits are not helping. In a city that has or that houses nearly two million people, you can expect a huge tonnage of domestic refuse. But those responsible for the city's waste management are still throwing domestic waste in the city centre, at Ferry Junction, out there in Kingtom, there are huge piles of solid waste and in the rainy season, the smell of it is unbearable. Then when it comes to the dry season, the fires start because the decomposing waste produces some gases that are highly inflammable and throughout the dry season the burning waste produces very toxic smoke.

In the provincial and rural parts of the country, participants identified land degradation and water pollution due to poor farming methods and extractions of minerals as the major environmental problems affecting their communities. In an interview conducted in Bo, the provincial capital of the Southern Province, one Religious Leader had this to say:

In this part of the country, our people depend on subsistence farming for their livelihood. But they cannot farm without deforesting the land. The common practice of farming – shifting cultivation is one of the causes of widespread deforestation.

The interviewee further stated:

I am also aware of the destructive impact of mining on the environment in some rural communities. For example, there is unregulated gold mining going on around Yele in Tonkolili District in the North and in Valunia Chiefdom Bo District here in the south along the banks of one of the major rivers in the country – known in the south as River Taia/Jong or Pampana River in the North. The rampant mining of gold is polluting the river. A once clean flowing river has become brown and dirty and it is affecting the livelihood of communities along the river. The pollution of the river is adversely affecting access to drinking, farming and fishing on which these communities depend for their day-to-day living. It is an unfortunate and sad reality.

Sand mining is another disturbing economic activity along the same river especially here down south. It is destroying the landscape along the riverbanks.

- **Perception of the impacts of environmental challenges on the livelihood of the poor**

From the interviews conducted with the study participants, it was acknowledged that the nexus between environmental degradation and poverty is not an abstract reality, but one that is

impacting their communities. In an interview conducted in the south of the country, one of the religious leaders had this to say:

The link between environmental degradation and poverty is very real here in this part of the country. As I said earlier, our people depend on land for their survival. With little or no alternative means of livelihood, there is more pressure on the environment through excessive use of the land and this is worsening the poverty rate here.

In another interview with a participant from the east of the country where mining (especially diamond mining) plays a significant role in the socio-economic activities of the inhabitants, the interviewee highlighted the link between poverty and land degradation:

As I said earlier, the impact of mining activities on our communities is very glaring. The benefits from the mining of mineral resources we do not really enjoy. Ironically most of these areas are poverty stricken despite the huge amount of money being raised from those areas. And eventually, it goes to the companies. For me, it is sheer exploitation.

In addition to land degradation arising from poor farming methods and mineral extraction, the phenomenon of climate change was also identified as another major environmental problem that was exacerbating poverty in the country as reported by one of the participants in Western Sierra Leone:

Global warming and climate change are not remote or marginal issues. They are here with us and they are affecting the livelihood of our people. Sometimes people make farms and when they expect rains, the rains don't come and so it affects the yields at the end of the day... In short, the environmental crisis is here with us, we see its effects every day.

- ***The current place of environmental justice in the mission of the Catholic Church and other Faith Traditions in Sierra Leone***

As indicated above, environmental degradation and climate change are greatly affecting impoverished communities around the world. During the interviews, two key Catholic Religious leaders were asked about their particular Churches' engagement with environmental issues in light of the palpable environmental challenges facing impoverished communities in Sierra Leone. One Catholic Bishop in the east of the country had this say: "As a diocese, we have not really done anything formal other than our preaching on the pulpit." Another Catholic Bishop in Western Sierra Leone noted that,

Yes, I have made interventions, but I must admit not in a very systematic way. As I said, I have emphasised environmental care more in my homilies and reflections. But I think there is a need for us now to move from that and embark on community sensitisation so that the message will reach a wider audience because what we are dealing with, the environmental problems we are being confronted with are not just affecting Catholics or Christians alone. We need to involve everybody. The issue of care for the environment did not come out well in our first Archdiocesan pastoral Assembly. But we are planning for a second one and we are hoping that would be a theme that will be taken up because it is a major issue that affects all.

In another interview with a representative of the Anglican Church of Sierra Leone in Southern Sierra Leone, the same question was posed and this was what the respondent said:

Well, the Anglican Communion in Sierra Leone comprising two dioceses – the Diocese of Freetown and the Diocese of Bo – is part of the Council of Churches Sierra Leone (CCSL). As part of the CCSL platform, we have already started speaking to the issue. We have started creating awareness among our members about the dangers of environmental degradation. For instance, last year as part of the CCSL, we started lobbying the Government to intervene and stop the pollution of the Taia/Jong River after our fact-finding team discovered life-threatening risks to communities living on the banks of that river. In Freetown, a similar representation was made to the Government regarding water resource management. In the Freetown area including the Freetown Peninsula, the CCSL has rung the bell that if people do not halt the deforestation of the water catchments in the hills, in the next five years the city risks losing its sources of water supply. The volume of the water has reduced drastically.

- ***The role of Religion in shaping attitudes about caring for the environment***

In the context of Sierra Leone where the two dominant religions practised in the country – Christianity and Islam play vital roles in peoples’ lives, participants were asked how the influence of religion can be harnessed to shape attitudes towards caring for the environment. One of the interviewees, a Muslim cleric in Bo southern Sierra Leone, explained that Islam has many ethical teachings on safeguarding the environment:

As Muslims, we have five daily prayers in which we honour God as the creator of the heavens and the earth. Our worship of Allah places a moral obligation on us to look after his creation. Also, The Quran and sayings of the Prophet (PBUH) have many ethical teachings on safeguarding the environment and the conservation of natural resources. For example, the idea of the Khalifah teaches us that we have a great responsibility as creatures of Allah to guard the good order of creation.

In an interview with one of the Catholic Bishops who participated in the study, he expressed similarly:

I admit religion has a very powerful influence on people. If we all agree as religious leaders to address this issue, the impact will be tremendous. But unfortunately, we have not prioritised environmental issues. Other issues have engaged our attention. The city of Freetown and Sierra

Leone as a whole is full of religious people but what I have noticed is that we have not seen the link or we the religious leaders have not helped our people to see the link between our faith in God as creator and our responsibility towards taking proper care of his creation. We have focused on other moral issues and have not emphasised the ecological dimension of faith. But if we do that, then we would even impact government policy in relation to environmental issues. My impression is that people still don't think that caring for the environment is an essential part of their religious beliefs even among us Catholics. So, we have to address the issue with the seriousness it deserves.

- ***The prospects of ecumenical and interreligious initiatives in tackling environmental Challenges in Sierra Leone***

Against the backdrop of the growing awareness about the possible link between environmental-related issues (such as access to land and water) and violent conflict particularly in fragile countries as reflected in *Laudato Si'*, participants were asked about the prospect of ecumenical and interfaith initiatives in addressing environmental problems in Sierra Leone. The question was raised against the background of Sierra Leone's status as a post-war country and the role of the country's Inter-religious Council as a moral guarantor of peace consolidation in the country. Almost all the participants agreed that the avenue of interfaith collaboration should be explored in tackling the environmental challenges facing the country. In the words of one Catholic Bishop during an interview conducted in Freetown, given the fact conflict related to environmental issues has raised its ugly head in the country, the Inter-religious Council should act proactively in addressing the issues:

We have always educated our religious leaders to be more proactive rather than reactive. That we have to attend to social issues including environmental problems that may lead to conflicts before violence erupts...The reality of environmental-related conflicts has already started happening in our country. Just around Easter this year I was in Kono in the East of the country, and there were reports of conflict between farmers and pastoralists in Gbense-Kandor, a community in the north-western area of Kono District. Pastoralists crossed from Falaba District into Kono destroying and damaging the rice farms of people. And seemingly the chiefs were slow to resolve the problem and it degenerated into a violent confrontation between the groups which resulted in the loss of lives and properties. This is a new development in that part of the country... During the dry season – and we are experiencing longer dry spells – pastoralists go in search of grazing grass and quite often they don't respect chieftdom or district boundaries. They go where there is green grass to feed their animals. As a result, they destroy people's plantations and when the matter is not resolved amicably, with fairness, then the farmers also react. So, already we are seeing the potential of bloody conflicts in the country at that level.

However, another key participant, a Catholic Bishop in the east of the country noted that although forming a religious coalition in the bid to address social challenges carries a heavier

weight, it is better for the Catholic Church to engage with environmental issues internally rather than rushing into a coalition. He offered this response:

I do believe that teamwork is very important. When we have these coalitions of religious leaders, it carries a heavier weight. But there is a division in mentality regarding this matter. Some of these religious leaders are part of the government. Sometimes when we meet to discuss certain important national issues, before we even engage the government, the issue is already out there. So, I think it is better for us as Catholic leaders to address the issue internally before forming partnerships with Religious Leaders of other faith communities.

- **Care for the environment in the work of the Catholic Development Agency in Sierra Leone**

Through semi-structured interviews, I sought to assess the level of attention the development wing of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone has given to environmental issues by interviewing focal persons of Caritas Sierra Leone at both national and diocesan levels.

As the development wing of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone, Caritas Sierra Leone and its diocesan branches in the words of the then National Acting Director,

is involved in the holistic development of the human person, which includes, education, health, and empowerment of the marginalized. We are at the forefront of every emergency. So to summarize, our work translates into action what we preach on Sunday in a pragmatic way...for the people to experience the love of God through the hands of our social workers and volunteers. In essence, our work is about capacity building and promoting human dignity and rights.

In view of the growing consensus that human development and protecting the environment are intertwined, the focal persons of Caritas were asked about the agency's engagement with environmental justice concerns. In an interview conducted in Bo, the focal person of Caritas in the Catholic Diocese of Bo had this to say:

Sincerely speaking before the publication of Pope Francis' document on the environment, Laudato Si' we didn't really engage with environmental issues. But after the launching of Laudato Si' here in Bo City by the Bishop himself, we started raising awareness among our people. In his address during the launching ceremony to a cross-section of members of the community from all sectors of society, the Bishop described Laudato Si' as an eye opener for all on the need to be more responsible towards our environment. The Bishop pointed out the effects of environmental crisis are here with us – adverse rainfalls that have caused havoc in some communities within the diocese, prolonged dry season. In fact, in the previous year, there was a serious problem in one the parishes in the Diocese – Gerihun wherein a lot of people were displaced as a result of heavy rainfalls. So, as I was saying, after the launching of Laudato Si' we started sensitizing our communities about the hazard of environmental destruction. But I must point out that we don't have a stand-alone environmental project.

In response to the same question, the focal person from the Caritas Office of the Archdiocese of Freetown noted that,

We are one of the agencies that have been at the forefront of promoting Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment, Laudato Si', a document that connects human rights issues with caring for the environment. When it comes to environmental issues, we have a justice and peace department, created within our office with an orientation towards raising awareness about safeguarding the environment, towards advocating for caring for the environment. Quite recently, we have embarked on tree planting in the western area of the country, both urban and rural. Our agency is also collaborating with the European Union to mitigate the effects of flash floods, which often pose threats to communities during the rainy season. So we have been very much engaged in sensitization and in helping people to be aware of the dangers of environmental degradation, that you don't just treat the environment like trash. Otherwise, the environment is going to react, sometimes in violent ways.

On the question regarding the integration of the themes and contents of *Laudato Si'* into the work of Caritas at national and diocesan levels, the representatives of the Agency noted that although it was not yet a major part of their work, nonetheless the themes and contents of the document were reflected to some extent, in some their projects. The focal person from the Catholic Diocese of Bo reported that:

The contents and themes of Laudato Si' are to some extent reflected in some of our projects. For example, we have an agricultural project along the Bo-Freetown highway. During the launching of the project, we engaged the community on sustainable farming methods as the way forward. We have also started a pilot school project in RC Model Primary School Bo where we have introduced the school children to waste management.

When the same question was posed to the person in Charge of the Archdiocesan office, the person noted:

As I said earlier, we do have the Justice and Peace Commission in our Agency whose sphere of influence includes environmental protection. Although environmental justice is not yet a big part of our operations, nonetheless, we have been involved in environmental protection activities. For example, inspired by the teaching of Pope Francis in Laudato Si' the Caritas National Office collaborated with the Society of Africa Missions, Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic Church and the Kwama community in planting 1000 trees.

On the question of engaging parish communities and young people in schools and other institutions of learning, the respondents from Caritas offered these responses. The focal person from the Caritas Catholic Diocese of Bo noted that their engagement with parish communities was at the level of creating awareness. The focal person from the Archdiocesan Office offered more details regarding their engagement with parishes:

In the structure of the Catholic Church here in Sierra Leone, there is an office that deals directly with schools and other institutions of learning, the Catholic Education Office. Here in Caritas, we have been engaging with young people in parish communities. We engage more with young people in parishes rather than in the schools. We think there will be conflict of roles if we engaged with schools directly when there is an outfit responsible for that. Nevertheless, we work with young people who are not in formal schools, yet they come together to volunteer in our environmental programmes including raising awareness about caring for the environment.

In addition to the formal interviews, I also had many informal conversations with residents of the various communities I visited. These informal discussions shed light on some of the underlying causes of environmental challenges facing Sierra Leone and their disastrous impacts on the livelihood of the poor. In particular, many of the people I spoke to, emphasised their powerlessness in the face of large-scale environmental destruction caused by multinational companies in their communities. For instance, in a discussion with a group of female ‘stone breakers’ in an abandoned diamond mine in one of the communities I visited, the women lamented the destruction of their community by large-scale mining. One of the women speaking on behalf of the group explained how mining activities have disrupted their livelihoods:

We used to farm and live in peace but now our lands and water sources are being poisoned and covered with rubbles. All we have left is this back-breaking work of breaking stones from the giant rubble pile of stones they [mining companies] have left behind. We sell the gravels we break to construction workers in order to feed our families. But even this we are not allowed to do in peace for we are constantly being harassed by the security guards working for the companies.

Despite the large environmental destruction and its impact on their livelihood, the residents contended that the government and other civil authorities have failed in their obligation to address their deplorable social condition.

3.3.3 Limitations

As with all studies the results of this study have limitations. Firstly, I could not reach a wider audience because the duration of the study was short. Secondly, the research was based on perception and therefore purely subjective. The study assessed the perceptions of respondents from four parishes (one from each of the four dioceses) and a limited number of respondents from among the ranks of Catholic clergy and religious, and leaders from other faith traditions in the country. So it is important to be careful about generalising perceptions of the entire Catholic

Church and other members of other faith traditions in Sierra Leone. And finally, there was the unavailability of local literature and records on religious interventions on environmental issues.

2.4 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

This study sought to assess environmental justice concerns in the local Catholic Church in Sierra Leone. This was accomplished by means of a four-week field trip to Sierra Leone and engaging ordinary church-goers in four parishes, priests, religious and seminarians, bishops and senior clerics from other Christian and Religious traditions. I engaged the research participants through the research instruments of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. This section presents an analysis and interpretation of the raw data results outlined in the previous sections. As in the case of the presentation of the raw data results, my analysis and interpretation of the research data will specifically focus on issues and themes that shed light on the engagement of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone with environmental issues or the lack thereof.

2.4.1 *Demographic profile of the research participants*

The participants who responded to the closed questionnaire were all ordinary church-goers (parishioners) from the selected parishes mentioned above. Of the 139 participants, 58.3 percent were male and 41.7 percent female. The ratio of men to women participants in the study at the level of parishes in some measure speaks to the literacy disparity between male and female in the Church and the country at large.¹¹⁸ Since, the questionnaire was self-administered and required literacy, male parishioners (who form part of the 51 percent literacy rate of adult males in the country in contrast 44 percent female literacy rate), were more willing and enthused to respond to the questionnaires. In terms of age, the participants were defined by an age group with a bias towards the young and middle age groups. This rightly represented the population of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone and the country as a whole, which is youthful.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ According to the 2015 national census, while more than half of the adult male adult population were literate, only 44 percent women were literate. Cf. Statistics Sierra Leone, *Sierra Leone 2015 Population and Housing Census: Thematic Report on Education and Literacy* (October 2017).

¹¹⁹ Cf. Statistics Sierra Leone, *Sierra Leone 2015 Population and Housing Census: Thematic Report on Children, Adolescents and Youth* (October 2017),

https://www.statistics.sl/images/StatisticsSL/Documents/Census/2015/sl_2015_phc_thematic_report_on_children_adolescents_and_youth.pdf, date accessed 08/07/2022.

With regards to the open-ended questionnaires, respondents were selected from 50 priests, religious and seminarians, of whom 66.7 percent were male and 33.3 percent female. This suggests a sample that broadly reflects the wider demographic composition of ordained and lay Catholic ministers working in the four dioceses of Sierra Leone. Again, among this category of respondents, there was a bias towards the young and middle age groups (ages 25-34, 45-54 and 55-64). This too represents the youthful demographic composition of ministers and would-be ministers of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone.

All the respondents who participated in the semi-structured interviews were male and fell under the age bracket of 55 and above. The interviewees were drawn from Catholic Bishops, senior clerics from other Christian and Religious traditions and senior staff from the Catholic Development Agency (Caritas) in Sierra Leone. This largely reflects the male dominance of leadership positions not only in the Catholic Church but also in other faith traditions in the country.

Apart from the clerics of the other Christian and Religious traditions (and some of the residents of various communities I visited – with whom I had informal discussions), all the respondents identified themselves as members and would-be members of the Catholic Church.

2.4.2 *Awareness and Perceptions of Environmental Problems and the Underlying Causes*

The results obtained from all the research instruments employed in the study revealed that the majority of the research participants were aware of the various environmental challenges confronting their communities and regions (62.6 percent among parishioners, 99.5 percent among priests, religious and seminarians and 100 percent among bishops, senior clerics from other Christian and Religious traditions).

With respect to the underlying causes of the myriad of environmental challenges, the study revealed that although the emphasis on causes of environmental problems varied across the communities and regions, unsustainable farming methods, extraction of mineral resources, unregulated housing construction, poor waste management and climate change were identified as the major causes of environmental problems across the communities and regions in the country.

The high degree of knowledge and perception of the major causes of the various environmental problems (deforestation, flooding, air, land and water pollution, long dry spell and excessive heat/humidity) facing communities across the geographical and ecclesiastical regions of Sierra Leone are not marginal or remote issues but real-life issues affecting the concrete and existential situations of communities in the country.

Therefore, the **first insight** I have gleaned from the study is that the environmental challenges facing communities across Sierra Leone are urgent socio-religious problems crying out for immediate and tangible action.

2.4.3 *Poverty and Environmental Degradation Nexus*

It has been widely acknowledged that environmental degradation exacerbates poverty. This is particularly evident in poor and underdeveloped nations in the Global South where the majority of people depend on subsistent agriculture for their livelihood.¹²⁰

In my informal discussions with some of the residents of the various communities I visited during the data collection phase of the research, some of the women I spoke with in communities that host mining corporations lamented that they are not only deprived of their livelihood, but are also largely excluded from the wealth generated from the extraction of natural resources from their ancestral land. Thus, while their lands are being plundered and destroyed, they are left in a state of extreme poverty and desolation. The results from the semi-structured interviews suggest that Catholic religious leaders and development officers and clerics from other faith traditions in Sierra Leone are highly aware of the links between poverty and environmental degradation. The interviewees acknowledged that the poor are both victims and agents of environmental degradation. As expressed by one of the respondents,

Sometimes we give the impression that those who violate the environment are just the big people. But to some extent, people at the grassroots level are not innocent bystanders. For example, their method

¹²⁰ Cf. Edward B. Barbier, "Poverty, Development, and Environment" in *Environment and Development Economics*, vol. 15 (2010), 635-660; E. Zaman et al, "Effects of Poverty on Land Use and Environmental Degradation Among Arable Crop Farmers in North Central Nigeria" in *Global Scientific Journal*, Vol. 6, Issue 7 (July 2018), 1151-1161.

of farming, where they build their houses, sometimes violates the very ecosystem that supports and sustains them.

In a country where about two-thirds of the working population depends on subsistence agriculture for their livelihood,¹²¹ and with limited alternative means of survival, the poor are forced to overuse the land and its resources for their daily survival. Furthermore, the negative ecological impacts of corporate and artisanal mining and the manifestation of climate change effects are impoverishing their environment and further compounding poverty, making their survival even more difficult.

The acknowledgement of the intertwined nexus between poverty and environmental degradation by the research participants further underpins my earlier insight that environmental challenges are urgent socio-religious problems crying out for immediate and tangible action.

2.4.4 *The Engagement of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone with Environmental Issues*

Religion has been recognised as a powerful influence in shaping people's attitudes towards social and moral issues.¹²² Religion is also considered as an important influence on attitudes about humans' relationship with the natural environment.¹²³ Environmental degradation with its negative effects is increasingly being seen as a matter of justice. The Catholic Church with its corpus of social teaching has lent a distinctive voice to environmental issues in the last few decades which eventually led to the promulgation of the first environmental-themed encyclical, *Laudato Si'* (2015).

Against this backdrop, I sought to gain insights into the engagement of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone with environmental issues. Insights from the raw data results are thematised as follows:

¹²¹ Cf. Statistics Sierra Leone, *Sierra Leone 2015 Population and Housing Census: Thematic Report on Agriculture* (October 2017), https://www.statistics.sl/images/StatisticsSL/Documents/Census/2015/sl_2015_phc_thematic_report_on_agriculture.pdf, date accessed 10/08/2022.

¹²² Cf. R. Beck, C. Dewayne C. Miller, "Religiosity and Agency and Communion: Their Relationship to Religious Judgmentalism" in *The journal of psychology*, Vol. 134, Issue 3, (May 2000) 315–324.

¹²³ Cf. R. S. Gottlieb, "Introduction: Religion and Ecology – What is the Connection", op. cit. 3-21.

2.4.4.1 *How concerned is the Church with environmental issues?*

The raw data results of parishioners who responded to the closed questionnaire provide evidence that there is some level of concern for environmental issues in the Catholic Church. While 23.7 percent and 27.3 percent believed that the Church is very concerned and somewhat concerned, the combined percentage of those who reported that the Church is neither concerned nor unconcerned stands at 26 percent. When examined further through the lens of bishops, priests, religious and seminarians, the study revealed that although there are some indicators of concern for the issue, it is not treated with the urgency it deserves. This was corroborated by one of the Catholic Bishops who participated in the research. According to the participant, concern for environmental justice has not yet been prioritised by the Catholic Church and other religious groups in the country. Rather he said, other moral issues have occupied their attention.

Therefore, the **second insight** I have drawn from the study is that although there is some level of concern for environmental justice in the Church, the issue has yet to occupy a prominent place in the list of the Church's pastoral priorities.

2.4.4.2 *Knowledge of the Church's Teaching on Care for the Environment*

There is no surprise regarding the high degree of knowledge about the Church's teaching on environmental issues among the ranks of bishops, priests, religious and seminarians. As outlined in the presentation of data from the open-ended questionnaire which targeted ministers and would-be ministers in the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone, the majority of the respondents reported that environmental care and concern factor into their training and formation.

However, among the ranks of parishioners, there was a high degree of unawareness about the Church's teaching on concern and care for the environment. On the question of whether they have heard about the first-ever papal encyclical to be entirely dedicated to care for the environment, more than half of the parishioners who participated in the study indicated that they have not heard about the document. When asked to indicate what best captures Pope Francis' teaching and Catholic Social Teaching in general on the environment, again more than half of the respondents marked the suggestion which says, *'humans were created by God to*

dominate the earth', while 26.6 percent chose the theme which captures the Church's updated understanding of humans' relations to the earth namely, *'by virtue of their creation in God's image, humans are called to till and keep the earth.'*

The high degree of unawareness of the Church's teaching on the environment speaks to a lacuna in the Church's pedagogical/catechetical practice. Unlike the clergy and religious who receive specialist doctrinal formation during their training, for the majority of Catholics in Sierra Leone, their religious formation stops at the level of basic catechetical training during preparation for the reception of the sacraments of initiation – Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist. Small wonder the majority of respondents' understanding of church teaching on the environment is still informed by the dominion worldview of human-environment relations according to which humans are created to rule over nature.

In light of the gap in the Church's pedagogical/catechetical practice, the **third insight** I have garnered from the study is that there is a high degree of unawareness about the Church's teaching among ordinary Catholic church-goers.

2.4.4.3 Specific Initiatives Geared towards Mitigating Environmental Problems in Parish Communities

To determine whether local clergy or religious orders and the communities they work with were engaged in initiatives oriented towards mitigating environmental problems in their respective communities, respondents were asked to highlight specific measures being undertaken to mitigate the effects of environmental challenges in their communities.

The results from the two sets of questionnaires revealed that besides raising awareness on environmental issues through homilies/sermons and seminars/workshops, little has been done by way of practical initiatives at the level of parish communities. Although there are some pockets of initiatives geared towards mitigating environmental challenges, notably tree planting and proper waste management in some communities, a coordinated and practical response to environmental problems remains at best patchy at the level of parish communities. In the words of one of the local bishops who participated in the study, religious adherents including Catholics still don't think that caring for the environment is an essential part of their religious beliefs.

In light of the above, the **fourth insight** I have drawn from the empirical research is that although the research participants acknowledge the gravity of environmental challenges confronting their communities and the religious incentive to care for the environment, there is a poor level of practical response to environmental issues in local parish communities.

2.4.4.4 *Environmental Justice Concern in the Work of the Catholic Development Agency in Sierra Leone*

There is a growing recognition in both secular and religious circles that environmental care and protection is a development issue. For instance, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (referred to as SDGs) document promotes the link between care for the environment and development (sustainable development).¹²⁴ In the context of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis in his concern for poverty, injustice and environmental degradation also sees care for the environment as a development issue.¹²⁵ In view of the integrated understanding of development, the study assessed the level of attention the development wing of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone (Caritas SL) is paying to environmental protection and sustainability.

The results of the study revealed that prior to the promulgation of Pope Francis' landmark encyclical on care for the environment, *Laudato Si'*, Caritas Sierra Leone at both national and diocesan levels had little or no engagement with environmental issues. However, the urgent call of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* to integrate concern and care for the environment into the Church's pastoral priorities has provided an impetus for Caritas Sierra Leone to start engaging with the issues. The study results suggest that although environmental justice concerns are reflected in some of the agency's interventions and projects, such as community sensitisation programmes, tree planting, environmental disaster relief programmes etc, the national and diocesan branches of Caritas Sierra Leone do not have standalone programmes specifically dedicated to environmental justice concern.

¹²⁴ Cf United Nations, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (October 21, 2015), <https://sdgs.un.org/publications/transforming-our-world-2030-agenda-sustainable-development-17981>, date accessed 15/08/2022.

¹²⁵ Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si'*: *On Care for our Common Home*, (May 2015) nn. 147-151.

Therefore, the **fifth insight** I have drawn from the study is that granted Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* has brought environmental justice concerns to the fore, the issue has not yet been sufficiently developed or remains mostly patchy in the work of the development wing of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone.

2.4.4.5 *Environmental Justice Concerns through the Prism of Ecumenical and Interreligious Cooperation*

In view of the religious plurality of Sierra Leone and given the fact that environmental degradation and its social effects cut across religious divides, the study sought the views of research participants on the idea of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone reaching out to other Christian Churches and the Muslim Communities in the country by way of ecumenical and interreligious coalitions in order to collectively speak to the environmental challenges confronting the country. The question of interfaith-based cooperation was raised against the backdrop of an already established culture of ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and cooperation in Sierra Leone.

The results of the study suggest that the various categories of respondents overwhelmingly support the idea of ecumenical and interfaith initiatives in addressing the problem. At the time when the research was conducted, the idea was only at the level of aspiration as stated by one of the interviewees: *"In my position as the current president of the Inter-Religious Council, I intend to push the issues [care and responsibility for the environment]. Now that your question has challenged me, I will raise the issue with the executive of the Council."*

Therefore, the **sixth insight** I have gathered from the research is that ecumenical and interfaith collaboration can provide a platform for collective religious-inspired social initiatives in addressing the environmental challenges Sierra Leone is confronted with.

2.4.5 **Highlights of key findings**

Before outlining the key findings gleaned from the raw data results, it is important to reiterate at this point that the results and findings of this study are not meant to provide empirical data from which statistically generalisable conclusions can be drawn. Rather the primary aim of my

research is to assess the place of environmental justice concerns in the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone or the lack thereof. Nevertheless, the results of this study may provide a baseline in determining the current state of the Church's engagement with environmental issues in the country.

Informed by the research questions and objectives of the research, the study has revealed:

- That the environmental challenges facing communities across Sierra Leone are urgent socio-religious problems crying out for immediate and tangible action.
- That granted there is some level of concern for environmental issues in the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone, the issue has yet to occupy a prominent place in the Church's pastoral priorities.
- That there is a high degree of unawareness about the Church's teaching on the environment among ordinary Catholic church-goers.
- That despite the gravity of environmental problems, their impact on the livelihood of the poor and the religious incentive to care for the environment, there is a poor level of practical response to the problems in the parish communities in the country.
- That granted Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* has brought environmental justice concerns to the fore, the issue has not yet been sufficiently developed or remains mostly patchy in the work of the development wing of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone.
- That ecumenical and interfaith collaboration can provide a platform for collective religious-inspired social initiatives in addressing the environmental challenges Sierra Leone is confronted with.

Concluding Remarks

The purpose of my empirical research was to assess environmental justice concerns in the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone. The data generated from the research instruments employed in this study have provided information relevant to the research questions and objectives of the study.

This chapter attempted to present the results of the data collected and to analyse and interpret the results of the raw data. The various phases of the empirical research afforded me the opportunity to observe and assess the Catholic Church's engagement with environmental issues in the country. The evidence-based insights and findings gleaned from the study make it clear that the research on the topic in the context of Sierra Leone is relevant both academically and socio-ecclesiologically. The findings of this empirical study will inform my discussions and arguments in the succeeding theoretical chapters.

CHAPTER THREE

ECOLOGICAL CONCERN IN PRE-*LAUDATO SI'* CATHOLIC MAGISTERIAL TEACHING

Introduction

This research aims to assess environmental justice concerns or the lack thereof in the pastoral priorities of the local Catholic Church in Sierra Leone and to argue for the integration of environmental concern and care in its mission.

In the first part of this work (chapters 1 and 2), I presented the historical and socio-religious context that informs the research and provided empirical data on the current state of environmental justice concerns in the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone. The empirical study established that concern for environmental issues is yet to occupy a prominent place in the pastoral priorities of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone. In light of this, I will argue in this second part of my work why the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone should prioritise care for the environment in its pastoral concerns by engaging in a detailed analysis of contemporary Catholic Social Teaching (hereafter referred to as CST) on concern and care for the environment.

This chapter focuses on the emergence of ecological awareness and stewardship as one of the urgent 'signs of the times' in CST before the advent of Pope Francis as a global prophetic advocate for environmental justice. I will examine ecological-related themes in papal and ecclesiastical writings declarations and statements issued during the pontificate of Pope Francis' predecessors and draw theological inferences in light of the specific social questions addressed by them.

The aim of this chapter is to provide a historical overview of ecological concern in CST prior to the promulgation of *Laudato Si'* and to demonstrate that before *Laudato Si'* concern for the environment had already grown and was being linked with the traditional socio-economic and political concerns of CST. This chapter will partially respond to the second research question, i.e. how the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone can operationalise the teachings of the Church on the environment in its mission and priorities.

The chapter is structured as follows. In the first section, I will peruse some of the documents of Vatican II to see if there is any historical precedent for ecological sensibility in the Council's engagement with the modern world. In the second, third and fourth sections, I will provide a systematic synthesis of ecological themes in the writings of Popes Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI. And in the final section, I shall give a brief appraisal of the pronouncements on environmental issues in pre-*Laudato Si'* CST and demonstrate that their interventions provided the stepping-stone for the mainstreaming of care for the environment as an integral part of the Church's mission. In tracing and examining environmental themes in post-Vatican II Catholic magisterial teaching, I shall give priority to papal encyclicals, apostolic letters, apostolic exhortations, and papal addresses/messages.

3.1 THE PLACE OF ECOLOGICAL CONCERN IN THE CONCILIAR TEACHING OF VATICAN II

In the general introduction to this work, I briefly touched on the emergence of ecological concern in CST. It was noted that though the Catholic Church remained largely on the fringe of the ecological discourse when the issue came to the fore in the second half of the twentieth century, ecological questions started emerging as a moral and theological concern in post-Second Vatican Council magisterial teaching.¹²⁶

Vatican II, it should be pointed out did not address ecological concern as a specific thematic issue. However, the Council's call to interpret the signs of the time in light of the Gospels sets the context for a dynamic engagement with the world. This provided the avenue for addressing future social questions, a point underscored by Pope Paul VI in his address to the Council on the last day of its proceedings: "Since the council had not intended to resolve all problems raised, some were reserved for future study by the church, some were presented in restricted and general terms, and therefore they remain open to further and deeper understanding and a variety of applications".¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Cf. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Themes of Catholic Social Teaching, <https://www.usccb.org/resources/sharing-catholic-social-teaching-challenges-and-directions>, date accessed 3/01/2022.

¹²⁷ Paul VI, Address During the Last General Meeting of the Second Vatican Council (December 7, 1965) quoted in O. Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II*, op. cit. 29.

Although Vatican II did not offer a systematic treatment of ecological and environmental issues, there are implicit references to ecological-related issues. As John Hart has rightly observed, a sustained scrutiny of some of Vatican II's conciliar documents especially, LG and GS shows "historical precedent, insights, and potential practices used later to address and attempt to alleviate ongoing ecological crises".¹²⁸ For instance, Hart sees in LG 36 which builds on St. Paul's teaching in the letter to the Romans (8:21) that the whole of creation will be delivered from the bondage of corruption and restored to God's original purpose, a seminal foundation for the Church's later formulation of its environmental teaching. He writes:

In *Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)*, for example, the council declared that Catholics should "learn the deepest meaning and value of all creation, and how to relate it to the praise of God" and "work to see that created goods are more fittingly distributed." (LG 36). These words present in seminal form the bases for the church's later formulation of the two pillars of its environmental teachings: respect for Earth and the biotic community (the community of all life) as God's creations; and provision of steps to ensure that human needs would be met as people work together for the common good.¹²⁹

GS, although reflecting the then-prevailing anthropocentric attitudes about human relations to the natural world, a relationship that emphasised humankind as the crown of God's creation which therefore has the right to "subdue earthly creatures and use them" (GS12), nonetheless cautioned against any arbitrary use of nature's resources. Rather the mandate to subdue the earth should be seen from the perspective of building up a better world (GS34).¹³⁰

Granted Vatican II did not specifically attend to ecological issues in a systematic way, the Council's reference to the biblical text regarding the creation and redemption of humankind and the whole of the created order, and its call to scrutinize the signs and interpret them in accordance with the Gospel, provide a firm theological ground for the Church to address the increasing ecological crisis of our times.

To sum up, Vatican II's call to engage the world on social issues has been widened to environmental issues in light of alarming ecological crises around the world. Over the last few

¹²⁸ J. Hart, *What are They Saying About Environmental Theology?*, Paulist Press, Mahwah NJ, 2004, 8.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Cf. *ibid.* 8-9.

decades, there has been a remarkable development in contemporary Catholic magisterial and theological reflections on concern for the environment.

3.2 ECOLOGICAL CONCERN IN THE MAGISTERIAL TEACHING OF POPE PAUL VI

As I mentioned earlier in this thesis, it was Paul VI who initiated a Catholic magisterial turn towards concern for the environment with his Apostolic letter *Octogesima Adveniens (A Call to Action)* in 1971. This section discusses Paul VI's contribution to the development of the Church's teaching on the environment.

3.2.1 *Octogesima Adveniens (A Call to Action)*

Addressed to Cardinal Maurice Roy (who was the president of the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace at that time) on the eightieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* (1891), the Apostolic letter (*Octogesima Adveniens, hereafter referred to as OA*) outlined eleven urgent social problems – including the environment – which Paul VI summoned the church to confront. In the introductory paragraph of the letter, Paul VI exhorted the Christian community to analyse and attend to emerging social problems by drawing on the heritage of the Church's teaching.¹³¹ The call to action in view of the emerging social problems by Paul VI in OA echoes the historically conscious approach favoured by Vatican II as evidenced in GS directive to scrutinise the signs of the times.¹³² With regards to environmental concern in OA, Paul VI raised the issue from the perspective of justice in relation to the impact of environmental degradation on human lives.¹³³ Like the other social problems outlined in OA, the letter does not offer any specific solutions to environmental problems. As Celia Deane-Drummond notes in her essay, "Catholic Social Teaching and Ecology: Promise and Limits", "What seems to be recognised here is not just the dangers of environmental destruction but shared responsibility to do something about it. At this

¹³¹ Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Letter, *Octogesima Adveniens* (May 14, 1971), n. 1 in David J. O'Brien & Thomas A. Shannon (eds), *Catholic Social Thought Encyclicals and Documents from Pope Lee XIII to Pope Francis*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll NY, 2018, (288-303) at 280.

ibid. The italics are mine.

¹³² Cf. T. Massaro, "The Role of Conscience in Catholic Participation in Politics since Vatican II" in E. Bingham (Ed), *The Church in the Modern World: Fifty Years after Gaudium et Spes*, Lexington Books, Lanham MD, 2015 (65-83) at 68.

¹³³ OA n. 21, ibid.

stage, there is little concrete suggestion as to what environmentally responsible actions might entail or the theological basis of this concern".¹³⁴

The timing of Paul VI's summons for a new sense of responsibility for the environment in OA is very significant. The letter was published at a time when the secular global community had become keenly aware of the increasing human-induced environmental degradation around the world and was taking steps to come to grips with the problem. A year after OA was published, the United Nations' first conference on the environment was held in Stockholm, Sweden in June 1972. Officially referred to as the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment but better known as the Stockholm Conference, the gathering sought international cooperation in addressing environmental problems within the framework of social, economic and developmental policies.¹³⁵

3.2.2 *Paul VI's Message to the Stockholm Conference*

Paul VI's message to the Stockholm Conference represents the Catholic Church's emerging contribution to the global discourse on environmental issues. The message was the first extensive and important papal diplomatic statement on environmental concerns at the time. In the address, entitled *A Hospitable Earth for Future Generations* (1972), Paul VI reinforced previous concerns he had articulated in other documents especially the renowned 1967 encyclical on human development – *Populorum Progressio* (hereafter referred to as PP) and OA. Within the framework of human development, the message underscored the interdependence of the human community and the environment: "Today, indeed, there is a growing awareness that man and his environment are more inseparable than ever. The environment essentially conditions man's life and development, while man, in his turn, perfects and ennobles his environment through his presence, work and contemplation".¹³⁶ In light of human-environment

¹³⁴ C. Deane-Drummond, "Catholic Social Teaching and Ecology: Promise and Limits" in William T. Cavanaugh (Ed), *Fragile World: Ecology and the Church*, Cascade Books, Eugene OR, 2018, (49-62) at 51.

¹³⁵ Cf. M Keenan, *From Stockholm to Johannesburg: An Historical Overview of Concern of the Holy See for the Environment 1972-2000*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City, 2002, 21-22; A. E. Egleston, *Sustainable Development: A History*, Springer, New York, 2013, 61-73.

¹³⁶ Paul VI, *Message to the UN conference on Human Environment: Addressed to Mr. Maurice Strong, Secretary-General of the Conference on the Environment* (June 1, 1972), https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/messages/pont-messages/documents/hf_p-vi_mess_19720605_conferenza-ambiente.html, date accessed 3/01/2022.

interdependence, Paul VI emphasised the moral obligation to care for the earth noting that “Interdependence must now be met by joint responsibility; common destiny by solidarity. This will not be done by resorting to facile solutions”.¹³⁷

While appreciative of the positive impacts science and technology have had on human progress, Paul VI condemned what Marjorie Keenan has called “the ambivalence of their indiscriminate use”,¹³⁸ especially the destructive powers of weapons both nuclear and biochemical and also “the imbalances caused in the biosphere by the disorderly exploitation of the physical reserves of the planet.”¹³⁹ Along the line of a responsibility ethic, Paul VI called for “clear-sightedness and courage” in addressing environmental problems since the environment is “the *res omnium* – the patrimony of mankind” including future generations.¹⁴⁰ Paul VI reiterated the obligation to care for the earth in his message for the ‘*Fifth Worldwide day of Environment*’ five years after the Stockholm Conference. In the message Paul VI connected the Church’s historic commitment to and solidarity with the poor to responsibility for the environment.¹⁴¹

Summary: Paul VI’s teaching on environmental concern constitutes the first indication of Catholic magisterial engagement with environmental issues and he envisioned concern for the environment from the perspective of global justice. Paul VI clearly affirmed the inseparable relationship and interdependence between human life and the natural environment. He also underscored the role of humans as ‘custodians of creation’. Furthermore, he linked the ethic of responsibility to the themes of solidarity with the poor and intergenerational justice, themes that later found detailed articulations in the social ethics of his successors.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ M. Keenan, *From Stockholm to Jerusalem: An Historical Overview of Concern of the Holy See for the Environment 1972-2000*, op. cit. 22.

¹³⁹ Paul VI, Message to the UN conference on Human Environment, op. cit.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Paul VI, Message for the Fifth Worldwide Day of the Environment (June 5, 1977), https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/messages/pont-messages/documents/hf_p-vi_mess_19770605_world-day-ambiente.html, date accessed 4/01/2022.

3.3 THE PONTIFICATE OF POPE JOHN PAUL II AND CONCERN FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Besides the current Bishop of Rome – Francis – who has dedicated an entire encyclical to the subject of ecology, John Paul II’s writings on the issue constitute the most extensive source of CST on ecological concern and responsibility. During his twenty-seven-year reign as Bishop of Rome, John Paul II increasingly incorporated ecological themes in his enormous corpus of encyclicals and other magisterial documents, giving the environmental issues a sense of urgency. According to Celia Deane-Drummond, “the credit for laying a firmer theological foundation for environmental concern in CST must be given to Pope John Paul II...”¹⁴²

In this section, I shall trace and offer some brief theological considerations of ecological themes in the writings of John Paul II. In my discussion in this section, due attention will be given to the following CST themes within which he articulated environmental concern and responsibility: human dignity, the dignity of work and workers’ rights, and human development.

3.3.2 *Human Dignity in Relation to Responsibility for the Environment*

At the heart of John Paul’s social ethics is the dignity of the human person. His keen interest in promoting and protecting the dignity of the human person has been attributed to his experience growing up in his native Poland. As a young man, Karol Wojtyla who became John Paul II upon assuming the papacy in 1978, experienced the horrors of World War II and the dictatorship of communism. The atrocities he experienced during World War II and its aftermath to a great extent informed his keen interest in theological anthropology.¹⁴³ John Paul II’s theological anthropology in which human dignity occupies a pride of place is underpinned by the fundamental doctrines of creation and redemption.¹⁴⁴

In his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis (Redeemer of Man, 1979*, hereafter referred to as RH), generally regarded as the programmatic document for his papacy, John Paul II developed a Christian anthropology which provided the background of his subsequent teachings. Drawing on the doctrines of creation and redemption, John Paul II noted in *Redemptor Hominis* that the

¹⁴² C. Deane-Drummond, “Joining the Dance: Catholic Social Teaching and Ecology, op. cit. (193-212) at 196.

¹⁴³ Cf. John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery: On the fiftieth Anniversary of my Priestly Ordination*, Doubleday, New York 1996, 66-67.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. A. Dulles, *The Splendor of Faith: The Theological Vision of Pope John Paul II*, op. cit. 154.

human person – made in the image and likeness of God and redeemed by the Christ-event – has inherent and inalienable dignity.¹⁴⁵ Against the backdrop of the threats posed to the dignity and rights of the human person not only by the political systems of the 20th century but also by certain advances in technology that prioritise productivity and profit ahead of the sacred worth of the human person, John Paul II identified the protection of human dignity and freedom as one of the signs of the times to which the church must actively pay attention.¹⁴⁶

Although the theological anthropology articulated by John Paul II in RH has the dignity of the human person as its primary focus, ecological concern also found expressions in the theological categories of creation and redemption which underpins the encyclical's affirmation of the worth and dignity of the human person. In the document, John Paul II noted that the incarnation (and the entire Christ-event) has a cosmic dimension.¹⁴⁷ For through the incarnation, "God the Son signifies the taking up into unity with God not only of human nature, but in this human nature, in a sense, of everything that is "flesh": the whole of humanity, the entire visible and material world."¹⁴⁸

In these texts, we find for the first time a detailed theological basis for the environmental concern in the Catholic Magisterium. John Paul II appealed to the theological category of 'cosmic Christology' to link the original creation narrative in Genesis with the incarnation of Jesus Christ to underscore the point that the Christ-event restores not only a broken humanity but also a broken earth as well. Within the perspective of the theological grounds for ecological concern, John Paul II linked the debasement of human dignity by way of infringement of human rights to ecological degradation. In RH, John Paul II acknowledged that the threats posed by the political systems and abuse of technological progress also affect the natural environment. The document is particularly fierce in its criticism of what John Paul II considered as the lack of understanding of the proper place of man in the universe and by implication his role in God's creative plans. As articulated in his own words, "Man often seems to see no other meaning in his natural

¹⁴⁵ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptor Hominis*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City (March 4, 1979), n. 9.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. RH 15, *ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Cf. RH 8, *ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City (May 18, 1986), n. 50.

environment than what serves for immediate use and consumption. Yet it was the Creator's will that man should communicate with nature as an intelligent and noble 'master' and 'guardian,' and not as a heedless 'exploiter' and 'destroyer'".¹⁴⁹ In addition to humankind losing sight of its proper place in the universe, John Paul II in RH also identified humankind's distorted or exaggerated understanding of God's mandate to have 'dominion over the earth' and to 'subdue it' (Gen. 1:28) as a contributing factor for man's self-destruction and the exploitation of the earth. For John Paul II, the correct understanding of the mandate to 'subdue the earth' should be mirrored after the pattern of Christ's kingship. He wrote: "The essential meaning of this "kingship" and "dominion" of humans over the visible world, which the Creator himself gave humans for his task, consists in the priority of ethics over technology, in the primacy of the person over things, and the superiority of spirit over matter".¹⁵⁰

In RH John Paul II provided the theological groundwork for the church's recognition of ecological problems as a moral and religious crisis that required a global ethic to address it. He reinforced this idea in subsequent documents, especially in his social encyclicals.

3.3.3 ***The Dignity of human work and ecological responsibility***

John Paul further developed his teachings on environmental issues in his social encyclicals beginning with his first social encyclical, *Laborem Exercens (On Human Work, 1981*, hereafter referred to as LE). One of the first social questions to which he linked humankind's stewardship over the earth is the theme of the dignity of human labour and workers' rights.

Work in relation to environmental stewardship

The social ethics of John Paul II as articulated in LE and subsequent social encyclicals builds on the theological anthropology developed in his programmatic document RH which emphasised the dignity of the human person. Central to John Paul II's theological anthropology is the Genesis account of humankind's creation in God's image. In view of the human person's creation in God's image and the mandate to subdue the earth, humankind is called to share in God's creative work. The divine command to humankind in the book of Genesis to 'subdue and have dominion over

¹⁴⁹ RH 15.

¹⁵⁰ RH 16.

the earth' has been criticised as being partly responsible for the undue exploitation of nature's resources.¹⁵¹ For John Paul II the mandate to have dominion over the earth is not absolute but ministerial.¹⁵²

It is within this ministerial context that he links human labour to ecological responsibility in LE and other texts. Seen from the perspective of participation in God's activity, John Paul II conceived of work as a vocation through which the human person transforms the natural world.¹⁵³ This means that although humans are required to transform the earth through work, they should do so by mirroring the Creator of the universe who does not exploit his creation. As bearers of the divine image, human beings have the spiritual calling to be co-creators with God.¹⁵⁴

Undoubtedly, John Paul II's theological analysis of the nexus between human work and the mandate to minister and transform the earth has an ecological import. However, the link between human work and ecological sensitivity/awareness failed to break out of the human-centred focus of the human and other creatures relationship - which conceives of nature's resources as goods meant to serve the needs of humanity. Additionally, although John Paul II's articulation of environmental responsibility in relation to human work in LE and other documents speak to the language of restraint in the use of the heritage of nature and pollution of the earth, however, his analysis appears to place undue faith in human intentions which history has shown can be sometimes wayward. Celia Deane-Drummond expresses it better when she says that "While the importance of restraint in polluting the earth or overuse of resources is at least a

¹⁵¹ This criticism is largely borne from the misrepresentation of the Genesis text (Gen. 1:28) especially the Hebrew words *kavash* (subdue) and *radah* (dominion). The interpretation of the text has a complex history and a legacy of disastrous implications. As pointed out by Bernhard W. Anderson, humankind's relationship with nature and the Genesis creation story, in general, have to be read in light of the larger literary context of the primaeval history (*Urgeschichte*) of the OT so as to avoid giving a theological interpretation of a given text independent of the literary context in which it was composed. The primaeval history and the entire history of ancient Israel have a covenantal undertone with cosmic implications. In light of this history, the whole of creation is seen a gift from God. Cf. B. W. Anderson, "Creation and Ecology" in Cf. Bernhard W. Anderson (Ed), *Creation in the Old Testament*, Fortress Press, London, 1984, 154-156.

¹⁵² Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae* (March 25, 1995) n. 42, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html, date accessed 12/01/2022.

¹⁵³ Cf. LE 25.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, (May 1, 1991), n. 32 in D. J. O'Brien & Thomas A. Shannon (eds), *Catholic Social Thought Encyclicals and Documents from Pope Lee XIII to Pope Francis*, op. cit. (471-525) at 497.

qualified attempt at environmental responsibility, it is perhaps somewhat naive to assume that the earth in subjection to human intention will take on the pattern of holiness and justice in the way that this document implies".¹⁵⁵ For example, the exploitation of Africa's natural resources by private multinational corporations from the Western world and developed nations from the far East such as China in the post-colonial era has often been portrayed as just business enterprises aimed at helping Africa to develop and enhance the livelihood of its people. However, evidence abounds that such has not been the case. The socio-ecological injustice associated with the activities of these corporations far outweighs the much-touted benefits for the continent.¹⁵⁶

3.3.4 *Environmental Concern in Relation to Human Development*

Another social question within which John Paul II incorporated environmental concern and responsibility is the sphere of human development from the perspectives of justice and solidarity.¹⁵⁷ The link between development in the social ethics of John Paul II was first enunciated in his 1987 social encyclical, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (On Social Concern)*. John Paul II promulgated *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (Hereafter referred to as SRS) on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of Paul VI's landmark 1967 encyclical on human development, PP. In SRS, John Paul II paid homage to Paul VI's historic document on human development (PP) in which Paul VI had earlier addressed the spiritual, moral and cultural dimensions of international development and its connection with economic justice and peace.¹⁵⁸ Development, Paul VI noted in PP, should not be conceived as mere accumulation of goods, but as promoting 'the good of every man and of

¹⁵⁵ C. Deane-Drummond, "Joining the Dance: Catholic Social Teaching and Ecology, op. cit. 198.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. W. Kelbessa, "Environmental Injustice in Africa" in *Contemporary Pragmatism*, Vol. 9. Issue 1 (2012) 99-132.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. G. Baum "John Paul II's Economic Teaching: A Call for Spiritual, Moral and Structural Conversions" in *The New Catholic Encyclopaedia, Jubilee vol.*, the Wojtyla years, Gale Group/University of America, Detroit, 2001, 43-51; D. Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth: From Leo XIII to Pope Francis*, Orbis Books Maryknoll NY, 2016, 265-266; David J. O'Brien & Thomas A. Shannon (eds), *Catholic Social Thought Encyclicals and Documents from Pope Leo XIII to Pope Francis*, op. cit. 424-425; Charles E. Curran et al, "Commentary on *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (On Social Concern) in K. R. Himes, *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, George University Press, Washington, DC, 429-449; C. Deane-Drummond, "Catholic Social Teaching and Ecology: Promise and Limits", op. cit. 49-62.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (December 30, 1987), n. 3.

the whole man.’ Against the background of worsening global poverty and the wide gap between the rich and poor nations, Paul VI advocated for universal access to the goods of the world.¹⁵⁹

After reviewing the originality of PP, SRS then assessed the impact of Paul VI’s teaching in light of the prevailing context of international social and economic development. In his assessment of the two decades since the promulgation of PP, John Paul II painted a grim picture of progress towards human development and lamented that Paul VI’s ‘hope for development’ remains unfulfilled.¹⁶⁰ He highlighted the widening gap between the areas of the developed North and the developing South, especially in the areas of the production and distribution of goods and services, healthcare, housing, access to safe drinking water, access to employment especially for women, life expectancy and other social and economic indicators.¹⁶¹

In response to the social problems highlighted SRS, John Paul II offered a theologically grounded vision of development namely, ‘authentic human development.’ In his theological reflection on authentic development, John Paul II critiqued the false notions of development. Specifically, the encyclical is critical of the idea of *super-development* driven by the culture of consumerism “which involves so much ‘throwing-away’ and ‘waste.’”¹⁶² In contrast to the purely materialistic concept of development which John Paul noted is rooted in ‘structures of sin’ that create and sustain injustices,¹⁶³ he articulated an alternative meaning of development. Authentic development, John Paul II posited, takes into account the bodily, spiritual and transcendent nature of human beings.¹⁶⁴ In other words, human development has a moral dimension. To underscore his theologically grounded vision of development, John Paul II appealed to the biblical image of humanity as the gardener as recorded in the book of Genesis. Again, as with much of John Paul II’s thought, he contended that true development has its basis in human participation in the image of God (Gen 1:26). On the basis of this participation, humans are charged with the task of cultivating and watching over the garden of creation since humans are ‘superior to the

¹⁵⁹ Cf. M. R. Heidt, “Development, Nations, and “The Signs of the Times”: The Historical Context of *Populorum Progressio*” in M. R. Heidt (Ed), *Journal of Moral Theology*, Vol. 6, n. 1, (Jan 2017) 1-20.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. John Paul II, SRS 12.

¹⁶¹ Cf. SRS 14.

¹⁶² SRS n. 28.

¹⁶³ Cf. SRS n. 36.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. SRS n. 29.

other creatures placed by God under his dominion.’ However, human dominion is not absolute or unlimited for “God imposes limits on human dominion and on the use of other creatures”.¹⁶⁵ In light of this biblical teaching John Paul II strongly noted that “development cannot consist only in the use, dominion over and indiscriminate possession of created things and the products of human industry, but rather in subordinating the possession, dominion and use to man's divine likeness and to his vocation to immortality”.¹⁶⁶ Here we find not only the broader theological basis for John Paul II’s vision of development (in which he criticised the mechanistic conception of contemporary development) but also the theological considerations for why development must take into account environmental responsibility.

Development in relation to environmental concern

In his theological reflection on human development, John Paul II forcefully stated that the moral character of development cannot exclude respect for the beings which constitute the natural world or cosmos in view of three theological considerations:

- Firstly, John Paul II maintained that humans “cannot use with impunity the different categories of beings...simply as one wishes, according to one’s own economic needs”.¹⁶⁷ The call for restraint on the indiscriminate use of the earth and its resources is although not explicitly stated, it could be argued that it is grounded in the inherent dignity of creation in spite of its instrumental value to humans.
- Secondly, John Paul noted that natural resources are not limited, and some are non-renewable. Therefore, they cannot be used “as if they were inexhaustible, with absolute dominion, seriously endangers their availability not only for the present generation but above all for generations to come”.¹⁶⁸
- And finally, John Paul II maintained that development especially industrialisation cannot ignore the consequences that its effects have on the quality of life. Here the pope specifically mentioned the effect of industrial pollution on the health of human beings.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ SRS n. 34.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

By way of recap, John Paul II's teaching on development reinforced and updated Paul VI's PP. In contrast to the consumeristic and transactional approach to development that is rooted in structures of sins and skewed against countries of the Global South, he articulated a theologically grounded and integrated approach to development – authentic development – that takes into account the bodily and spiritual nature of the human person. John Paul II's teaching on development as laid out in SRS gave voice to the perspective of the Global South more than any document before it. And more importantly, he introduced an environmental element to development in CST, i.e., a true concept of development cannot ignore the environmental question. Although considerably human-centred, John Paul II's introduction of the ecological element into the church's discourse on human development marked a significant milestone in CST discourse on ecological issues.

3.3.5 *Ecological conversion*

For John Paul II, the ecological crisis like other social crises has its basis in the rupturing of relationship with God the creator, with fellow human beings and with the rest of creation through sin at both individual and collective levels. In other words, the ecological crisis is also a moral problem. Since the ecological crisis is a moral issue, John Paul II insisted that it required a corresponding need for 'ecological conversion.' He hinted at the term ecological conversion in his 1990 World Day Peace Message and 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus*. In the 1990 World Day Peace Message entitled *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation* – which is John Paul II's most comprehensive intervention on the environmental question¹⁶⁹ – he declared that the ecological crisis should not only be treated as a socio-economic, or technological issue but also theological and moral.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Although John Paul II concentrated his early reflections on environmental issues in previous documents, in the text of 1990 *World Day of Prayer for Peace Message*, we see a more detailed treatise on concern for the environment that does not emphasise the language of dominion but rather an emphasis on the mutual interdependence in creation. Additionally, the document acknowledges the alarming and widespread environmental problems around the world as a crisis that requires a coordinated approach; Cf. John Paul II, *Twenty-third World Day of Peace Message: Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation* (January 1, 1990), n. 1, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html, date accessed 15/01/2022.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. *Ibid* no. 5.

The ecological crisis John Paul insisted, emanates from a number of adverse causes, poverty, war, consumeristic lifestyle of contemporary society. To mitigate the negative consequences of the crisis, he appealed for the adoption of moderate lifestyles. In *Centesimus Annus*, John Paul II alluded to the meaning of the term ecological conversion when he called for “a change of lifestyles, of models of production and consumption, and of the established structures of power which today govern societies”.¹⁷¹ Although not explicitly stated in the texts of *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation* and *Centesimus Annus*, John Paul II’s call for moderation and simplicity of lifestyle in the documents is an allusion to a type of conversion that is sensitive to the widespread destruction of the environment.

John Paul II explicitly and more forcefully used the phrase ‘ecological conversion’ at a General Audience on January 17, 2001. Against the backdrop of a grim description of how “humanity has disappointed God's expectations” by devastating, polluting and degrading the planet,¹⁷² John Paul II invoked the idea of ecological conversion. He wrote: “We must therefore encourage and support the 'ecological conversion' which in recent decades has made humanity more sensitive to the catastrophe to which it has been heading”.¹⁷³ From an ecumenical perspective, the meaning of the term was given more flesh in a joint declaration issued by Pope John Paul II and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I entitled *Common Declaration on Environmental Ethics* (2002). In light of the growing awareness of the havoc humankind has wreaked on creation, John Paul II and Bartholomew I exhorted Christians and other believers to repentance and conversion.¹⁷⁴ By calling for recognition and repentance of our sins against creation in the text of the joint declaration, John Paul II and Patriarch Bartholomew I summoned humankind to new spiritual awareness, an awareness, to borrow the words of Elizabeth Johnson in *Ask the Beast* (2014) that occasions changes not only in lifestyles but also thought patterns and moral commitments.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, op. cit., n. 58.

¹⁷² Cf. John Paul II, *General Audience Address* (January 17, 2001) n. 3.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, n. 4,

¹⁷⁴ Cf. John Paul II and the Ecumenical Patriarch His Holiness Bartholomew I, ‘*Common Declaration on Environmental Ethics* (June 10, 2002),

¹⁷⁵ Cf. E. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London, 2014, 257-258.

To sum up, the term ecological conversion was introduced into the teaching of the Church by Pope John Paul II and it means a deepened spiritual and moral awareness of the ecological crisis and the urgent need for a new way of relating to creation. This is particularly notable as the term has been widely used in Catholic environmental discourse as evidenced by the important place it occupies in Pope Francis' moral case for protecting our common home in *Laudato Si'*.

Summary: As an emerging concern in the thought of Pope John Paul II, environmental issues also found expression in his numerous other documents that were authored directly by him or were published during his pontificate. For example in the Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in America* (1999) – which touched on the destructive impact of globalisation on the environment,¹⁷⁶ John Paul II noted that “it would be very useful to have a compendium or approved synthesis of Catholic social doctrine, including a “Catechism”, which would show the connection between it and the new evangelization”.¹⁷⁷ A few years later, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace published the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004) in which the entire tenth chapter is dedicated to “Safeguarding the Environment”. In its discourse on the environment, the compendium begins with the biblical basis of environmental stewardship, the place of humans in relation to the rest of creation and proceeds to address many other environmental-related issues.¹⁷⁸

In the documents mentioned above and many others that I have not explored here, John Paul II reiterated the link between the traditional social questions of CST and responsible environmental stewardship.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. John Paul II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in America* (January 22, 1999), n. 20.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid no. 20, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_22011999_ecclesia-in-america.html, date accessed 19/01/2022.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, op. cit. (nn. 451-487), 228-245.

3.4 ECOLOGICAL CONCERN IN THE MAGISTERIAL TEACHING OF BENEDICT XVI.

The theme of safeguarding creation was also picked up by Benedict XVI who succeeded John Paul II in 2005. Regarded as one of the most accomplished theologians of his time, Pope Benedict XVI enriched Catholic teaching on the environment through thoughtful and systematic theological reflections. Ecological concern in the thought of Benedict XVI predates his papacy. Lucia A. Silecchia highlights more eloquently Benedict XVI's pre-papacy advocacy for environmental issues. She writes:

Indeed, two decades ago when many ecological issues were garnering attention for the first time, and several years before the first papal document dedicated solely to environmental issues, then-Cardinal Ratzinger had already published a series of his homilies in a book called "*In the Beginning . . .*": *A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*. Although the primary focus of this book was a theological explication of the Genesis creation accounts, it also explored the relationship between humanity, creation, and Creator, as well as the implications that those complex relationships have for environmental responsibility.¹⁷⁹

Like his predecessor, Benedict XVI did not dedicate any specific document to environmental issues, however ecological themes of varying significance form an important part of his papacy. As pointed out by W. Koenig-Bricker, the German Pontiff drew attention to the reality of the ecological challenge of our times right from the very onset of his papacy.¹⁸⁰ In his homily at his inaugural Mass as the 265th Pope, the German Pontiff accentuated the imbalance in creation caused by human destruction.¹⁸¹

Benedict XVI's ecological vision is deeply rooted in Sacred Scriptures and in the Church's tradition. In this section, I shall trace and examine ecological themes in the vision of Benedict XVI as articulated in the following documents: *Deus Caritas Est (God is Love, 2005)*; *Caritas in Veritate (Charity in Truth, 2009, hereafter referred to as CiV)*; Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus (Africa's Commitment, 2010)*; and World Day of Peace Messages (especially the World Day of Peace Messages for 2007, 2008 and 2010).

¹⁷⁹ L. A. Silecchia, "Discerning the Environmental Perspective of Pope Benedict XVI" in *Journal of Catholic Social Thought*, Vol. 4, no. 2, 2007, (227-269) 233.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. W. Koenig-Bricker, *Ten Commandments for the Environment: Pope Benedict XVI speaks out for Creation and Justice*, Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame IN, 2009, 1.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Homily at Mass for the Imposition of the Pallium and Conferral of the Fisherman's Ring for the Beginning of the Petrine ministry of the Bishop of Rome* (April 24, 2005).

For the purpose of this thesis, a brief review of ecological themes in the Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Africae Munus* and related documents of the Second Synod of the African Bishops (2009) will be helpful here.

Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation Africae Munus (Africa's Commitment)

The post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Africae Munus* is the product of the second Synod of the African Bishops that took place in Rome from October 4-25, 2009, during the pontificate of Benedict XVI. The second African Synod reflected on the African Church's commitment to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace against "the background of a flourishing evangelising mission of the church in Africa, but concurrent with a declining African social order".¹⁸² To shed light on how concern for the environment found expression in Benedict XVI's post-synodal exhortation, a few comments on the synodal process are helpful here.

- *Preparatory phase of the synod:*

The documents for the preparatory phase of the synodal process highlighted environmental problems as one of the challenges facing the African continent:

- The *Lineamenta* (Guidelines): Paragraph 78 of the guidelines for the synod harkened back to a crucial link made in *Ecclesia in Africa* between the arms trade and the plundering of Africa's resources: "For the Church-Family of God in Africa, the call for peace means demanding a stop to the arms trade in areas of conflict. Everyone knows how the parties in conflict are supplied with arms. This is a great injustice and thievery: the resources of poor countries are systematically plundered to fuel the arms trade".¹⁸³
- The *Instrumentum Laboris* (Working Paper): The working paper for the synod incorporated this theme drawing attention to the arbitrary exploitation by the industrialised countries of the world.¹⁸⁴

- *During the Synod:*

¹⁸² I. Otu, *Communion Ecclesiology and Social Transformation in African Catholicism Between Vatican Council II and African Synod II*, Pickwick Publications Eugene Or, 2020, 155.

¹⁸³ *Lineamenta for II Special Assembly for Africa: The Church in the service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace*, n. 78, Vatican City 2006.

¹⁸⁴ *Instrumentum Laboris* ("Working Paper") for Synod of Bishops Second Special Assembly for Africa. The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace, n. 72, Vatican City: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2009.

In the deliberations of the synod, the issue of protecting the continent's environment formed an important part of the discussions as evidenced in the propositions and final message of the synod:

- ***Final List of Propositions:*** Environmental issues also found expression in three of the fifty-seven final propositions for the synod.¹⁸⁵

Proposition 22: deals with the preservation of creation's integrity. In light of the Judeo-Christian belief that 'God the Creator made all things good' (cf. Gn. 1) and humans have been given the responsibility to cultivate and administer the earth, the participants of the synod noted:

We observe that many human beings, at all levels, have continued to abuse nature and destroy God's beautiful world by exploitation of natural resources beyond what is sustainable and useful. There is an irresponsible degradation and senseless destruction of the earth, which is "our mother."¹⁸⁶

They were (synod participants) particularly critical of Africa's political elite noting that

In complicity with those who exercise political and economic leadership in Africa, some businesses, governments and multinational and transnational companies engage in businesses that pollute the environment, destroy flora and fauna, thus causing unprecedented erosion and desertification of large areas of arable land. All of these threaten the survival of mankind and the entire ecosystem.¹⁸⁷

In view of this sad state of affairs, they proposed that local Churches of Africa 'promote education and awareness'; 'persuade their local and national governments to adopt policies and binding legal regulations for the protection of the environment and promote alternative and renewable sources of energy'; and 'encourage all to plant trees and treat nature and its resources, respecting the common good and the integrity of nature, with transparency and respect for human dignity.'

Proposition 29: addresses the issues of natural resources. Building on the theological premise that the 'earth is God's gift, the synod delegates after expressing thanks to God for the abundant riches and natural resources God has bestowed on Africa, lamented that

the peoples of Africa, instead of enjoying them as a blessing and a source of real development, are victims of bad public-management by local authorities and exploitation by foreign powers...Some Multinational corporations exploit the natural resources of African countries oftentimes without

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops: *Final List of Propositions* (October 23, 2009), https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20091023_elenco-prop-finali_en.html, date accessed 18/01/2022.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. propositions 22.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

concern for populations or respect for the environment, with the complicity of many privileged local people.¹⁸⁸

In view of undue exploitation of Africa's resources and the lack of ecological accountability, the synod delegates made a global clarion call for moderation in the consumeristic attitudes that drive the exploitation of the continent's resources and reformation of the economic systems that marginalises the African continent. They further appealed to the international community to formulate a legal framework so as to ensure that the local populations benefit from revenues accrued from the continent's resources.

Proposition 30: addressed environmental issues from the standpoint of land security and access to water. The synod delegates against the backdrop of the arbitrary exploitation of vast swathes of the continent's fertile land and water resource by unscrupulous exploiters by both local and foreign investors urged that:

- the Church in Africa seeks information and learn about land and water issues in order to educate the People of God and enable them to challenge unjust decisions in these matters;
- all negotiations on land deals be conducted in full transparency and with the participation of the local communities who may be affected;
- land alienation deals should not be contracted out nor signed without the free, prior and informed consent of the local communities concerned, nor should people forfeit their land without proper compensation;
- promote the professional formation of youth in farming and the raising of animals as a way to stem the uncontrolled flight from the village to the cities;
- the models of agricultural production respect the environment and not contribute to climate change, soil depletion and the exhaustion of drinkable water reserves;
- food production for export not endanger food security and sovereignty the needs of future generations;
- traditional land rights be respected and recognized by the law; and

¹⁸⁸ Ibid proposition 29.

– water not be exploited as a private economic commodity without due attention to people’s interests.

▪ ***Final Message of the Synod***

Notwithstanding the detailed attention given to environmental issues in the preparatory documents of the synod, in the final message of the synod, environmental concern is mentioned only once in paragraph 33. Could it be that concern for environmental issue was overtaken by other pressing challenges? In this document, reference to environmental issues is made in the context of a demand to multinational companies “to stop their criminal devastation of the environment in their greedy exploitation of natural resources”.¹⁸⁹

▪ ***Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation***

In his synthesis of the deliberations of the second African Synod of Bishops articulated in *Africae Munus*, Pope Benedict XVI raised the question of caring for the environment in the third section of chapter two under the subheading ‘The African Vision of Life’. In the section, Benedict discusses respect for creation within the framework of the interconnected web of life in which the visible and invisible co-exist.¹⁹⁰ Despite the scant attention given to environmental issues in *Africae Munus*, by discussing concern for the environment within the theme of ‘African vision of life,’ I believe Benedict XVI is giving deference to the African worldview which emphasises the interrelationship between the human and other creatures.

From the above-mentioned documents, I have drawn the following thematic inferences from Benedict XVI’s teaching on the environment:

3.4.1 *The environment is God’s gift*

Benedict XVI’s theological vision is firmly anchored on the doctrine of creation, a subject that is close to his heart. In his pre-papal reflection, he decried the lesser status given to creation

¹⁸⁹ *Final Message of the Second Special Assembly for African of the Synod of Bishops*, (October 28, 2009), n.33, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20091023_message-synod_en.html, date accessed 18/01/2022.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Africae Munus – On the Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace* (November 19, 2011), nn. 69-87.

theology in “catechesis, preaching, and even theology”.¹⁹¹ The theologian Pope draws on the doctrine of creation to make a case for maintaining ecological balance in creation. In *Deus Caritas Est*, Benedict XVI brings to the fore the centrality of the belief in God as the source of the created order and that God’s creation is very dear to him.¹⁹² Benedict further elaborates his theocentric vision of creation in CiV when he calls for the judicious use of nature’s goods:

The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it, we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole. When nature, including the human being, is viewed as the result of mere chance or evolutionary determinism, our sense of responsibility wanes. In nature, the believer recognizes the wonderful result of God's creative activity, which we may use responsibly to satisfy our legitimate needs, material or otherwise, while respecting the intrinsic balance of creation. If this vision is lost, we end up either considering nature an untouchable taboo or, on the contrary, abusing it. Neither attitude is consonant with the Christian vision of nature as the fruit of God's creation.¹⁹³

In addition to the environment being God’s gift to all of humankind, which behoves humans not to arbitrarily exploit its resource for the sake of the poor and future generations, Benedict XVI by means of an exegetical analysis of the Pauline epistles (Romans 1:20 & Ephesians 1: 9-10 and Colossians 1: 19-2), noted that the natural environment also communicates the goodness of the creator. He furthered that there is also hope for its salvation in Christ at the end of time.¹⁹⁴

3.4.2 ***Responsible Stewardship over Nature***

In light of the characterisation of the environment as God’s gift, Benedict XVI advocates for the maintenance of the harmonious balance in creation as intended by the Creator through responsible stewardship. Benedict XVI advocates for maintaining a healthy balance between enjoying the fruits of the earth and protecting its integrity. As stewards, humans are called to be caregivers and not despotic rulers over nature. This ethos of responsibility according to Benedict XVI, should be guided by the principle of solidarity and intergenerational justice.¹⁹⁵

Thus, the ethos of responsible stewardship in the vision of Benedict XVI is grounded in God’s covenantal relationship with humans. In light of this covenantal relationship, Benedict XVI posits

¹⁹¹ J. Ratzinger, *“In the Beginning...”: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, B. Ramsey (Trans), Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids MI, 1995, ix.

¹⁹² Cf. Benedict XVI, *Caritatis in Veritate*, n.9

¹⁹³ Ibid. n. 48. Op. cit.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. ibid n. 48.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. ibid.

that the relationship of humans with the natural environment “should mirror the creative love of God, from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying”.¹⁹⁶ This covenantal relationship offers an ethical roadmap for humankind’s relationship with the environment. Put differently, Benedict XVI’s appeal for a renewed commitment to environmental responsibility is a reminder that the fate of the earth is closely bound to the fate of humanity, for there is a delicate interdependence between humans and the natural environment.

3.4.3 *The Delicate Nexus between Human Well-being and Preserving Nature’s Integrity*

Benedict XVI envisions an intricate direct and reciprocal relationship between human well-being and caring for nature’s integrity, what he calls ‘natural ecology’ and ‘human ecology.’ Drawing on this link, he emphasises the moral and ethical dimension of ecological concern:

The way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself, and vice versa. This invites contemporary society to a serious review of its lifestyle, which, in many parts of the world, is prone to hedonism and consumerism, regardless of their harmful consequences. What is needed is an effective shift in mentality which can lead to the adoption of *new life-styles* “in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings and investments.”¹⁹⁷

Benedict XVI connects the protection of nature and the stability of human solidarity; violation of one affects the other, with disastrous consequences.¹⁹⁸ He elaborates further on the links between protecting nature and human solidarity in his 2010 World Day of Peace message. In the text, Benedict XVI directly links the theme of peace and stability of human community with protecting the integrity of nature noting that offsetting ecological harmony can result in grave consequences for the peaceful co-existence of humankind.¹⁹⁹ This particularly impacts the poor living in some of the most deprived areas of the world. The evidence of which, as Benedict XVI mentioned, is seen in the forced displacements of people living in degraded land, conflicts involving natural resources and unemployment among young people.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., n.51.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Message for the Celebration of World Day of Peace* (January 1, 2010), n. 1.

²⁰⁰ Benedict XVI, *World Day of Peace Message, If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation* (2010), n. 4.

3.4.4 *The Imperative for Environmental Advocacy*

In the face of the outsized impacts of the environmental crisis on the poor, Benedict XVI called on the church not to remain indifferent to environmental injustice. With respect to the African continent where the link between poverty and environmental destruction is manifestly visible, Benedict XVI puts forward the need for the church to be an advocate for both the poor and the environment in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation on the second General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa. He writes:

Together with the Synod Fathers, I ask all the members of the Church to work and speak out in favour of an economy that cares for the poor and is resolutely opposed to an unjust order which, under the pretext of reducing poverty, has often helped to aggravate it. God has given Africa important natural resources. Given the chronic poverty of its people, who suffer the effects of exploitation...

Some businessmen and women, governments and financial groups are involved in programmes of exploitation which pollute the environment and cause unprecedented desertification. Serious damage is done to nature, to the forests, to flora and fauna, and countless species risk extinction. All of this threatens the entire ecosystem and consequently the survival of humanity. I call upon the Church in Africa to encourage political leaders to protect such fundamental goods as land and water for the human life of present and future generations and for peace between peoples.²⁰¹

In the above-cited text, Benedict does not only link poverty and environmental concern, he clearly calls for prophetic advocacy on the part of the Church. Here Benedict XVI ties the Church's social justice concern with concern for the environment. Although in my view the imperative for environmental advocacy in the post-synodal exhortation received only a passing reference, the fact it was mentioned is quite significant. In the final list of propositions from the second African Synod which I mentioned earlier, the issue of advocacy on environmental-related issues formed an important part of the discussions indicating that it was a pressing concern during the synod's deliberations. That it was not fully explored in the formal magisterial document of the synod was a missed opportunity in my view. Environmental destruction on the continent has a direct bearing on the other forms of pressing injustices that the document dealt with – endemic poverty, bad governance, corruption, human rights abuse, ethnic rivalry/conflicts etc. In a continent where religious beliefs exert a profound influence on social life, the role of a religious prophetic voice on pressing social challenges cannot be overemphasised. For example, in the 1990s in what is

²⁰¹ Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus* nn. 79-80.

referred to as Africa's second liberation, religious leaders played significant roles in the struggle for democratic governance on the continent.²⁰² If the Church in Africa (Sierra Leone) is to give voice to the issues of environmental injustice and its impact on the poor, I believe it needs to re-awaken its prophetic commitment by advocating both within and beyond our church to encourage, appeal to, and even challenge leaders to care for the wellbeing of the environment.

Summary: With his conception of the whole creation as God's gift, Benedict XVI brought intense theological persuasion to the Church's intervention on environmental issues. In Benedict XVI's theological synthesis on the environment, we witness an expansion of the Church's teaching regarding the environment and a gradual shift from the language of dominion and stewardship to that of the integrity of nature independent of its instrumental benefits to humans.

3.5 A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S TEACHING ON THE ENVIRONMENT PRE-*LAUDATO SI'*

In the foregone exposition, I have examined pre-*Laudato Si'* magisterial teaching on the environment. I also discussed some of the key social issues within which the environmental question has been addressed. Over the last few decades, the Church's teaching on the environment has undergone a progression, from the language of dominion to responsible stewardship, culminating in the ethic of care in *Laudato Si'*. I now offer critical remarks on the Church's magisterial teachings on the environment in the period under review.

As I stated earlier, concern for the environment was not a major topical issue in CST and Catholic theology in general when it came to the fore in the second half of the 20th century. However, once the Church started lending its voice to the issue in the early 1970s, it increasingly began to emphasise that the environmental question is also a moral issue and therefore it needed a moral response. To this end, Catholic magisterial teaching began to articulate its response by appealing to the Church's theological heritage and social ethics. The Church's involvement with environmental issues in the pre-*Laudato Si'* era has brought a distinctive moral voice to ecological issues. In doing so, it has brought many positive elements to the global response to the ecological challenges of our times. Among these positive elements, the following stand out to me. Firstly,

²⁰² Cf. C. Bodewes, *Civil Society in Africa: The Role of a Catholic Parish in a Kenyan Slum*, Cambridge Scholar Publishing, Newcastle Upon Tyne, 2013.

with insights from theological categories such as creation, incarnation, redemption and others, the Church has affirmed that the whole of creation is intrinsically good and that there is an interdependence between humans and other creatures. Therefore, granted humans occupy a privileged position among the members of the planetary community, they do not have a licence to arbitrarily exploit the earth. Rather, by virtue of their privileged position, humans are called to safeguard creation.

Secondly, the principles in which the Church's teaching office frames its teaching on the environment; human dignity, solidarity, the common good, option for the poor, the dignity of work and workers' rights, are principles that apply universally to all people everywhere, not just Catholics. These principles particularly speak to the yearnings and aspirations of impoverished people in underdeveloped nations such as Sierra Leone. Thirdly, the magisterial reflections on the environment do not impose ironclad moral or ethical rules as to how communities should act in relation to safeguarding the environment. Rather, they provide ethical frameworks from which Catholics and non-Catholics can draw insights and practices that best suit their concrete situations.

Despite the positive elements of the Church's distinctive moral contribution to the ecological issue, it should be noted that the magisterial theological and moral reflections on the environment during the pre-*Laudato Si'* era were conditioned by the socio-ecclesiological context in which they were articulated. Therefore, the Church's response to the ecological question (as is the case with its response to other social questions) has some blind spots and weaknesses. Notable among them is the almost exclusively anthropocentric emphasis in these reflections and failure to incorporate all the insights from regional ecclesiastical documents such as the African voices of experience at the Synod for Africa into papal magisterial documents, an ecclesial blind-spot that Pope Francis is attempting to address.

Many ecological-minded theologians and ethicists have critiqued the anthropocentric focus in Catholic magisterial teaching on the environment before *Laudato Si'* was promulgated the details of which I will not belabour here. However, I will highlight a few of those more measured critiques. For example, Thomas Nairn in his essay "The Roman Catholic Social Tradition

and the Question of Ecology” (1994), identifies three related phases of the Catholic Church’s interventions on ecological issues; the period of ‘natural order’, the period of ‘human interdependence’ and the period of ‘human co-creation’. In each of these periods, Nairn notes, the Church discusses the question of the environment within the broader context of justice and the common good.²⁰³ In his reflection on the third phase, the period of human co-creation, Nairn notes that it is within this period that the Church started moving away from the instrumental conception of the rest of material creation to the notion that other creatures have intrinsic value interdependent of their usefulness to humans.²⁰⁴ Despite the call to respect the integrity of the entire ecosystem, Nairn contends that the Church’s teaching on the environment is situated within the anthropocentric paradigm. He writes:

When one looks at the Church’s contemporary social tradition as described above, one sees certain constants within all three phases: the centrality of the notion of the common good, a corresponding notion of harmony and order, human interdependence, a distinction between the instrumental value of material creation and the intrinsic value of humanity, and a setting of the ecological question within that of human society. In spite of differences, in each period the ecological question soon risks becoming instead a question of how humans relate to one another. As important as this consideration is it is insufficient to ground a significant ecological ethic. Indeed it suggests that the conflict between what is good for nature and what is good for poor people and poor nations will very well continue.²⁰⁵

From the citation above, it is evident that Nairn sees the human-centric focus of the Church’s teaching on the environment in the period of a more ecological awakening as incapable of being fully attentive to the magnitude of the ecological crisis. Hence, he argues for an ecological ethic that affirms the intrinsic value of nature and sees humans as part of the broader ecosystem.²⁰⁶

The Irish theologian Donal Dorr offers a more balanced critique of the anthropocentric paradigm prevalent in Catholic social thought on the environment in the pre-Francis pontificate. In the recently revised edition of his book, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth* (2016), Dorr

²⁰³ Cf. J. Nairn, “The Roman Catholic Social Tradition and the Question of Ecology” in R. N. Fragomeni & J. Pawlikowski (Eds), *The Ecological Challenge: Ethical, Liturgical, and Spiritual Responses*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville MN, 1994, 27-38.

²⁰⁴ Cf. Ibid. 36

²⁰⁵ Ibid. 37.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

proffers a rebuttal of the anthropocentric focus in magisterial teaching on the environment.²⁰⁷ However, he notes that the anthropocentric emphasis in papal teaching especially as articulated by John Paul II and Benedict XVI is a nuanced anthropocentricity that demands humanity to respect the integrity of nature as intended by God and therefore provides no justification for the arbitrary exploitation of the earth.²⁰⁸ To underpin this point, Dorr appeals to the theological legacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI:

Precisely because John Paul and Benedict are good theologians, their anthropocentric approach is located within a God-centred vision. If committed Christians and other people of goodwill take seriously the teaching of these popes on environmental issues, they can help to bring about 'ecological conversion' that the popes call for and can play their part in solving the environmental problems that our world now faces.²⁰⁹

Despite averring that Catholic magisterial teaching on environmental issues cannot be accused of justifying human exploitation of nature, Dorr notes that it fails to adopt a cosmic vision until Pope Francis was elected to the papacy.²¹⁰ Taking a cue from Dorr, I maintain that granted Catholic magisterial teaching on the environment prior to *Laudato Si'* was anthropocentrically biased, it must be understood in the context of then-prevailing anthropocentric attitudes about human relations to the natural world and also against the backdrop of the attempts by some within the ecological movement to elevate other creatures as more important than the human person.²¹¹

²⁰⁷ In *Option for the Poor and Option for the Earth*, Donal Dorr emphasises that although his analysis focuses mainly on Catholic Social Teaching (CST) – documents from popes and conferences of bishops – he is nonetheless attentive to Catholic social thought – i.e., the wider body of theological reflection and writings by theologians on social justice issues. This clarification is very important for Catholic social thought is broader than CST. Although Catholic Social thought has its basis in CST, it goes beyond the normative framework of Catholic magisterial teaching on social issues. Catholic social thought offers dynamic ethical analyses of CST themes and contextualises them in the concrete existential settings of members of the Church. Thus, Catholic social tradition enriches CST and contributes to its development: Cf. D. Dorr, *Option for Poor and for the Earth*, op. cit., 6-7.

²⁰⁸ Cf. *ibid.* 383.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ *Ibid.* 383-384.

²¹¹ In articulating the Church's position on environmental issues, John Paul II and Benedict XVI sought to uphold human dignity in opposition to the negation of human dignity by some portion of the environmental movement. Among the most prominent critics of human dignity is the Australian ethicist Peter Singer, who has not only spoken against the biblical story of creation and its emphasis on human uniqueness, he has also advocated for the slowing down of human population growth in order to combat poverty and environmental degradation: Cf. G. Cole, "Singer on Christianity: Characterised or Caricature?" in G. Preece (Ed), *Rethinking Singer: A Christian Critique*, InterVarsity Press, Downer Grove IL, 2002, 95-105. Openly misanthropic worldviews have continued to find expression in the works of David Benatar and Trevor Hedberg. In his book, *Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming into*

In addition to the anthropocentric bias, Catholic magisterial teaching on the environment in the pre Pope Francis era appears to lack a sense of urgency with regards to the ecological crisis. This is evidenced by the fact the issue was not addressed on account of its own merit and the gravity of the situation. The ecological question was always discussed through the lens of other social questions.

To sum up, the voice of the pre-Pope Francis Catholic magisterial response to the environmental question notwithstanding its limitations brought an invaluable and distinctive perspective to the issue.

Concluding Remarks

The aim of this chapter has been to trace and examine ecological-related themes in pre-*Laudato Si'* Catholic magisterial teaching. From my reflections on some of the key papal pronouncements and interventions in the period under review, it has emerged that although the environmental question was not directly addressed at Vatican II, the council's call for the Church to engage with important social questions (signs of the times) provided the framework for post-conciliar magisterial engagement with environmental issues. In the years following the Council, concern for the environment has been addressed in relation to other social questions such as solidarity with the poor, peace, workers' rights, human and development in the magisterial teaching of the Church.

The discussions in this chapter have also shown that magisterial teaching on environmental issues, beginning with Pope Paul VI, has gone through historical and theological progression with varying emphases. Despite the humancentric biases and blind spots in the pre-

Existence, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006, Benatar espouses a straightforward misanthropic anti-natalist view arguing that since human life is meaningless and characterised by suffering, it better not to come into existence; Cf. P. Lyne, "Is It Ecologically Just to Be? Anti-Natalism in Eco-Deconstruction" in *Oxford Literary Review*, Vol. 38, no. 1, 2016, 99-126. More recently, Trevor Hedberg has linked global population size to environmental problems. According Hedberg, the growing human population is not only the major cause of environmental (such as climate change and loss of biodiversity), but also large human population make it difficult to tackle the problem: Cf. T. Hedberg, *The Environmental Impact of Overpopulation: The Ethics of Procreation*, Routledge, New York, 2020.

Laudato Si' magisterial reflections on ecological issues, they provided the sources which Pope Francis' environmental-themed encyclical *Laudato Si'* draws from.

My reflections in this chapter have also shown that: a) concern for the well-being of the environment is no longer a marginal issue in the Catholic Church's social engagement b) the proper use of the environment and its resources must be seen from the perspective of justice, development and the peace and stability of the world, especially in the impoverished and deprived parts of the world.

CHAPTER FOUR

AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: INSIGHTS FROM POPE FRANCIS' INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

Introduction

Recall that this thesis seeks to assess environmental justice concerns or the lack thereof in the pastoral priorities of the local Catholic Church in Sierra Leone and to argue for the integration of environmental concern and care in its mission.

In the preceding chapter, I examined the emergence and development of Catholic magisterial teaching on the environment before the promulgation of *Laudato Si'*. The chapter established that although Catholic magisterial teaching on the environment in the said period offered a distinctive moral voice on the issue, its almost exclusive anthropocentric emphasis failed to speak to the gravity of the situation.

Over the decades, Catholic theologians and ethicists have argued that a broader ecologically oriented framework is required if the Church is to holistically respond to the ecological question, an approach that will give a more balanced understanding of humans' relationship with nature.²¹² With the publication of Pope Francis' environmental-themed encyclical LS, the question arises whether the church is moving away from its human-centric focus in relation to the ecological question to a broader cosmic vision. This chapter focuses on the theological hinge of my argument namely an integrated approach to social and environmental justice in view of the socio-ecclesial context of Sierra Leone. In light of the findings of my empirical research outlined in the second chapter of this work, this chapter follows Pope Francis' line of argument in his delineation of integral ecology which avers that the challenges of alleviating poverty, injustice and environmental degradation are intricately interwoven.

Having established in the preceding chapter that concern for environmental issues is no longer a marginal issue in the global church, I argue in this chapter that Pope Francis' delineation of integral ecology as articulated in LS offers an opportunity to the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone

²¹² Cf. D. P. Scheid, *Cosmic Common Good: Religious Grounds for Ecological Ethics*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2016, 25.

to champion the cause of ecological sensitivity by adopting an integrated approach to social and environmental justice issues in its social mission. As in the case of the preceding chapter, the discussions in this chapter will respond to research question two – how can the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone operationalise the teaching of the Church on ecology in its social mission?

The chapter comprises four main sections. In the first section, I shall provide an overview of the background of Pope Francis' encyclical LS. In the second section, I shall discuss and analyse Pope Francis' delineation of the concept of integral ecology as articulated in LS. And in the third section, I will explore the moral imperative of Pope Francis' integral ecology for an integrated approach to social and environmental justice. In the final section, I will highlight some emergent insights from Pope Francis' call for an integrated approach to social and environmental justice and its relevance for the social-ecclesial context of Sierra Leone.

4.1 BACKGROUND TO *LAUDATO SI'*

The pontificate of Pope Francis has brought renewed attention to the Catholic Church's concern for the moral responsibility for the environment. In this first section, I discuss the general overview of Pope Francis' encyclical LS. I begin by discussing Pope Francis' contribution to the mainstreaming of ecological concern in CST. Secondly, I review some of the influences on Pope Francis' vision and how those influences permeate LS. Thirdly, I situate LS within the context of Catholic social teaching. Fourthly, I provide a brief synthesis of the structure of the encyclical and how it has been received in religious and secular circles since its publication. I conclude with a critical appraisal of the encyclical. My aim in this subsection is to highlight some of the key elements of LS that will underpin my argument on why the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone should integrate concern for the environment in its mission.

4.1.1 *Pope Francis' Contribution to the Mainstreaming of Ecological Concern in CST*

Within Catholic magisterial discourse on environmental issues, the pontificate of Pope Francis has brought unprecedented attention to the church's concern for the environment. As Celia Deane-Drummond has rightly stated, the emblematic characteristic of Francis' pontificate is his

determination to bring a new lens to poverty and peacemaking and concern for creation.²¹³ Reflections on the environment have featured prominently in his magisterial teaching more than any other Pope before him. In EG, Francis gave us a preview of his intention to make ecological concern one of his papacy's main concerns. In the document, Pope Francis categorised the environment as one of the weak and defenceless beings that need to be protected and cared for.²¹⁴

In continuity with the church's teaching on the care for the environment before him, Pope Francis conceives of the cosmos as a delicate and complex network of interconnectedness between humanity and the natural environment. Invoking Saint Francis of Assisi, the great Saint of the poor and patron of the environment, in whose honour he chose his papal name, Pope Francis exhorts all "to watch over and protect the fragile world in which we live, and all its peoples".²¹⁵

4.1.2 ***Brief Insights into the Major Influences on Pope Francis' Thought***

In order to understand Pope Francis' teaching on care for the environment as articulated in LS, it is important to understand some of the major influences on his thought which he brings to bear on his ecclesiological priorities. Among the major influences on his thought which are writ large in LS are:

- *Jesuit heritage*

Pope Francis is the first member of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) to be elected to the papacy. One of the core charisms of the Jesuit Order is the practice of discernment which has its roots in the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. Discernment is the constant effort to avail oneself to the guidance of the Spirit of God and allowing the Spirit to illuminate the concrete reality of everyday life. Discernment links the life of prayer and the art of decision-making.²¹⁶ Francis has consistently drawn on his Ignatian spirituality of discernment in his homilies and writings. In EG,

²¹³ Cf. C. Deane-Drummond, "Pope Francis: Priest and Prophet in the Anthropocene" in *Environmental Humanities*, Volume 8 no.2, 2016, 256–262.

²¹⁴ Cf. Francis, EG n. 215,

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, n. 216.

²¹⁶ Cf. E. Regan, "The Bergoglian Principles: Pope Francis' Dialectical Approach to Political Theology" in *Religions* Vol. 10, Issue 12 (December 2019), 1-16.

Francis makes multiple references to the practice of discernment in its various conceptual frameworks as an itinerary for the Church at both local and universal levels in decision-making.²¹⁷ As a process that seeks to understand the root causes of social issues, ecclesial discernment offers valuable tools for local churches like Sierra Leone to unearth the causes of social problems in order to address them in light of the Gospel.

In LS Francis employs the practice of discernment as we shall see later in this subsection, in the first chapter of the encyclical, where he outlines the decaying and degrading status of our common home.

- *Saint Francis of Assisi*

Pope Francis' ecclesiological priorities are also heavily influenced by the twelfth-century itinerant preacher and founder of the Franciscan Order St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226). As explained by Leonardo Boff; "We can be sure that when Cardinal Bergoglio chose this name, he wanted to signal a project for the Church in accord with the spirit of St. Francis..."²¹⁸ St. Francis of Assisi is well known for his love of nature, concern for the poor and as a man of peace and dialogue.

Some of the prominent themes of Pope Francis' papacy such as concern for the poor, ecological awareness and respect and tolerance for other religions mirror the life and preaching of St. Francis of Assisi. From EG to the two social encyclicals Pope Francis has written, he invokes St. Francis to emphasise concern for the poor, the natural world and human interdependence.²¹⁹ In LS and *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis also references St. Francis of Assisi as a source of his inspiration for his teaching on protecting the natural world and repairing and enriching relationships across the human family.²²⁰

²¹⁷ Cf. EG n. 33.

²¹⁸ L. Boff, *Francis of Rome and Francis of Assisi: A New Springtime for the Church*, Orbis Books, 2014, 43.

²¹⁹ Cf. EG 216.

²²⁰ Cf. LS 10 and *Fratelli Tutti*, nn. 1-4.

- *The Argentine brand of Liberation Theology*

As the first pope from Latin America, Francis' papal priorities are also heavily influenced by the contextual theology of Latin America especially the contextual theology of his native Argentina— *teología del pueblo* (theology of the people). The 'theology of the people' is a variant of liberation theology that was developed in Argentina. It emerged from Argentina's Episcopal Conference's efforts to contextualise the teachings of Vatican II.²²¹ The theology of the people as a brand of liberation theology developed through the decisive influence of Lucio Gera whom Pope Francis holds in high esteem.²²²

The methods and emphasis of the theology of the people are particularly evident in EG and LS. For instance, insights from this Argentine brand of liberation theology are evident in the analysis of the economic and social structures that sustain the dehumanisation of the poor and degradation of the environment.²²³

- *See-judge-act methodology*

Another major influence on Francis' thought is the methodological style he has frequently employed in his social analysis namely, the inductive method of *see-judge-act*. This methodology was developed by Belgian Cardinal Joseph Cardijn (1882–1967), who as a priest had worked with poor workers and founded the Young Christian Workers. In his work with young Catholics, Cardijn used the method as a framework for linking faith to social action. Acting upon Cardijn's inspiration, Pope John XXIII endorsed and recommended the method in his 1961 encyclical *Mater et Magistra* as an ideal way to read and respond to the signs of the times.²²⁴

In the wake of Vatican II, the three-stage methodology of *see-judge-act* gained prominence and extensive use in the Latin American ecclesial context, especially in liberation theology and

²²¹ Cf. G. C Lecour, "The "Theology of the People" in the Pastoral Theology of Jorge Mario Bergoglio in B.Y. Lee & T. L. Knoebel (Eds), *Discovering Pope Francis: The Roots of Jorge Mario Bergoglio's Thinking*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville MN 2019, 42-53.

²²² Cf. W. Kasper, *Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love: Theological and Pastoral Perspectives*, Paulist Press, New York, 2015, 16.

²²³ Cf. LS n. 49.

²²⁴ Cf. E. M. Brigham, *See, Judge, Act: Catholic Social Teaching and Service learning*, Anselm Academic, Winona Mn, 2013, 10-18; see also John XXIII, Encyclical Letter: *Mater et Magistra – On Christianity and Social Progress* (May 15, 1961), n. 236.

base ecclesial communities.²²⁵ The impetus for the widespread use of the see-judge-act method was provided at the 1968 meeting of the Latin America regional Episcopal Conference (CELAM) in Medellín, Columbia. In their bid to integrate the teachings of Vatican II in the context of Latin America, the Latin American Bishops used the see-judge-act methodology to address the pervasive social and structural injustice in the South American sub-continent. The Medellín conference deliberations and the post-conference documents laid the foundation for what would become known as liberation theology.²²⁶

Francis draws inspiration from the See-Judge-Act methodology to organise his thoughts in LS. In LS the said methodology is reflected in the structure of the encyclical. Firstly, he uses the first part of the methodology – see – to provide a moral diagnosis of the intertwined social and environmental crisis. Secondly, Francis critically evaluates, challenges and judges the twin crisis in light of the Judeo-Christian tradition. And finally, Francis calls for a concerted effort from every sphere of human endeavour to address the twin crisis, environmental and social.

4.1.3 *Ecclesial and Social Context of Laudato Si'*

Francis situates LS within the context of CST.²²⁷ In paragraph 15 he writes: “It is my hope that this Encyclical Letter, which is now added to the body of the Church’s social teaching, can help us to acknowledge the appeal, immensity and urgency of the challenge we face”.²²⁸ Although the document is ground-breaking as far as the socio-ecological debate is concerned, it is consistent with the long tradition of the Christian faith to speak to issues of serious import in the social, political, and economic spheres.²²⁹

²²⁵ Cf. K. W. Irwin, *A Commentary on Laudato Si'*, op. cit. 13.

²²⁶ Cf. A. L. Peterson & M. A. Vasquez “The New Evangelization in Latin American Perspective” in *Cross Currents*, vol. 48, no. 3, 1998, 311–329.

²²⁷ CST is a corpus of thought (papal, conciliar and synodal teachings) that addresses social, political, economic and international order. CST has been developed over the past hundred years. It originated with Pope Leo XIII 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*. Subsequent popes and curia offices have continued to develop and enrich CST as a moral and prophetic tool that links faith with the social sphere. Like other components of church teaching, CST is grounded in Sacred Scripture, tradition, philosophy (reason and experience) and other sciences. Cf. J. B. Hehir, “Catholic Social Teaching” in R. P. McBrien (Ed), *Encyclopaedia of Catholicism*, op. cit. 280-284.

²²⁸ Cf. LS n. 15

²²⁹ Cf. C. P. Vogt, “*Laudato Si'*: Social Analysis and Political Engagement in the Tradition of Catholic Social Thought” in D. O’Hara et al (Ed), *Integral Ecology for a More Sustainable World: Dialogue with Laudato Si'*, Lexington Books, Lanham MD, 2020, (13-27) 13.

Addressed not only to Catholics and other Christians but to every person living on planet earth (LS 3, 7), LS summons the entire human community to care for and protect the earth our common home. As I have mentioned above, in the Catholic tradition, thematic references to environmental issues have progressively been developed in CST over the years, especially in post-Vatican II Church theological reflections. Although the social and ecological questions raised in LS are not new, in Francis' pontificate the said issues have found renewed expression and emphasis. The encyclical incorporates some of the traditional themes of CST such as human dignity, the common good, option for the poor, rights and responsibilities, governance and economic justice, stewardship of creation, integral development etc. However, even though Pope Francis affirms the traditional focus of CST in LS, he broadens some of the important social questions providing fresh insights and renewed emphasis in view of the recurring theme of the document; 'everything is interconnected.'

In addition to the ecclesial context discussed above, it is important to note that LS must also be understood within the context of the secular debate on the link between human activities and environmental damage, a debate that has given rise to a growing scientific consensus that humans are responsible for the global ecological crisis and its related effects such as climate change.²³⁰ Also, the social sciences and humanities have repeatedly shown that there is an intricate interplay between social and environmental degradation.²³¹ Following scientific consensus as acknowledged in the first chapter of the LS, Francis highlights the danger of disregarding the connection between social justice and environmental justice.²³² Thus, LS forms part of the wider mobilization by faith groups and secular intergovernmental institutions to stir up action on the ecological crisis. The timing of the encyclical's promulgation is very important. It was published just before two major international conferences were held to address issues directly connected to the ecological crisis – the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit

²³⁰ For example, in an article published in 2013, a team of scientists led John Cook, building on Naomi Oreskes's 2004 findings – "*The Scientific Consensus on Climate Change*" in which she peer-reviewed scientific papers on climate change from 1993-2003 – established that 97% of scientists agree on the reality of human induced (anthropogenic) climate change. Cf. J. Cook et al, "Quantifying the Consensus on Anthropogenic Global Warming in the Scientific Literature", *Environmental Research Letters* (June 2013), Vol. 8, No. 2.

²³¹ Cf. P. Robbins, *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*, Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester, 2012.

²³² Cf LS nn. 11, 70.

(New York, September 2015) and the Paris Climate Conference (December 2015). It appears Francis deliberately wanted to provide moral guidance and impetus to the international discourse on contemporary socio-ecological issues. At the Paris Climate Conference, the encyclical was approvingly acknowledged as an important contribution to the worldwide debate on climate change.²³³

I make reference to both the ecclesial and secular context of LS to illustrate the fact that concern for the environment is no longer a marginal issue in the religious and secular spheres. The ecological crisis is directly impacting real human beings, real communities and real societies and its out-sized impacts are particularly being felt by the poor and underdeveloped countries such as Sierra Leone.

4.1.4 ***Overview of the Structure and Outline of LS***

The encyclical LS takes its name from the invocation of St. Francis of Assisi in his *Canticle of Creatures*, a song in praise of God for the beauty of creation and the interdependence of creatures. The document is divided into 246 paragraphs and after a brief introduction in which Pope Francis maps out the itinerary of the encyclical (LS), he structures the document into six chapters all linked together by the common thread of “everything in the world is connected”. By discussing the structural outline of LS, I aim to give a preview of some of the thematic issues raised in the document that will inform the arguments in this project.

The first chapter entitled, *What is happening to our common home?* (§17-61), examines the bigger picture of the alarming state of our common home. With specific facts and details from well-informed recent scientific data and analysis, Francis reviews the major human-induced causes and impact of the socio-environmental issues affecting the world. The main argument of this section is that humanity faces both an environmental crisis and a social crisis and that the two are inextricably linked (LS 49).

²³³ Cf. D. Lane, *Theology and Ecology in Dialogue: The Wisdom of Laudato Si'*, Messenger Publications, Dublin, 2020, 12.

The second chapter – *The Gospel of creation* (§ 62-100) presents the theological vision of the natural world. Drawing insights from the Judeo-Christian scripture and tradition, Francis uses them as a template to discuss the basic themes of what existence on earth constitutes.

The third chapter – *The human roots of the ecological crisis* (nn. 101-136) - further examines and deepens the discussion outlined in the first chapter, noting that “It would hardly be helpful to describe symptoms without acknowledging the human origins of the ecological crisis” (LS 101). Francis traces the underlying causes of the two-sided crisis to a misguided anthropocentrism that pervades both religious and secular spheres.

The fourth chapter – *Integral ecology* (§137-162) explores the central theme of the encyclical. In this chapter, Francis articulates an ecological theology in response to the mindset that underpins the myth of unlimited material progress. The concept of integral ecology considers every aspect of the ecological crisis, bringing together environmental ecology, economic ecology, social ecology, and cultural ecology.

In chapters 5 & 6, Francis advances proposals for dialogue and action at local, national, and international levels. These proposals go beyond mere general encouragement to engage in dialogue and listening to each other. The fifth chapter – *Lines of approach and action* (§ 163-201) attends to the policy implications of Francis’ ecological vision. He appraises the successes and failures of the already established conventions on environmental protection at national and international levels (LS 164-169). He laments the poor implementation of decisions already agreed upon at world summits on the environment. In view of this, Francis advocates for consensus building through honest dialogue and transparent decision-making processes based upon a conviction that earth is a global common good and that humanity is one people living in a common home.

In the final chapter of the document – *Ecological Education and Spirituality* (§ 202-246), Francis shifts attention to the practical details of his ecological vision. Laws and policies according to Francis are useless if they are not accompanied by a change in lifestyles, attitudes, and convictions. To this end, he challenges the human community to adopt an ecological education and spirituality. The educational paradigm which Francis proposes cuts across all sectors of social

life, the family, institutions, social groups, and Christian communities. This model of education entails raising awareness about the negative impact of consumerism and proposes a new way (ethical) of thinking' about life, society, and our relationship with nature.

4.1.5 ***How has LS been Received?***

Since its publication in 2015, the encyclical has generated a wide range of reactions not only within the Catholic community but also in interfaith circles and in the larger global community. The document received global media coverage, and, on the whole, it has largely received a positive response from scientists, academics, politicians, representatives of intergovernmental agencies etc. However, climate change sceptics and some conservative Christian leaders, politicians and economists have criticised not only the content of the document (in part or in whole) but also the fact that Pope Francis dared to venture into a discussion that they consider to be outside of his domain.²³⁴ For the purpose of this work, I intend to largely focus on how the document has been received on the African continent.

Positive responses:

- *Catholic Church*

Within the Catholic community, the document has received enthusiastic praise from regional episcopal conferences and some senior Catholic figures in both the global north and south.

On the African continent despite muted responses from church leaders in the early days following the encyclical's release, some local church leaders issued statements in praise of the document. For instance, in Sierra Leone, the Metropolitan Archbishop of Freetown Edward Tamba Charles presented the encyclical to the faith communities of Sierra Leone. In a statement at the presentation ceremony, Archbishop Charles spoke in favour of the encyclical, highlighting the importance of the document for Sierra Leone. He cautioned Sierra Leoneans not to dismiss Pope Francis' appeal in the encyclical as a western propaganda aimed at deterring the progress and development of the country but rather the entirety of the Pope's message should serve as an eye opener to the social and environmental challenges in the country. He cited the clearing of

²³⁴ Cf. M. Fiedler, "The political implications of 'Laudato Si'" in *The National Catholic Reporter* (Jul 31, 2015), <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/earthbeat/eco-catholic/political-implications-laudato-si>, date accessed 21/09/2021.

forests in favour of housing projects, the devastating effects of large-scale mining of minerals in some rural areas of the country and the improper waste management in urban centres as the pressing challenges that Pope Francis' message in LS speaks to.²³⁵

In the intervening years since the release of LS, African Church leaders and Catholic charities such as CARITAS, CAFOD, and many others have embarked on mobilisation activities for the reception of the teachings of the encyclical in the African Church. Also, deliberations on implementing the proposals of the encyclical have featured prominently in plenary assemblies of regional episcopal conferences. For example, in the February 2020 meeting of the Standing Committee of the West African Catholic Bishops Conference (RECOWA-CERAO) held in Abidjan Ivory Coast, the encyclical formed the backdrop of a statement released on the actions of multinational companies and their impact on the environment.²³⁶

However, the high-level ecclesiastical reactions to the document are yet to be matched by way of active reception of the encyclical in the particular churches on the continent. Despite the lack of an overall active and practical response to Pope Francis' spirited summons to care for creation, a number of initiatives have been started by some local churches, religious orders/communities and church agencies, especially in East and Southern Africa. To mention a few, in Zambia less than a year after LS was published, the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) in collaboration with the Zambia Episcopal Conference organised a two-day conference on 'Care of our Common Home in the Context of Large-Scale Investments: Mining and Agriculture.' The conference which drew participants from all the dioceses in the Catholic church in Zambia, government and civic groups discussed the impact of large mining on the livelihood of those

²³⁵ Cf. Betty Milton "Pope Francis' climate change message presented to Salone" in *Awoko Newspaper* (June 27, 2015), <https://awokonewspaper.com/sierra-leone-news-pope-francis-climate-change-message-presented-to-salone/>, date accessed 22/09/2021.

²³⁶ Cf. Message from the Bishops Members of RECOWA-CERAO Standing Committee, Abidjan, (February 16, 2020), <https://www.cidse.org/2020/02/27/west-african-bishops-call-for-a-binding-instrument-to-regulate-the-activities-of-transnational-corporations/>, date accessed 22/09/2021.

affected in the proximity of the operations.²³⁷ In Rwanda, the document has been translated into the indigenous language (Kinyarwanda) to make it accessible to more people.²³⁸

- *Scholarly response*

At a scholarly level, the encyclical has garnered critical acclaim in academic circles among diverse disciplines including theology, legal studies, social and environmental sciences and more. In light of the African context, LS has received interdisciplinary scholarly responses in some publications. For example, in a 2018 volume entitled *Integral Ecology: Protecting our Common Home* edited by Gerard Magill and Jordan Potter, Peter Ikechukwu Osuji (a Nigerian priest and academic at Duquesne University) analysed the encyclical from the perspective of traditional African environment ethics. Osuji's comparative analysis concluded that the African traditional worldview – which places emphasis on interdependent existence among the human and nonhuman world – resonates with the relational cosmology that Francis espoused in LS.²³⁹

Another scholarly publication to engage LS from an African perspective is the small volume written by Aidan G. Msafiri (A Tanzanian Catholic priest and environmental ethicist) and published in 2019. In his work titled *How Relevant and Timely is Laudato Si' in Africa?*, Msafiri outlines African creation spirituality in light of LS so as to stimulate and harness responsible and sustainable environmental action in Africa's ecclesial and pastoral settings.²⁴⁰

From the perspective of jurisprudence, James Campbell's paper entitled "*Laudato Si'*: The Catholic Church's Position on the Environment" published in *Law, Religion and the Environment in Africa* (2020), analysed the philosophical and jurisprudential sources of LS. With key insights from LS and the wider context of CST, Campbell concluded that the environment as envisioned

²³⁷ Cf. A. Ottaro, "Cardinal Turkson Addresses *Laudato Si'* Conference in Lusaka Zambia" in *The Catholic World Report* (April 28, 2016), <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2016/04/28/cardinal-turkson-addresses-laudato-si-conference-in-lusaka-zambia/>, date accessed 22/09/2021.

²³⁸ Cf. A. Ottaro, "*Laudato Si'* takes root in Africa, but much urgent work remains" in *The National Catholic Reporter* (May 22, 2020), <https://www.ncronline.org/news/earthbeat/laudato-si-takes-root-africa-much-urgent-work-remains>, date accessed 23/09/2021.

²³⁹ Cf. P. Osuji, "*Laudato Si'* and Traditional African Environmental Ethics" in G. Magill & J. Potter, *Integral Ecology: Protecting Our Common Home*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle Upon Tyne, 2018, 184-208.

²⁴⁰ A. Msifiri, *How Relevant and Timely is Laudato Si' in Africa?*, Be&Be- Verlag, Heiligenkreuz, Austria, 2019.

by the Catholic Church has inalienable and inherent rights because it is part of God's creation and hence it is worthy of protection and respect.²⁴¹

In his essay "Laudato Si': A Prophetic Message" (2021), A. E. Orobator, a Nigerian Jesuit theologian, considers the prophetic tone and urgency of Pope Francis' teaching on care for the environment and how we might best respond to Francis' prophetic exhortation. Against the backdrop of the existential threat that the ecological crisis poses to life on planet earth, especially to the livelihood of the poor, Orobator argues that the ecological challenge requires an educational response on the part of those in the field of education. He contends that the ecological crisis which doubles as "an educational challenge" requires a radical rethinking and re-modelling of the educational system for a sustainable future.²⁴²

And finally, in his recent book entitled *Environmental Ethics in the African Context* (2021), Richard N. Rwiza, a Tanzania Catholic theologian at the Catholic University of East Africa, has expressed critical appreciation of many aspects of LS. In chapter seven of his book, Rwiza analyses the central theme of the encyclical – integral ecology – from a theological and ethical perspective in the context of the African continent. In particular, Rwiza argues that given the significant environmental and ethical challenges facing the African continent, environmental care is an area that needs a focused and integrated approach. He concludes that LS offers a model for a needed approach.²⁴³

- *Ecumenical and Interfaith responses*

I highlight the ecumenical and interfaith engagement with LS in view of the religious context of Sierra Leone. LS also received positive responses from a wide spectrum of religious leaders. A number of other religious leaders welcomed the encyclical and linked it to the ecological

²⁴¹ Cf. J. Campbell, "Laudato Si': The Catholic Church's Position on the Environment" in M. Christian Green & Muhammed Haron (Eds.), *Law, Religion and the Environment in Africa*, Sun Press, Stellenbosch SA, 2020, 45-52.

²⁴² Cf. A. E. Orobator, "Laudato Si': A Prophetic Message" in *Journal of Catholic Education*, vol. 24. Issue 1 (July 2021), 300-305.

²⁴³ Cf. R. N. Rwiza, *Environmental Ethics in the African Context*, Catholic University of Eastern Africa Press, Nairobi, 2021, 123-146.

teachings in their own religious traditions. In the context of the worldwide ecumenical community, LS was warmly received by the World Council of Churches (WCC).²⁴⁴

Within the Muslim communities, LS also received acclaim. The document in some way stimulated and inspired the *Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change* released in 2015. The declaration was drafted by over sixty Muslim religious and political leaders from twenty countries who gathered in Istanbul in the lead-up to the Paris climate summit. In a statement announcing the release of the declaration, the participants made explicit reference to the importance of LS and noted the declaration is in harmony with Pope Francis' message in LS. The content of the declaration also mirrors some of the issues Pope Francis addresses in LS.²⁴⁵

Criticisms:

Although the publication and contents of LS have been widely acclaimed as a watershed moment in the Catholic Church's engagement with the world in relation to the ecological crisis, nonetheless it has also received unfavourable responses both within and outside the Catholic Church. These unfavourable reactions to the document range from withering attacks and intensive heckles to sympathetic critiques. Criticisms of the document have largely come from three distinct camps namely, conservative Catholics, progressive/social liberal Catholics and free-market advocates.²⁴⁶ I will not dwell at length on the details of these criticisms, but I will highlight the broad strokes of these criticisms.

Among conservative /traditionalist Catholics, criticisms of the encyclical have ranged from minor theological disagreements to sharp and outright rejection of the contents of the encyclical. One group of Catholic conservatives have criticised Pope Francis for venturing into what they consider to be outside the traditional domain of CST. This group is represented by Cardinal

²⁴⁴ Cf. Statement by the WCC general secretary, "Laudato Si' enhances churches and peoples' care for our common home" (June 18, 2015), <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/laudato-si2019-enhances-churches-and-peoples2019-care-for-our-common-home>, date accessed 24/09/2021.

²⁴⁵ Cf. K. Clark, "A Francis Effect? Islamic Leaders Issue Statement on Climate Change" in *America* (August 18, 2015), <https://www.americamagazine.org/content/dispatches/francis-effect-islamic-leaders-issue-statement-climate-change>, date accessed 24/09/2021.

²⁴⁶ Cf. H. Schnitker, "Reception and Perception: An Historical context for *Laudato Si'*" in J. A. Orr et al (Eds), *Reflections on Pope Francis's Encyclical, Laudato Si'*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle Upon Tyne, 2017, 164-188.

George Pell (the former Vatican financial chief).²⁴⁷ A second group of conservative Catholics have outrightly dissented from the content of the encyclical either in part or in whole and labelled it a manifesto of the radical left and a quasi-Marxist document. This second group, represented by the likes of William Oddie (former editor of the *Catholic Herald*) have expressed concern “that the pope has allowed himself to be caught up in a political agenda disguised as science, and the climate change agenda is cover for global population control and economic oppression”.²⁴⁸

Among the progressive camp, LS largely received what I would call sympathetic criticisms. Although they are receptive to Pope Francis’ position on some social issues discussed in LS such as his concern for the poor, the oppressed and migrants, they are however dissatisfied with what they think the encyclical does not address. They have criticised Pope Francis for not being radical enough on some of the issues raised in the encyclical, for example Pope Francis’ apparent silence on the growing world population. Mark Graham, a theologian at Villanova University falls under this category. In his analysis of LS Graham notes that although the encyclical has many strengths, it also has some significant flaws. He outlined three major flaws of the encyclical: 1) identity confusion – that the encyclical does not know what it wants to be, and it lacks a clearly defined agenda; 2) disavowal of the population problem – that the Pope fails to engage with human population increases and c) failure to follow through on some moral issues – that granted Francis skilfully situates the socio-environmental issues within the context of mainstream Christian ethics, but when it comes to making normative moral statements on environmental issues, he is less than clear on how to apply the normative teachings.²⁴⁹

From an economic perspective, opposition to the encyclical has come from the camp of the free-market economy advocates. The criticism of the free market advocates of LS has been largely directed at what they perceive as Pope Francis’ attack on free-market capitalism in the encyclical. This criticism is directed at Francis’ excoriation of what he perceives to be the unregulated operation of the free-market economy and its weak response to environmental and

²⁴⁷ Cf. R. Sanderson and J. Politi, “Reformer tries to bring light to closed world of Vatican finance” in *Financial Times* (July 16, 2015), <https://www.ft.com/content/7f429c28-2bc6-11e5-acfb-cbd2e1c81cca>, date accessed 25/09/2021.

²⁴⁸ D. Longenecker, “Can a good Catholic dissent from *Laudato Si’*” in *Crux* (June 24, 2015), <https://cruxnow.com/church/2015/06/can-a-good-catholic-dissent-from-laudato-si/>, date accessed 25/09/2021.

²⁴⁹ Cf. Mark Graham, “Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si’*: A Critical Response” in *Minding Nature*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2017, 57-62

social problems. Francis' critique of the free market economy for its unrestrained faith in technology and its profit and consumerist impulses at the expense of the well-being of the earth and the poor received harsh criticisms from the likes of Nicholas Capaldi – who accused Francis of missing the point in LS. In an article published in the *Seattle University Law Review*, Capaldi accuses Pope Francis of misdiagnosing the socio-environmental problems, causes and solutions. Capaldi furthered that environmental degradation and poverty are not the product of technology and free market economies but the lack of viable markets, the failure of traditional communities to adapt to the challenges of modern individualism and the absence of the rule of law.²⁵⁰

4.1.6 ***Critical Appraisal of Laudato Si'***

Since its publication in 2015, LS has continued to generate numerous positive commentaries and mild and harsh criticism. The vast majority of these have come from Catholic scholars and commentators. The positions the critics of the encyclicals have taken on the document largely reflect the tribal divisions (culture wars) of the Global North. In my appraisal of this document, I refuse to take any of these positions. Rather, I reflect on some of the encyclical's strengths and then identify particular blind spots in view of the aims of this research project.

There is so much to commend LS for, however, I highlight three positive elements of the encyclical that strongly resonate with me – a) A sound theology of communion rooted in Christian theology b) A prophetic document and c) It promotes ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and collaboration in protecting the environment.

a) Theology of communion

LS is solidly rooted in Christian theology. Francis grounds his ecological teaching in the foundational Christian doctrines of creation and incarnation. The document is permeated with many references to the Christian experience of God as a communion of persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (especially in the 2nd, 4th and 6th chapters of LS). The Christian experience of God as communion forms the basis of the encyclical's recurring refrain; "everything is connected".²⁵¹ Francis enriches the theological foundation of the document by drawing on the reflections of

²⁵⁰ Cf. N. Capaldi, "A Critique of Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'*" in *Seattle University Law Review*, Vol. vol 40, Issue 4 (2017), 1261-1282.

²⁵¹ Cf. LS nn. 70, 92, 117, 137, 142, 240.

other eminent figures of the Christian world and with a particular sensitivity to St. Francis of Assisi and the whole of the Franciscan tradition as represented by St. Bonaventure and others.²⁵²

These trinitarian and christological credal references represent the most profound key to understanding Francis' ecological teaching and they form the basis of the encyclical's moral case for the tremendous responsibility of humankind towards creation. While the theology of communion which underpins Francis' teaching in LS is not new, it nonetheless conveys a new sense of urgency for caring for the environment.

b) A prophetic document

As mentioned earlier, Pope Francis comes from a socio-ecclesial background from which the 20th-century contextual theology – liberation theology – was birthed. As a theological category, liberation theology accentuated the prophetic role of the church to speak on behalf of the poor and oppressed. Pope Francis is not a liberation theologian, and he does not make explicit references to liberation theology in LS and his other writings. However, the document signals the prophetic tone of liberation theology.

LS is undoubtedly a prophetic document for it not only gives voice to the twin cry of the earth and the poor but also denounces the systems that perpetuate injustice and degradation of the earth. With a prophetic tone, Francis laments the devastation inflicted on the earth, our common home: "Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years" (LS 53) to the point that "The earth our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth" (LS 21). Francis contends that the victims of the twin crisis are disproportionately in the developing countries of the Southern Hemisphere. At the heart of LS's prophetic message is the invitation to ecological conversion, a change of heart, to adopt a more sustainable way of living so as to mitigate and halt the damage inflicted on our common home.

The prophetic tone of the document has enormous implications for Christians and all those who profess faith in God. Francis' prophetic challenge in LS is an invitation to recalibrate

²⁵² Cf. LS nn. 11, 66, 233.

our relationship with creation of which humanity is an integral part - as rightly noted by Richard Bauckham: “Humans are not demi-Gods...set above creation, but creatures among other creatures, dependent, like other creatures, on the material world of which they are part, immersed in a web of reciprocal relationships with other creatures”.²⁵³

c) Ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and collaboration

Finally, another strong aspect of LS that resonates with me and by implication the aims of this research, is the invitation to dialogue and collaborate. And as I have noted earlier, the invitation to dialogue is not a catchword for an attempt to be polite. Francis’ ecumenical and interreligious outreach in LS is aimed at generating processes capable of integrating various viewpoints and contributions in addressing the ecological crisis. Furthermore, the widespread environmental degradation and its social effects cut across religious divides.

Francis brings these perspectives to bear on LS. At an ecumenical level, Francis recognises the contribution offered by Patriarch Bartholomew of the Orthodox Church (LS 7-9). LS also reaches out to the Islamic faith when Francis references a 9th-century mystical Muslim poet Ali-al-Khawwas to underscore the concept of nature’s ‘mystical meaning.’ The encyclical’s interfaith outreach also is extended to indigenous and traditional religions by recognising them as important dialogue partners (LS 146).

Matter(s) of concern

It is clear that LS has brought a lot of insights to the Catholic Church’s teaching on the environment which indicates the evolution and development of the Church’s teaching on environmental issues. However, LS is not a perfect document. It has many blind spots and weaknesses. One particular area of concern for me that the document ignores is the disproportionate impact of the socio-ecological crisis on women and the role women have played in alerting the world to the crisis.

Francis in the first chapter of LS noted that he engaged with scientific data to highlight the decaying and degrading state of our common home. However, he failed to engage with the

²⁵³ R. Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 2010, 27-28.

many credible data that depict the outsized impact of the socio-ecological crisis on women especially in the developing world. For instance, the 2015 UN World's Women report outlined the disproportionate impacts and dangers of the climate crisis on women around the world especially in developing countries.²⁵⁴ From the perspective of food security, the Rome-based UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) 2015 report on climate change and food security painted a similar picture:

In regions with high levels of food insecurity and inequality, increased frequency of droughts will particularly affect poorer households and may disproportionately affect women, given their vulnerability and restricted access to resources. Gender and social differences discriminate against people's access to adaptation options, or even information, such as weather and climate data.²⁵⁵

While Pope Francis rightly identifies unbridled anthropocentrism as the root cause of the ecological crisis in LS, the document is awfully quiet on one of the chief and most pervasive manifestations of anthropocentrism that has prevailed since the inception of human history namely, the patriarchal mindset of dominion and control – which continues to subjugate and oppress women around the world.

In addition to LS's silence on the role of the patriarchal mindset in the degradation of the environment, the encyclical fails to acknowledge the role of women in championing the cause of environmental justice. On the African continent, the work of the late Kenyan Nobel Laureate for Peace, Wangari M. Maathai (1940-2011), exemplifies the leading role women have played in alerting the world to the wounds inflicted by the ecological crisis across the world. Born in the central highlands of Kenya to subsistence farmers, Maathai converted to Catholicism in her early education at St. Cecilia's Intermediate Primary School, a Catholic Mission School. In her memoir, *Unbowed* (2007), Maathai recounted how at the time of her birth, the land was "lush, green, and fertile...with abundant shrubs, creepers, ferns, and trees...reliably clean drinking water".²⁵⁶ However, all these were slowly destroyed when Kenya was colonised by Britain and "introduced

²⁵⁴ Cf. United Nations, *World's Women 2015: Trends and Statistics*, UNO Publications New York 2015, https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/downloads/worldswomen2015_report.pdf, date accessed 27/08/21.

²⁵⁵ FAO, *Climate Change and Food Security: Risks and Responses*, (2015), <https://www.fao.org/3/i5188e/i5188E.pdf> date accessed 26/09/2021.

²⁵⁶W. Maathai, *Unbowed: A Memoir*, William Heinemann, London, 2007, 24.

new methods of exploiting our rich natural resources: logging, clear-cutting native forests, establishing plantations of imported trees, hunting wildlife, and undertaking expansive commercial agriculture”.²⁵⁷ Maathai furthered that due to the colonial takeover of her land, “Hallowed landscapes lost their sacredness and were exploited as the local people became insensitive to the destruction, accepting it as a sign of progress”.²⁵⁸ The exploitation of Kenya’s natural resources and the resultant environmental destruction continued long after the colonisers left, a sad state of affairs that was replicated in almost the entire African continent including my native Sierra Leone. Maathai’s closeness to nature, the painful experience of the destruction of her ancestral land and her religious convictions as a Catholic, undoubtedly played a major role in her later fight for environmental justice.²⁵⁹

Like Maathai, prior to the arrival of Pope Francis as a global champion of environmental justice, there were already women theologians within mainstream Catholic theology whose theological works focused on Christian ecological theology from the perspective of Catholic theology. To mention a few;

- Rosemary Radford Ruether, a pioneer in contemporary feminist theology, was one of the first Catholic theologians to explore ecological issues through the prism of feminist theology (eco-feminism). A major thread in Ruether’s eco-theological works is the attribution of the exploitation of women and nature to the patriarchal hierarchical system. Thus, Ruether contends, that women’s liberation cannot be disconnected from finding solutions to the ecological crisis.²⁶⁰ Ruether has authored and edited many books and articles about the subject of ecology including; *New Woman/New Earth*, 1975; *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, 1992; *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*, 1994; *Christianity and Ecology Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans* Edited by Dieter T. Hessel Rosemary Radford Ruether, 2004; *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions*, 2004.

²⁵⁷ Ibid 32.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Cf. M. Mwangi, “Wangari Maathai: An Ecofeminist at the Crossroad of Social Justice and Environment in Kenya” in M. Christian Green & M. Haron (Eds.), *Law, Religion and the Environment*, op. cit. 199-215.

²⁶⁰ Cf. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman/New Earth*, Seabury, New York, 1975 204.

- Celia Deane-Drummond is another leading voice in the field of eco-theology. Deane-Drummond has expertise in both natural science and Christian theology. She has written extensively on environmental issues through the lens of theology-science intersections. Her works include; *A Handbook in Theology and Ecology*, 1996; *The Ethics of Nature*, 2004; *Wonder and Wisdom*, 2009.
- Ilia Delio, A Franciscan Religious Sister, whose speciality is also in the area of theology and science, is also a leading scholar in the field of ecotheology. Her works on ecology are deeply influenced by Franciscan theology. They include the following; *Care for Creation: A Franciscan Spirituality of the Earth*, 2009 as co-author; *The Emergent Christ: Exploring the Meaning of Catholic in an Evolutionary Universe*, 2011.

To sum up, the encyclical's failure to engage with women's voices, especially women who have been at the forefront of raising awareness of the threats environmental destruction pose to existence on earth raises concern about Francis' war against inequality in its various guises.

4.2 INTEGRAL ECOLOGY: INTEGRATING SOCIAL JUSTICE AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Having discussed the background to LS I now examine the overarching prism through which Pope Francis views the ecological question namely, integral ecology. In this section, I shall analyse the concept of Pope Francis' delineation of integral ecology and its moral imperative for integrating social justice and environmental justice. The section is divided into two main subdivisions. The first subdivision discusses the hermeneutical background of the concept of integral ecology and the second section analyses the concept as articulated in LS.

4.2.1 *Hermeneutical Background of the Concept of Integral Ecology*

There is no doubt that Pope Francis has popularised the concept of integral ecology in both religious and secular circles since the publication of LS in 2015. But the term predates its usage in the encyclical. This subsection explores the emergence of the concept in contemporary environmental discourse. The reason why I deem it essential to include a hermeneutical background of the concept of integral ecology is to illustrate that the term is not only a moral or ethical approach to envisioning the relationships between humans and other creatures but an interdisciplinary approach that speaks to the heightened awareness of the links between the destruction of the human and natural environment.

The phrase ‘integral ecology’ has become an important catchphrase in contemporary environmental discourse; however, its origins are not clear. In his book, *On the Verge of a Planetary Civilization: A Philosophy of Integral Ecology* (2014), Sam Mickey provides a historical development of the concept of ‘integral ecology’. According to Mickey, the term in its contemporary usage first emerged in Hilary Moore’s marine ecology textbook: *Marine Ecology* (1958) in which Moore proposes that ecologies that focus on ecosystems and on their component organisms should be complemented by integral ecology so as to reconnect the ecosystem and its components into a whole (H. B. Moore, *Marine Ecology* 1958:7).²⁶¹ Etymologically, the word ‘integral’, is derived from the Latin word *integer*, meaning ‘whole’ or ‘complete’ entity and has connotations of unity or wholeness. In line with this etymological definition, Mickey notes that “becoming integral with the Earth community suggests that humans would understand themselves as members of one single yet multiform community that includes all of the planet’s habitats and inhabitants, ideas and societies, humans and nonhumans.”²⁶²

In the 1990s, the term was popularised in the works of the cultural historian Thomas Berry (1914-2009), the liberation theologian Leonardo Boff and the integral theorist Ken Wilber.²⁶³ In theological circles, Berry and Boff’s understanding of the term has acquired a renewed theological interest in light of the development of eco-theology as a discipline. Although Berry and Boff have different emphases, their conception of ‘integral ecology’ developed in the context of cosmology, expresses similar ideas. Berry employed the term integral ecology within the framework of cosmology to emphasise the communion between the human and other creatures. In his book *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (1999) – which represents the culmination of his cosmological project – Berry attributes the contemporary social and environmental breakdown to “a mode of consciousness that has established a radical discontinuity between the human and other modes of being...”²⁶⁴ This mindset has stripped the other creatures world of all rights apart from its usefulness to humans and has caused the alienation of modern society

²⁶¹ S. Mickey, *On the Verge of a Planetary Civilization: A Philosophy of Integral Ecology*, Rowman & Littlefield International, Ltd., London, 2014, 16.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁶⁴ T. Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*, Bell Tower, New York, 1999, 4.

from the integral community of the earth which earlier people had with the natural world.²⁶⁵ Boff expresses a similar idea but from the perspective of liberation theology.²⁶⁶ In opposition to the binary worldview of the modern era which has not only set humans against the rest of creation but also precipitated the exploitation of the poor and the plundering of nature's resources, Boff advocates for an 'integral ecology' that brings together other approaches developed in the sciences, humanities, and other disciplines.²⁶⁷ Integral ecology according to Boff includes environmental, social and mental ecologies. The environmental approach engages ecological issues through sciences and technological development. The social approach addresses issues of social justice and sustainable social institutions like education, health care, the economy etc. Mental ecology focuses on consciousness and indicates that ecological problems call for healthier processes of subjectivity, processes that revitalize socio-cosmic well-being by renewing vital engagements with the natural world and with cultures, gender roles, religious worldviews, and unconscious desires.²⁶⁸

In modern CST, the term 'integral' has acquired a distinctively Catholic approach in addressing social issues, particularly in post-Second Vatican Council magisterial documents. In PP (1967), Paul VI does not use the term integral, however, he references the 'integral humanism' of Jacques Maritain to promote a vision of development that takes into account the spiritual and moral dimension of the human person.²⁶⁹ Paul VI used the term integral in conjunction with development – "integral development" in his 1971 apostolic letter OA to delineate a vision of development that engages every sphere of human life.²⁷⁰ In SRS (1987), John Paul II referred to the idea of 'integral human development' to make a moral case against the culture of death that corrupts human development.²⁷¹ In his 2009 encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, Benedict XVI also

²⁶⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁶⁶ Cf. L. Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll 1995; L. Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll 1997; L. Boff, *The Tao of Liberation: Exploring the ecology of transformation*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll 2009.

²⁶⁷ Cf. L. Boff & V. P. Elizondo, "Ecology and Poverty: Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor", - Editorial" *Concilium*, 5, 1995 (ix-xii) ix-x

²⁶⁸ D. M. Nothwehr, "Leonardo Boff's Franciscan Liberation Ecology and "Integral Ecology" in *Laudato Si'*" in D. R. DiLeo (Ed), *All Creation is Connected*, Anselm Academic, Winona MI, 2018, (93-112) 106.

²⁶⁹ Cf. Paul VI, PP, n. 42.

²⁷⁰ Cf. QA, nn 31 & 52.

²⁷¹ Cf. SSR n, 24.

adopted the term integral human development to advocate for a person-centred rather than a profit-centred approach to globalization.²⁷²

The brief discussion on the hermeneutical background of the term integral ecology has shown that as an approach, the concept of integral ecology runs counter to the view that environmental problems are merely social issues. It signifies a unifying vision that seeks to make sense of the different aspects of the environmental crisis and to utilise the full range of resources and endeavours in addressing the crisis.

4.2.2 *Pope Francis' Delineation of Integral Ecology in Laudato Si'*

The term ecology came to prominence in CST with the introduction of the concept of 'human ecology' by Pope John II in *Centesimus Annus* (1991),²⁷³ where he linked the destruction of the natural world to the destruction of the human environment.²⁷⁴ Pope Benedict VI further elaborated on the term in his encyclical *CiV* (2009) by highlighting the mutual interdependence of human and environmental ecology.²⁷⁵

Francis expands on the teaching of his predecessors by introducing a new way of understanding ecology, namely 'integral ecology'. The theme of integral ecology is the most distinctive feature of LS and provides the hermeneutical key to understanding the entire encyclical. According to Vincent Miller, the term integral ecology as used in LS "can be understood on three levels: as an understanding that interconnectedness is the essence of reality, as a way of seeing that can perceive interconnectedness among human beings and the rest of creation and as a moral principle for acting in harmony with them".²⁷⁶ Although not explicitly acknowledged in the encyclical, Francis' usage of the term 'integral ecology' draws on the conceptual framework proposed by Leonardo Boff which highlights the intrinsic

²⁷² Cf. *CiV* nn. 21-42.

²⁷³ Cf. P. K Turkson, "The Evolution of the Concept of Integral Ecology in Papal Teaching": Preface in D. O'Hara et al (Ed), *Integral Ecology for a More Sustainable World: Dialogue with Laudato Si'* op. cit. (xi-xxiv); see also P. A. Blanco, "*Laudato Si'*: Care for Creation at the Centre of a New Social Issue" in *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 46, Issue 3 (September 2018), 425-440.

²⁷⁴ Cf. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, n. 38.

²⁷⁵ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Caritatis in Veritate*, n. 51, op. cit.

²⁷⁶ V. Miller, "Integral Ecology: Francis's Moral and Spiritual Vision of Interconnectedness" in V. Miller (Ed), *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato Si': Everything is Connected*, Bloomsbury T&T Clark, London, 2017, (11-28) 11.

interconnectedness among environmental ecology, economic ecology, social ecology, and cultural ecology. Integral ecology occupies the conceptual heart of LS.²⁷⁷ Although we find a detailed analysis of the concept in chapter four of the encyclical, the term occurs in multiple other places in the encyclical.²⁷⁸

The foundational principle of integral ecology: 'Everything is connected'

Underlying the vision of integral ecology is the principle of interconnectedness which runs throughout the encyclical. The principle of interconnectedness embraces an integrated vision of reality that integrates human and cosmic well-being. Drawing on the meaning of ecology as a discipline that “studies the relationship between living organisms and the environment in which they develop”. (LS 138). Francis underscores the importance of understanding interconnection as the very essence of reality.

It cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected. Time and space are not independent of one another, and not even atoms or subatomic particles can be considered in isolation. Just as the different aspects of the planet – physical, chemical and biological – are interrelated, so too living species are part of a network which we will never fully explore and understand. A good part of our genetic code is shared by many living beings. It follows that the fragmentation of knowledge and the isolation of bits of information can actually become a form of ignorance, unless they are integrated into a broader vision of reality.²⁷⁹

Francis' emphasis on the interconnectedness of all aspects of human life and creation challenges what Sean Kelly has called the 'mechanistic and materialistic' worldview of the contemporary era – a worldview supported by mainstream science, that fragments the cosmos and sees it as essentially composed of “lifeless particles, which, without inherent meaning or purpose, have more or less accidentally given rise to life and to self-conscious beings such as ourselves”.²⁸⁰ In contrast to this worldview, Francis points out that humans and the rest of the created order are part of the community of creation.

Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it... Given the

²⁷⁷ Cf. D. M. Nothwehr, “Leonardo Boff’s Franciscan Liberation Ecology and “Integral Ecology” in *Laudato Si’*” op. cit.

²⁷⁸ Cf. LS nn. 10, 11, 62, 124, 137, 159, 225, & 230.

²⁷⁹ LS 138.

²⁸⁰ S. Kelly, “The Five Principles of Integral Ecology” in S. Mickey et al (Eds), *The Variety of Integral Ecologies: Nature, Culture, and Knowledge in the Planetary Era*, SUNY Press, Albany NY, 2017, (189-227) 193.

scale of change, it is no longer possible to find a specific, discrete answer for each part of the problem. It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems.²⁸¹

The vision of integral ecology also recognises that social, political and economic decisions are interrelated, and they impact human existence and interaction with the earth and resources therein. In view of these intricate interlocking relationships on which cosmic well-being depends, Francis drawing on Benedict XVI's *Caritas in Veritate* posits that "Every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment" (LS 142). Francis' emphasis on the interrelatedness among humans and the rest of creation is evidenced by his invocation of St. Francis of Assisi and the recurring theme of the encyclical; 'everything is interconnected', which shows that he favours the cosmic interdependency of creation.²⁸²

4.2.3 *Theological Basis of Integral Ecology*

The integral approach of LS and its underlying theme of interconnectedness has its theological basis in the theology of creation. The theology of creation discussed in the second chapter of the encyclical (LS 62-100), not only provides the theological frame for the entire encyclical, but it also underpins the vision of integral ecology. Drawing on biblical testimony from both OT and NT biblical literature, Francis emphasises the following points:

- *Creation in all its rich diversity of beings reflects the goodness of the Creator*

Animated by the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi, he speaks of creation as an epiphany of the goodness of God, the Creator, hence creation itself is good news – Gospel (see the title of the 2nd chapter of LS).

St. Francis (1182 -1226) is well known for his deep bond of friendship with other creatures and his belief that creation reflects the radiance of the Creator.²⁸³ He did not articulate a systematic treatise on the environment however his famous *Canticle of Brother Sun* (also known as *Canticle of Creatures/creation*) highlights Francis of Assisi's profound awareness of the interconnectedness in God's creation. Animated by the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi and the

²⁸¹ LS 139

²⁸² Cf. LS 70, 92, 117, 120,137, 142, 240

²⁸³ W. French, "Francis of Assisi" in B. R. Taylor et al (Eds) *The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Nature*, Thoemmes Continuum, Bristol, 2005, 670-672.

Franciscan tradition, Pope Francis describes nature as “a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness” (LS 12).

In addition to mirroring the goodness of God the creator, the whole of creation is not only open to God’s transcendence within which it develops, but it is also the locus of God’s immanent presence (LS 79 & 80). Although Francis does not use the term co-creator in LS, it seem to me that his reference to God’s presence in creation is an invitation to us to see creation from a broader perspective as it unfolds and to be his co-creators.

- *Humans are interpersonal creatures.*

Francis notes that biblical creation narratives convey “profound teachings about human existence and its historical reality. They suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself.” (LS 66). The relationships are so intricately intertwined that when one is broken the others are broken. As attested to by biblical testimony, the tripartite relationships “have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin...” (LS 66). Here Francis links the social implication of sin to creation which he attributes in some measure to the misuse of the biblical doctrine of creation.

- *The whole of creation belongs to God and it has been given to humankind as a gift*

This is instructive for Francis’ call to overcome the dominant paradigm of dominion and unbridled exploitation of nature (LS 67). It also provides the moral framework for humans to “respect the laws of nature and the delicate equilibria existing between the creatures of this world” (LS 68).

- *Creation is an act of God’s love that reveals God’s loving plan for every creature*

This conviction is a repudiation of any notion that conceives of the universe as an act of chance or accident. As an act of divine love,

creation has a broader meaning than 'nature', for it has to do with God’s loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance. Nature is usually seen as a system which can be studied, understood and controlled, whereas creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion.²⁸⁴

²⁸⁴ LS 76.

- *Creation is open to a universal communion*

Francis calls attention to the symbolic communion between God and humans which serves as the concrete manifestation of the communion within the human community and the rest of the planetary community. He writes, “as part of the universe, called into being by one Father, all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect” (LS 89).

- *Creation is an act of the Triune God*

Francis describes the Triune God as the creator and centre of the whole of creation. He highlights the relationship between God and creation by appealing to the foundational Christian experience of God as a Trinity. Each of the persons within the trinitarian Godhead is linked to the act of creation.²⁸⁵

Faith in God who is a Trinity of persons shows that creation has the stamp of the Triune God on it. To underscore this point, Francis again invokes a leading personality in the Franciscan theological tradition, St. Bonaventure (1217-1274).²⁸⁶

For Christians, believing in one God who is trinitarian communion suggests that the Trinity has left its mark on all creation. Saint Bonaventure went so far as to say that human beings, before sin, were able to see how each creature “testifies that God is three”. The reflection of the Trinity was there to be recognized in nature “when that book was open to man and our eyes had not yet become darkened”. The Franciscan saint teaches us that *each creature bears in itself a specifically Trinitarian structure*, so real that it could be readily contemplated if only the human gaze were not so partial, dark and fragile. In this way, he points out to us the challenge of trying to read reality in a Trinitarian key.²⁸⁷

The stamp of the Triune God on creation which the thread of interconnectedness in creation mirrors, also points to the vocation of humans to maintain and enhance the interconnectedness in creation.

²⁸⁵ Cf. LS 238.

²⁸⁶ St. Bonaventure is regarded as the founder of the Franciscan theological tradition. As a leading theological scholar in the medieval period, Bonaventure integrated in his theological synthesis the vernacular theology of St. Francis of Assisi. Cf. K. B. Osborne, “Preface” in K. B. Osborne (Ed), *The History of Franciscan Theology*, Franciscan Institute Publication, New York 2007, vii-ix.

²⁸⁷ LS 239.

- *Creation is Christocentric*

Francis also emphasises the Christological dimension of creation both from the act of creation in the beginning and in the recreation brought about by the Christ-event – birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Citing St. Paul’s Christological hymn in the letter to Colossians (Col 1:16) and the Johannine prologue (John 1:1-18 Francis notes that God in Jesus Christ became part of the human race, but also part of the natural world.²⁸⁸ To underscore the cosmic dimension of the Christ-event, Francis invokes the patristic testimony of the second-century Christian apologist, Justin Martyr who like other Patristic theologians such as Irenaeus, Maximus the Confessor and others, referred to Jesus Christ as the divine logos who sustains everyone and everything.²⁸⁹

- *Sin as the rupture of relationships with the Creator, with human beings and with the whole creation*

Francis’ grounding of his integral ecology on the doctrine of creation has not only revived interest in the theology of creation (as evidenced by the plethora of commentaries on essays on LS),²⁹⁰ but also brought to the fore the idea of social sin. The Catholic Church regards sin as a violation and/or rejection of divine goodness. Although sin in its proper sense is a personal act, hence personal sin, the Church acknowledges that there is a social dimension of sin. Both the personal and social dimensions of sins affect humans’ relationship with God and with others.²⁹¹ However, until quite recently, Catholic moral theology and the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church largely focused on the personal dimension of sin. In *Laudato Si’* Francis stresses the social dimension of sin noting that sin ruptures the fundamental relationships with God, neighbour and with the earth (LS 66). In the introductory section, Francis speaks to the issue of ecological sin by citing the head of the Orthodox Church Patriarch Bartholomew who has been calling out the “sin” of environmental degradation for years.²⁹²

²⁸⁸ LS 99.

²⁸⁹ Cf. G. O’Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2011, 300.

²⁹⁰ Cf. J. Hanvey, “Laudato Si’ and the Renewal of Theologies of Creation” in *Heythrop Journal*, Vol. 59, Issue 6, (November 2018), 1022–1035.

²⁹¹ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994), nn. 1846- 1869.

²⁹² Cf. LS 8.

In the face of growing global inequality and environmental degradation, Francis' holistic conception of sin speaks to corporate and social sinfulness embedded in the social structures of society. Although not explicitly stated in the encyclical, Francis hints at the notion of structural sin by using a conceptual analogy. For instance, citing Benedict XVI Francis mentions the structural causes responsible for social and environmental dysfunctions (LS 6).

Francis' allusion to structural sin has precedents in the deliberations of the Latin American bishops at Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979), in the theological analysis of Liberation theologians and in the magisterial teachings of his immediate predecessors – John Paul II and Benedict XVI. In the Latin American context, the Latin American bishops and Liberation theologians employed the concept of structural sin to critique and challenge the social structures that perpetuate injustice and inequity.²⁹³

In CST, a tacit acknowledgement of structural sin can be traced to John Paul II's 1987 encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* where in addition to the emphasis on solidarity and the preferential option for the poor, he drew attention to "structures of sin." He noted that sinful human actions and attitudes are often built into the laws, institutions, and traditions that organize our social life (see SRS 36-39). Following John Paul II, Benedict XVI in *Caritas in Veritate* (2009) acknowledges the presence of sin in social conditions and in the structure of society (CIC 34) and its impacts on human society and the environment (CIC 51). In *Laudato Si'* Francis implicitly acknowledges the role of sinful social structures or systems in the perpetuation of global poverty and inequality and environmental degradation. Hence, he calls for "an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature" (LS 139).

To sum up, it should be noted that the Gospel of creation outlined in the second chapter of *Laudato Si'* is a short treatise on the Christian doctrine of creation. Hence it is limited in scope and does not elaborate on some theological themes raised in the section. Despite the limitations,

²⁹³ Cf. D. J. Daly, "Structures of Virtue and Vice" in *New Blackfriars* Vol. 92, Issue 1039 (May 2011), 341-357; see also D. K. Finn, "What Is a Sinful Social Structure?" in *Theological Studies* Vol. 77, Issue 1, (February 2016), 136-164; M. LONDON, "The Social Presuppositions of Early Liberation Theology" in *Restoration Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (2005), 13-31.

Francis offers fresh conceptual resources for theological reflection on the origin and purpose of creation and the human vocation in the created order. As pointed out by Cardinal Peter Kodwo Turkson, a close collaborator of Pope Francis and one of the key architects of *Laudato Si'*, Francis' analysis of the Christian doctrine of creation reminds us of

- a) The basic consequence of creation, which establishes a threefold level of relationship for the human person:
 - with God the Creator,
 - with other human persons in a bond of fraternity, and
 - with the world as the garden-home for our existence, and
- b) the basic demands of our vocation to participate in God's work as co-creators, and so
- c) our responsibility for the work of God who does not hide his face from any aspect of creation, poor or rich, natural or human.²⁹⁴

4.2.4 ***Implication of Integral Ecology for Promoting Human Dignity and Care for the Environment***

Among the many other important questions raised in *Laudato Si'* is the question of the relationship between anthropology and ecology. For Francis, "There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself" and "There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology" (LS 118). In continuity with anthropological developments in CST, he delineates an anthropology that underscores interrelatedness between humans and the wider community of the earth.²⁹⁵ Francis sets his anthropological discourse against the backdrop of the ecological crisis which he identifies as a symptom of a defective anthropology. According to Francis, this distorted anthropology, is a major part of the ecological crisis. He acknowledges that the current dominant anthropological model which sees the 'nonhuman world only as resources for humans to use' is severely inadequate in dealing with the ecological crisis. In the third chapter of the encyclical, he identifies the various strands of anthropocentrism he perceives as the causes of the disconnect between humankind and nature.

²⁹⁴ P. K Turkson, "The Evolution of the Concept of Integral Ecology in Papal Teaching" op. cit. xx.

²⁹⁵ Cf. D. Lane, *Theology and Ecology in Dialogue: The Wisdom of Laudato Si'* op. cit. 31-50; C. Deane-Drummond, "A new anthropology? *Laudato Si'* and the Question of Interconnectedness" in R. McKim (Ed), *Laudato Si' and the Environment: Pope Francis' Green Encyclical*, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, London, 2020, 189-20.

- *Modern anthropocentrism*

Modern anthropocentrism is rooted in a technoscience approach that views the natural world from the standpoint of utility. In LS, Francis does not provide a definition of modern anthropocentrism, however, from the description of the term, it can be inferred that Francis is referring to the elevation of technological thought over the material world.²⁹⁶ Francis' critique of modern anthropocentrism as a product of technoscience mentality to 'control and dominate nature' has received sharp criticism from some commentators in the Catholic press. Some have even gone to the extent of labelling Francis as anti-progress.²⁹⁷ Although Francis' tone in the encyclical may appear from a cursory reading to be anti-scientific and anti-progress, he does not in any way suggest a return to a 'stone age' (LS 114), rather he offers moral guidance against the unlimited power of technoscience which he perceives as lacking the required ethical checks and balances. In fact, in the encyclical (LS 102-103), Francis extols the invaluable role technoscience has played in human progress in the various spheres of life. Francis' critique is directed against certain approaches of technoscience that objectify, control and exploit both the poor and nonhuman creation without regards for their inherent dignity and intrinsic value.

- *Excessive anthropocentrism*

This strand of human-centredness fails to see the connectedness of all things and "continues to stand in the way of shared understanding and of any effort to strengthen social bonds." (LS 116). Francis attributes this view to an inadequate interpretation of the biblical command to 'fill the earth...and have dominion over the earth' (Gen 1:28), which in time gave rise to an exploitative understanding of the relationship between human beings and the world (LS116).

²⁹⁶ LS 115.

²⁹⁷ For example, Russell R. Reno in an article published in 'First Things magazine' charged Francis' teaching in *Laudato Si'* as being 'anti-scientific, anti-technological, and anti-modern.' Cf. R. R. Reno, "The Return of Catholic Anti-Modernism" in *First Things magazine* (June 18, 2015), <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2015/06/the-return-of-catholic-anti-modernism>, date accessed 03/10/2021.

- *Tyrannical anthropocentrism*

This form of anthropocentrism ignores the biblical teaching on relationships and manifests itself in individualism and disregards the worth of other creatures. Francis emphatically rejects this form of human-centredness as having no place in the Bible (LS 68).

- *Misguided anthropocentrism*

Francis describes the final form of the false understanding of what it means to be human as misguided anthropocentrism. This form of anthropocentrism “gives absolute priority to immediate convenience” and “interests” (LS 122), while overlooking “objective truths”. (LS 123). Rooted in the culture of relativism, misguided anthropocentrism perceives both human beings and the rest of the created order as disposable, devoid of any spiritual or transcendental value.

In contrast to the aforementioned shrivelled forms of anthropology, Pope Francis espouses a new anthropology. Francis develops his anthropological discourse within the matrix of the post-Vatican Council II Catholic teaching which explicitly affirms the uniqueness of the human person both individually and in relation to others as the crown of God’s creation, hence their vocation to be responsible stewards of the earth. However, Francis’ anthropological synthesis in LS marks a departure from the anthropocentric emphasis of his predecessors to a relational and cosmic emphasis. He recalibrates Catholic social teaching that explicitly affirms the unique status and inalienable dignity of humans in the order of creation on one hand, while on the other hand, he stresses the intrinsic dignity (LS 115) and intrinsic value (LS 140) of the nonhuman creation independent of their usefulness to humans.²⁹⁸

The main thrust of the anthropological argument is that humankind was created for relationships (LS 65-75). Drawing on the biblical creation account in the book of Genesis, Francis makes it plain that human life is grounded in three fundamental and intertwined relationships; with God the Creator, neighbour and creation as a whole (LS 66). In the web of relatedness, Francis affirms the unique and inalienable dignity of the human person:

The Bible teaches that every man and woman is created out of love and made in God’s image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26). This shows us the immense dignity of each person, “who is not just

²⁹⁸ Cf. C. T. S. Grey, “‘The Only Creature God Willed for its Own Sake’: Anthropocentrism in *Laudato Si’* and *Gaudium et Spes*” in *Modern Theology*, Vol. 36, Issue 4, (October 2019), 865-883.

something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons.” Saint John Paul II stated that the special love of the Creator for each human being “confers upon him or her an infinite dignity.”²⁹⁹

Francis furthered that “Those who are committed to defending human dignity can find in the Christian faith the deepest reasons for this commitment” (LS 65).

Having affirmed the distinctive status of humankind within the created order, he then emphasises the ‘intrinsic value’ of the nonhuman world in light of the biblical account of creation. In opposition to the interpretation of divine command in the creation narratives to “fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over” the land (Gen 1:28) as a license for unbridled exploitation of the earth, Francis sets about to give the correct exegesis of Genesis text.³⁰⁰ Francis acknowledges that although Christians may have contributed to the false interpretation of Gen 1:28, he insists that “nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures” (LS 67). The biblical texts, he emphasises, are to be read in the appropriate hermeneutical context and in relation to Gen 2:15 which tells us to “till and keep” the garden of the world” (LS 67). According to Francis’ exegesis, “Tilling” refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while “keeping” means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. By means of this exegetical analysis, Francis moves from the well-established notion of stewardship in CST to a concept of care.

The term ‘care’ used over thirty times in the encyclical (including care for the environment, care for neighbour, care for the poor and vulnerable, care for indigenous communities etc.), denotes a relational responsibility. It means to be in relationship with, to stand alongside with, to protect.³⁰¹ The concept of care conveys a sense of interrelationship as opposed to the idea of stewardship which conveys the notion of being in charge of the earth’s community, free from any restraints. In the context of the human-nature relationship, Francis employs the term ‘care’ to advocate for a relational re-engagement with the rest of creation, which we

²⁹⁹ LS 65.

³⁰⁰ Gen 1.28, text taken from the *Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1999.

³⁰¹ Cf. K. W. Irwin, *A Commentary on Laudato Si'*, op. cit. 119-120; Ls 69.

humans have “disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations” (LS 66).

The correct understanding of the biblical creation accounts according to Francis pays attention to both the unique status of humankind in the web of creation whilst also maintaining the right balance in the community of the earth. To sustain this dynamic balance, he exhorts the human community to recognise the intrinsic value of other creatures independent of their usefulness to humans, for they “have a value of their own in God’s eyes” (LS 69).

Francis’ exegetical analysis of the creation account which simultaneously recognises the inalienable dignity of humankind and the intrinsic value of the nonhuman world, does not propose a flattened ontology that equates human dignity with the value of nonhuman creatures as some critics would have us believe.³⁰² Francis is not questioning the pre-eminence of the value of humanity. In fact, he strongly argues against such a proposition as it may lead to “biocentrism” and creates another imbalance that would further compound the current socio-ecological crisis (LS 118). Rather he situates human value in the wider context of the rest of nature with its intrinsic value. Thus, it is worth noting that Francis does not in essence reject anthropocentrism, in fact, Francis’s take on what it means to be human in LS still retains some anthropocentric bias. However, keeping in line with his vision of integral ecology rooted in the principle of interconnectedness, he articulates a ‘relational anthropology’ that is oriented toward a holistic and integrated vision of reality which incorporates human and cosmic well-being. Francis rejects any form of anthropocentrism that promotes a “Promethean vision of mastery over the world” (LS 116). Equally so, it outrightly rejects any misanthropic conception of environmentalism that is more concerned with protecting other species than defending the dignity of human beings (LS 90).

³⁰² One such critic who has taken issue with Pope Francis’ exegetical analysis of the creation account in the book of Genesis is Steven C. van den Heuvel. He disagrees with what he perceives as “pope’s emphasis on the equality of all creatures as being on a common path to God...” According to Heuvel, while Pope Francis’ interpretation is popular, it not only misrepresents the ecological problems, but it also goes against the traditional interpretation of the creation accounts. Cf. S. C. van den Heuvel, “The Theocentric Perspective of *Laudato Si’*: A Critical Discussion” in *Philosophia Reformata*, Vol. 83, Issue 1, (May 2018), 51-67.

To sum up, Francis through the prism of integral ecology unequivocally affirms the dignity of the human person and the intrinsic value of the nonhuman world. Francis also reminds the human community that by virtue of the dignity conferred on them, they have the responsibility to care for and protect the earth.

4.2.5 *Brief critical remarks on Pope Francis' integral ecology*

In chapter one of LS Francis rightly states that in light of the heightened awareness of the impact of the ecological crisis, it is impossible to separate the ecological question from the social question (LS 49). On this premise, he gives a detailed exposition of the vision of integral ecology in chapter 4 of LS. Through the prism of integral ecology, Pope Francis expands Catholic social teaching from a purely anthropocentric focus to a holistic and inclusive cosmic vision. It dynamically incorporates the various dimensions of ecology namely, human, social, cultural and natural ecologies.

Grounded in the doctrine of creation and re-creation through the Christ-event, the vision of integral ecology promotes a relational anthropology that shows a greater appreciation for the delicate balance among all forms of life and the elements that make up the planet. Although Francis' vision of integral ecology retains elements of anthropocentric bias of the environmental teachings of his predecessors, his call for an integrated approach to social and environmental questions within the context of the Catholic Church is fairly original. In my view, Francis' ecological discourse through the lens of integral ecology and related themes not only shows an appreciation of an integrated cosmic vision of reality but also updates Catholic magisterial teaching on ecology.

4.3 INTEGRAL APPROACH TO SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

The discussion in the preceding section analysed Pope Francis' delineation of integral ecology and its theological underpinnings. The discussions established that the concept of integral ecology as articulated in LS shows a greater appreciation of the reality of ecological interconnectedness. In this section, I detail the moral imperative of Pope Francis' integral ecology for an integrated approach to social and environmental justice. I discuss the subject of social and environmental justice in light of one of the findings gleaned from the empirical research

presented in the second chapter of this work namely, the intertwined link between poverty and environmental degradation.

4.3.1 *CST and Social Justice*

As an integral part of the tradition of the Catholic Church, CST has been informed by social justice issues. Beginning with Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (1891) there has been a flourishing of Catholic magisterial interventions on social issues. However, the usage of the phrase social justice is a relatively new concept in CST. It was introduced into modern CTS by Pope Pius XI in his 1931 encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno – on the reconstruction of the social order* (hereafter QA). The encyclical was issued on the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* in response to the worldwide economic depression and the rise of fascism and communist totalitarianism. In this encyclical Pius XI accentuates the just arrangement of society, which allows for the active participation of individuals in the institutions that constitute society. Drawing mainly on the theology of Thomas Aquinas, Pius XI uses the term 'social justice' to describe the mutual obligation of the individual and society. The individual has the obligation to contribute to the growth of society and society has the obligation of promoting the common good of each and every member of society.³⁰³ In the face of social and economic injustice brought about by the capitalist system's exploitation of the working class for profit and the communist system's emphasis on collectivism at the expense of individual freedom, Pius XI critiqued both capitalism and socialism for their structural injustice (QA 44-58).

From Pius XI's QA onwards, the term social justice has provided the evolving framework for the Catholic Church's interventions on social, political, and economic matters.³⁰⁴ For instance, the term provided an important backdrop to the synodal process of the Second African Synod (2009). In view of the Synod's central theme, *The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation*,

³⁰³ Cf. D. J. O'Brien & T. A. Shannon (Eds), *Catholic Social Thought: Encyclicals and Documents from Leo XIII to Pope Francis*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 2018, 40-42.

³⁰⁴ Pius XI's conception of social justice and its links to the 'common good' have been developed further and applied in subsequent social encyclicals to a wide range of social, political economic issues: See John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra* (1961), PAUL VI, *Populorum Progressio* (1967), John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* (1981), *Centesimus Annus* (1991) and Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (2005).

Justice and Peace..., the term justice was discussed in relation to the social mission of the African Church.³⁰⁵

4.3.2 ***Social and Environmental Justice in Laudato Si'***

The pontificate of Pope Francis with its emphasis on the poor and the marginalised has brought renewed attention to the social justice concerns of the Catholic Church. Francis uses the theme of social justice in favour of the poor as the hermeneutical lens through which he interprets the social teaching of the Church. He makes this very clear in EG: "Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society. This demands that we be docile and attentive to the cry of the poor and to come to their aid".³⁰⁶ This Christian demand, Francis further asserts "means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter" (EG 188). Thus, there is no justifiable excuse for abandoning and being indifferent to the cause of the poor. No one is "exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice..." (EG 201).

For Francis, the poor constitute the less privileged, women, migrants, and refugees, the marginalised and abandoned of society such as the elderly and "other weak and defenceless beings who are frequently at the mercy of economic interests or indiscriminate exploitation" (EG 201). Francis categorised the environment as one of the weak and defenceless beings that need to be protected and cared for (EG 15).

At the heart of Francis' vision of integral ecology is the proposal for a new paradigm of justice. Francis avers that environmental degradation is inextricably linked to other aspects of global injustice. In light of the intertwined link between social and environmental poverty, Francis in *Laudato Si'* confluent issues of social justice and environmental justice which hitherto were treated separately. The encyclical is permeated by references to social and environmental justice.

³⁰⁵ Cf. I. Otu, *Communion Ecclesiology and Social Transformation in Africa Catholicism*, op. cit. 169-195.

³⁰⁶ *Evangelium Gaudium*, n. 187.

- Francis' personification of the earth as 'sister': Echoing St. Francis of Assisi's canticle of creation, Pope Francis personifies the earth as a sister crying out for help due to the harm inflicted on her by "our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her".³⁰⁷ This cry is a passionate call to humanity to change direction and seek to restore the right balance in our relationship with other members of the planetary community.
- Francis perceives the ecological crisis not as an isolated problem but one that is connected to the debasement of human dignity both individually and collectively. He argues that "we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the *cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*" (LS 49).
- Francis points out that the intertwined social and environmental degradation demands that the human community change tack for it has caused "sister earth, along with all the abandoned of our world, to cry out, pleading that we take another course". (LS 53).
- Francis advocates for the judicious use of nature's resources. He challenges what he calls the mistaken view of human domination which views nature's resources from the sole angle of profit and gains. Without ambiguity, Francis notes that the arbitrary use of nature's resources for the sole purpose of profit is at odds with the ideals of harmony, justice, fraternity and peace as proposed by Jesus. (LS 82).

Francis' linkage of social justice and environmental justice evokes both biblical tradition and the contextual theology of Latin America especially the theological analysis of Leonardo Boff. Biblically, the starting point of justice is right relationship.

The Hebrew word '*sēdāqâ* or *sedeq*' (righteousness/justice) which has a relational undertone informs the biblical understanding of justice in its various forms and expressions.³⁰⁸ As Brigid Reynolds and Sean Healy have pointed out, biblical justice contains within it the idea of right relationships with God the creator, with others and with the environment. These

³⁰⁷ LS 2.

³⁰⁸ Cf. I. Fuček, "Justice" in R. Latourelle & R. Fisichella (Eds), *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 1994, 560-581.

interwoven dimensions of justice underpin biblical faith and call for concern for one's neighbour especially the poor and excluded (Deut. 14:29; 15:7-9; Ex. 22: 21-22; Job 29:11-20; Prov. 29:7).³⁰⁹

In LS Francis retrieves the biblical understanding of justice and its emphasis on harmony in the human person's tri-dimensional relationships with our neighbour and with the earth.

According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. This in turn distorted our mandate to "have dominion" over the earth (cf. Gen 1:28), to "till it and keep it" (Gen 2:15). As a result, the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature became conflictual (cf. Gen 3:17-19).³¹⁰

Francis' integration of social and environmental justice in LS has a strong parallel with the inseparability of the plight of the earth and the plight of the poor in the theological reflections of the liberation theologian, Leonardo Boff.³¹¹ In his work *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (1997), Boff expands the reach of liberation theology to ecology.

Liberation theology and ecological discourse have something in common: they start from two bleeding wounds. The wound of poverty breaks the social fabric of millions and millions of poor people around the world. The other wound, systematic assault on the earth, breaks down the balance of the planet, which is under threat from the plundering of development as practiced by contemporary global societies. Both lines of reflection and practice have as their starting point a cry: the cry of the poor for life, freedom, and beauty...and the cry of the Earth groaning under oppression.³¹²

Written against the backdrop of the environmental degradation and its impacts on the poor in the Amazon region of his native Brazil, Boff maintains that the plight of the human poor is intimately linked to the plight of the earth. He identifies the modern paradigm of progress

³⁰⁹ Cf. B. Reynolds & S. Healy, "Laudato Si' and Social Justice" in S. McDonagh (Ed), *Laudato Si': An Irish Response*, Veritas Publications, Dublin, 2017, 105-124.

³¹⁰ LS 66.

³¹¹ It should be noted that even though Boff's influence is writ large on Pope Francis' discussion of integral ecology, Francis does not explicitly reference Boff in the encyclical. According to Dawn M. Nothwehr, Francis' decision not to explicitly mention Boff was a good political strategy by Pope Francis. For although Boff's works on social and environmental issues have received wide recognition, the Vatican authorities were suspicious of Marxist influences in Boff's thought. In 1984 and 1991, he was silenced by the Vatican for his writings on ecclesiology and the priesthood. Boff took issue with his silencing by the Vatican as a cruel and pitiless use of ecclesiastical power. As a result, he resigned from the priesthood in 1992. In view of this background, any explicit mention of Boff would have made reception of the encyclical's message among some in the Church less likely. Cf. D. M. Nothwehr, "Leonardo Boff's Franciscan Liberation Ecological Theology and "Integral Ecology" in *Laudato Si'*" in D. R. DiLeo (Ed), *All Creation is Connected: Voices in Response to Pope Francis's Encyclical on Ecology*, op cit. 94-112.

³¹² L. Boff, *The Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, Orbis Book, New York, 1997, 104.

sustained by the capitalist and authoritarian socialist political systems as the cause of social injustices against the poor as well as injustices against the earth. In the name of progress, the modern political systems have created a binary worldview of nature and society, humans, and nonhumans, thereby destroying the fabric of interconnectedness and interdependence inherent in creation. This worldview has provided the paradigm for setting human beings apart from nature and from the planetary community. It has also provided the justification for the exploitation of the earth and the poor thereby engendering the rising social inequality, exclusion, increasing poverty and deterioration of the environment.³¹³ From the onset of the book, Boff argues that “The logic that exploits classes and subjects peoples to the interests of a few rich and powerful countries is the same as the logic that devastates the Earth and plunders its wealth, showing no solidarity with the rest of humankind and future generations”.³¹⁴

The language of ‘cry’, a metaphor for anguish and pain calls for attentive listening to the lamentation and suffering of the poor and the earth. The call of Francis to attend to social and environmental injustice is not grounded in some abstract theological and philosophical arguments but based on real-life situations in many parts of the world. With concrete examples, Francis highlights the effects of the suffering of the earth and the poor:

- the desolation of the earth (LS 2),
- the shortage of safe drinking water for the poor (LS 29),
- the decline of the quality of life and the exacerbation of conflicts due to a shortage of resources (LS 43-46),
- increasing global inequality (LS 48-52).

In summary, Francis’ critique of social injustices and inequitable economic order as well as environmental injustice speaks to the concrete realities of many impoverished countries around the world, particularly the African continent. Therefore, his vision of an integrated approach to social and environmental justice concerns and his call for a shift in thinking on the part of religious

³¹³ Cf. *ibid* 67-69.

³¹⁴ *Ibid* xi.

adherents and policymakers is both timely and relevant for the socio-ecclesial context of Sierra Leone.

4.4 SOME EMERGENT INSIGHTS FROM FRANCIS' VISION OF AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR THE SOCIAL-ECCLESIAL CONTEXT OF SIERRA LEONE

How is Pope Francis' vision of an integrated approach relevant for the social-ecclesial context of Sierra Leone? In answering this question, I will highlight and discuss in this section three emergent insights gleaned from the foregone discussions in this chapter.

4.4.1 *Respect for Ecological Values in Other Religious Traditions*

Firstly, Francis' integrated approach to the ecological challenge pays deference to ecological values in other religious traditions. His integral ecology with the relational anthropology it espouses expands the boundaries of Christian anthropology beyond the confines of anthropocentric interests to a more holistic and integrated vision. This vision speaks to the socio-cultural and religious sensibilities of Sierra Leone for it is open to listening to both the voices of the other Abrahamic faiths³¹⁵ and also to voices of indigenous religions.³¹⁶

As we have seen, Pope Francis grounds his relational anthropology in the doctrine of creation - a core belief that Christianity shares with Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This clearly has an ecumenical and interfaith relevance for Sierra Leone for it engages the religious worldview of the dominant religions practised in the country, namely, Christianity and Islam.³¹⁷

Francis' integral ecology with the anthropology it espouses also resonates with the African traditional worldview of the people of Sierra Leone.³¹⁸ Although the majority of Sierra Leoneans identify themselves as either Christians or Muslims, their worldview is considerably influenced by the belief systems of African traditional religions. The traditional African worldview conceives reality from the standpoint of community, relatedness and solidarity. As such, reality

³¹⁵ Cf. V. Miller, "Integral Ecology: Francis's Moral and Spiritual Vision of Interconnectedness" op. cit.

³¹⁶ C. Deane-Drummond, "A new anthropology? *Laudato Si'* and the Question of Interconnectedness", op. cit.

³¹⁷ I will discourse in detail the ecumenical and interfaith perspective of environmental justice in the 6th chapter of this work.

³¹⁸ I use the word 'worldview' here in the context of belief systems as "a set of assumptions held consciously or unconsciously in faith about the basic makeup of the world and how the world works."; D. L Miller, *Discipling Nations, The Power of Truth to Transform Cultures*, Seattle, WA: YWAM Publishing, 2001, 38.

consists of an interdependent existence among the divine, humans (both the living and the dead) and nature.³¹⁹ Accordingly, being a person in the context of the African religious worldview Bénézet Bujo explains, is defined not through the lens of individualism but by means of relations.³²⁰ This integrated worldview, characterised by an interdependent system of existence, embraces both the physical and spiritual dimensions of reality. As such, there exists a thin dichotomy “between the profane and the sacred, the temporal and non-temporal, the individual and communal, matter and spirit, plant and animals as well as between animate and inanimate”.³²¹

The African traditional worldview places a strong emphasis on relationships, participation and community. It is within the context of this network of relationships that the dignity of humans both individually and collectively finds its basis.³²² In addition, the African traditional worldview promotes respect and reverence for life systems on earth and informs environmental responsibility in its various expressions. It should be noted however that Africans do not have a unified or homogenous worldview on environmental ethics. The rationale for caring and maintaining the integrity of the environment varies from anthropocentric interests to theocentric injunctions rooted in folkloric stories or a mixture of both.³²³ Irrespective of the varying views on what underpins African environmental ethics, the human-nature relationship in the African

³¹⁹ Cf. B. Bujo, “Ecology and Ethical Responsibility from an African Perspective” in M.F. Murove (Ed), *African Ethics: An Anthology of Comparative and Applied Ethics*, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Scottsville, 2009, 281–297.

³²⁰ Cf. B. Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality*, The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 2001, 3-4.

³²¹ P. Osuji, “*Laudato Si’* and Traditional African Environmental Ethics” in G. Magill & J. Potter, *Integral Ecology: Protecting Our Common Home*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle Upon Tyne, 2018, (184-208) 186; see also B. Bujo, “Ecology and Ethical Responsibility from an African Perspective” op. cit.

³²² Cf. B. Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic*, op. cit.

³²³ Although the African traditional religions view human-nature relations in symbiotic and interdependent terms, the underlying reasons for maintaining a harmonious relationship between humans and nature vary from culture to culture as evidenced in the writings of some scholars who have contributed to the subject of African environmental ethics. Cf. C. K. Omari, “Traditional African Land Ethics,” in J. R. Engel & J. Gibb Engel (Eds), *Ethics of Environment and Development: Global Challenge, International Response*, University of Arizona Press, Tucson, 1992, 167-175; S. Ogungbemi, “An African Perspective on the Environmental Crisis,” in L. J. Pojman (Ed), *Environmental Ethics: Readings in Theory and Application*, Wadsworth Publishing, Belmont, 1997, 330–337; Cf. W. Kelbessa, “Indigenous Environmental Ethics in Ethiopia” in K. Fukui et al (Eds), *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective: Papers of the Thirteenth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Shokado Books Sellers, Kyoto: 1997, 264–303; B. Bujo, “Ecology and Ethical Responsibility from an African Perspective”, op. cit.; M. F. Murove, “An African Environmental Ethic Based on the Concepts of Ukama and Ubuntu,” in M. F. Murove (Ed), *African Ethics: An Anthology of Comparative and Applied Ethics*, op. cit., 314–31.

traditional context is characterised by interconnectedness and interdependence. As Peter Osuji argues, in line with the traditional cosmocentric worldview, the self-realisation and the well-being of humans depend on maintaining harmony with the cosmic totality.³²⁴ This is clearly the case in the traditional communities of Sierra Leone. For instance, among the Mende ethnic group in south-eastern Sierra Leone, the symbiotic element of human-nature relations informs the ethic of environmental responsibility. In my maternal village of Bomu Samba located in Pujehun District Southern Sierra Leone, there is a portion of forest belt called *Elue* (an interdictory word in the Mende language which means ‘it must not be cut down’) that has remained exempt from all agricultural activities for generations. The *Elue* forest, besides the sacred and cultural significance attached to it, plays a very important environmental protection function. Lying between a river and the surrounding farmlands, the *Elue* forest serves as a natural flood defence during the peak of the rainy season.

The close affinity between the ecological ethics that Pope Francis’ integral ecology espouses, and the African traditional worldview provides a unique opportunity for the African Church to cultivate and promote the contributions of African theologies to ecological ethics. Although for too long overlooked, African theological reflections have something unique to offer to help mitigate the impacts of human-induced ecological challenges facing the continent and beyond. Stan Chu Ilo points out what an African theological contribution can bring to ecological ethics in a perceptive contribution to the book *Fragile World: Ecology and the Church* (2018). In his Essay entitled, “Fragile Earth, Fragile African: An African Eco-theology for human and Cosmic Flourishing”, Ilo notes that “the mechanistic, deistic and dualistic Western worldview that gave birth to an anthropocentric conception of creation – the main cause of patterns of living that led to climate change – cannot bring about a new ethics for environmental sustainability”.³²⁵ In order to address the underlying causes of the ecological crisis, Ilo contends that the dominant and pervasive Western worldview needs to be reformed so as to create a new ethical framework. He writes:

³²⁴ P. Osuji, “*Laudato Si’* and Traditional African Environmental Ethics” op. cit.

³²⁵ S. Chu Ilo, “Fragile Earth, Fragile African: An African Eco-theology for human and Cosmic Flourishing” in William T. Cavanaugh (Ed), *Fragile World: Ecology and the Church*, Cascade Books, Eugene OR, 2018, (129-150) at 145.

This Western worldview is in need of conversion, because the ecological crisis is also a result of a predominantly Western epistemological crisis regarding how the world is seen and the relationship between humans and nature. In search for a new ethical framework for integral ecology, African theologians are developing alternative pathways for eco-theology in conversation with other worldviews.³²⁶

Echoing Ilo, I maintain that the affinity between the African worldview and the ecological ethics that Francis proposes in LS offers an avenue for the local Catholic Churches in Africa to contribute to a new ethical framework by encouraging and promoting dialogue between indigenous or traditional knowledge systems and Catholic theology.

4.4.2 ***A New Lens on the Perspectives of the Global South***

Secondly, Francis' vision of integral ecology brings a new lens to the perspective of the Global South, more than any other papal encyclical. The Global South, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa, is not only characterised by endemic poverty, but it is also regarded as the most vulnerable region to the threats of the ecological crisis.³²⁷ On the question of poverty, Pope Francis has repeatedly said the problem of the poor cannot be resolved without the participation of the poor. Commenting on LS, Alexandre A. Martins has rightly observed that "the option for the poor is not only attention to the poor in Francis' thought, but rather it is the participation of the poor in a process of transformation from a paradigm of exploitation to a paradigm of caring."³²⁸ This raises an important question for the socio-political and ecclesial context of Sierra Leone and Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole. How can the poor be subjects of their own development? This question speaks to the issue of decolonising development programmes both within the socio-political and religious spheres.

In the post-independence era, Africa's development agenda has largely followed the trajectory of the Western model of development which is based on high levels of production, consumption and economic growth. In addition to providing little or no space for Africa's cultural elements, the Western model of development has been identified as one of the major drivers of

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Cf. C. Azzarri & Sara Signorelli, "Climate and poverty in Africa South of the Sahara" in *World Development*, Vol. 125 (Jan. 2020), 1-19.

³²⁸ A. A. Martins, "*Laudato Si'*: Integral Ecology and Preferential Option for the Poor" in *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 46, Issue 3 (September 2018), 411-424 at 419.

ecological degradation on the continent.³²⁹ However, the faulting of the Western model of development alone for Africa's environmental challenges does not tell the whole story. The failure of leadership on the part of the continent's post-independent leaders has not helped matters in this regard. In her book, *The Challenge for Africa* (2009), the late Kenyan environmental activist, Wangari M. Maathai not only decried this failure of leadership but argued for an urgent change in direction. She wrote:

Fundamentally, I argue, Africa needs a revolution in leadership – not only from the politicians who govern, but from an active citizenry that places its country above the narrow needs of its own ethnic group or community. Those in power – the presidents, prime ministers, politicians, and other elites – have to recognize that the way Africa has been conducting its affairs of state has neither protected the welfare of the continent's citizens nor provided for the long-term growth and stability of its nations...

The revolution I propose requires the development of policies that work for the benefit of all citizens rather than the advantage of a few. It necessitates standing up to international interests that seek access to the considerable natural resources with which Africa is blessed for less than fair market value.

Too many Africans still live in the hope that their leaders will be magnanimous enough not to take advantage of their weakness and vulnerability, and instead to remove the causes for why so many continue to live in fear.

The revolution in leadership and the need to instil a sense of service cannot be confined only to those at the top of African societies, however. Even the poorest and least empowered of Africa's citizens need to rid themselves of a culture that tolerates systemic corruption and inefficiency, as well as self-destructive tendencies and selfishness. They must grasp the available opportunities and not wait for someone else magically to make development happen for them...

At both the top and the bottom, all Africans must change the mind-set that affects many colonized peoples everywhere. They must believe in themselves again; that they are capable of clearing their own path and forging their own identity; that they have the right to be governed with justice, accountability, and transparency; that they can honour and practice their cultures and make them relevant to today's needs, and that they no longer need to be indebted – financially, intellectually, and spiritually – to those who once governed them. They must rise up and walk.³³⁰

There is a lot to unpack from the citation above. But the fundamental thread running through Maathai's perceptive insight is the injustices the African continent has suffered and continues to suffer at the hands of the colonial powers and post-independence leaders. In the name of progress, the continent's resources continue to be plundered leaving in its wake, to borrow the

³²⁹ Cf. A. L. Magbodgunje, "The environmental challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa" in *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development*, Vol. 37, Issue 4 (May 1995), 4-9, 31-35.

³³⁰ W. M. Maathai, *The Challenge for Africa*, Arrow Books, London, 2009, 18-20.

words of Pope Francis, the diminishment of the quality of human life and a deteriorated and degraded environment.³³¹

The Catholic Church and other mainline Christian traditions on the continent are to some extent complicit in the endemic socio-ecological challenges facing the continent. During the colonial period, some European missionary groups not only cooperated with the colonial authorities but also contributed to the devaluing of African traditional practices. For instance, reflecting on the context of what was known as the Belgian Congo, Bénézet Buju underscores this point. According to Buju, in 1923, the superiors of the Belgian Congo Mission issued a document in Stanleyville (now called Kisangani) with a list of African traditional practices considered harmful to public order and solicited the support of the colonial administration in banning them.³³²

In the post-independence era, the reforms initiated by Vatican II set in motion the process of indigenisation and inculturation of the Christian faith in the African Catholic Church. However, the process was painfully slow and marked by stiff resistance from some within the Vatican Hierarchy. It was against this backdrop that the theme of inculturation was selected as one of the five major deliberative themes of the African Synod I. However, questions remain about how far the local Churches have gone in implementing the proposals such as inculturation in the post-synodal era. In my view, the new lens that Pope Francis has brought to the perspective of the Global South offers a kairos moment for the local Church(es) in Sierra Leone (and in Africa as a whole) to decolonise its social mission by drawing on local resources including the rich cultural heritage of the continent.

4.4.3 ***A new lens on local ecclesial initiatives***

Another emergent insight I draw from Francis' vision of an integrated approach to social and environmental justice concerns relevant to the socio-ecclesial context of Sierra Leone is Francis' emphasis on local ecclesial initiatives in addressing social and environmental challenges.

³³¹ Cf. LS 194.

³³² B. Buju, *African Theology in its Social Context*, Translated by John O'Donoghue, Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1992, 44.

As I indicated in the general introduction to this work, the reforming agenda of Pope Francis' pontificate is showing greater commitment to Vatican II's vision of a decentralised and socially engaged church. Francis has called on the leaders of local churches to take the initiative in addressing urgent socio-pastoral issues in their ecclesial context. In LS, Francis in addition to affirming the importance of global consensus in addressing the ecological crisis, also underscores the need for local initiative (LS 62-64, 164). This is consistent with one of the central tenets of CST, namely the principle of subsidiarity. First articulated in QA by Pope Pius XI in 1931, the principle of subsidiarity holds that what people can accomplish by their own initiative and efforts at the local level should not be taken from them by a higher authority.³³³

Francis affirms the principle of subsidiarity in LS both in practice and in exhortation. At the level of practice, Francis extensively cites throughout the encyclical from regional and local episcopal conferences from around the world. Which shows that he values the voices of local churches. From the standpoint of exhortation, Francis alludes to the principle of subsidiarity in the encyclical firstly in his call for the promotion of the common good (LS 157) and secondly in appeals for an integrated and interdisciplinary approach in addressing the different aspects of the ecological crisis (LS 197).

A lot has been said about how the Vatican hierarchy prior to the pontificate of Pope Francis provided little space for a more inclusive and participatory form of decision-making in the Church, especially with regards to local churches in Africa and the Global South in general. But what has been often overlooked is the authoritarian way of governing and decision-making at play in those particular Churches. Francis' desire to implement the reforms set out by Vatican II for a more inclusive and participatory Church in my view is a wakeup call for the local church(es) in Sierra Leone and the wider African continent to make it their priority to introspect and bring about a more inclusive and participatory Church, especially with regards to issues that directly affect the livelihood of ordinary churches-goers.

As overwhelmingly acknowledged by participants of my empirical research in the first part of this work, there is an urgent need for the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone to systematically

³³³ Cf. Pius XI, QA n. 79.

respond to the urgent environmental challenges facing the country. In the words of one of the Catholic Bishops who participated in the research,

the sooner the [local Church in Sierra Leone] recognises the importance of [the place of environmental justice concerns] at all levels the better for the [entire country]. Global warming and climate change are not remote or marginal issues. They are here with us and they are affecting the livelihood of our people.

Echoing Pope Francis, responding to the identified need of integrating environmental justice concerns in the social mission of the Church in Sierra Leone must not lose sight of the importance of a more inclusive and participatory form of decision-making at all levels of the Church.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have argued that the gravity of the environmental challenges facing the socio-ecclesial context of Sierra Leone demands an integrated approach to social and environmental justice issues in the social mission of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone. Informed by the evidence-based data of my empirical research and Pope Francis' vision of integral ecology, the discussions in this chapter have undergirded the central argument of this thesis, namely, social and environmental justice are intricately linked (cf. LS 49), hence concern and care for the environment is not an optional extra in the Church's mission.

The chapter started off by presenting a general overview of Pope Francis' encyclical *On Care for our Common Home*. This was followed by an analysis of Pope Francis' vision of integral ecology. It was noted prior to Pope Francis, the term integral ecology has already been used by secular ecologists and eco-theologians. However, it was established that Francis' synthesis of the term in LS not only brings a distinctive moral lens to the concept, but it has also broadened and updated CST on the environment. Underpinned by the principle of interconnectedness, Francis' vision of integral ecology shifts CST from a purely human-centric focus to a more integrated cosmic vision. Drawing on multifaceted insights from various branches of human wisdom, Francis' synthesis of integral ecology integrates the traditional social justice concerns of CST with environmental justice issues.

Viewed from the socio-ecclesial context of Sierra Leone, the integral ecology of Pope Francis and its moral imperative for an integrated approach to social and environmental justice

concerns, despite its significant blind spots, appears to be a better approach for the social mission of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone if it were to respond to the environmental challenges confronting its socio-ecclesial context.

CHAPTER 5

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN RELATION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND INTEGRAL PEACE

Introduction

Recall that my research aims to assess environmental justice concerns or the lack thereof in the pastoral priorities of the local Catholic Church in Sierra Leone and to argue for the integration of environmental concern and care in its mission.

Chapter four argued for an integrated approach to social and environmental justice issues in the social mission of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone through the prism of Pope Francis' integral ecology. The argument made in the preceding chapter established that given the inherent link between social and environmental injustice, addressing social and environmental issues requires an integrated approach. Following that line of inquiry, this chapter focuses on environmental justice from the perspective of sustainable development and the promotion of peace in the social mission of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone.

The role of religion in enhancing and promoting development and peace has not only received recognition among international bodies, the links between religion and development, and religion and the promotion of peace have also become well-established subjects in development and peace studies in the last few decades. With regards to the link between religion and development, there has been a growing acknowledgement among international institutions of the role religion can play in promoting development. For instance, in 2004, the World Bank in recognition of the powerful influence of religion on public discourse called on international financial institutions to incorporate religious organisations in the fight against poverty and promote integral development.³³⁴ Also, research about the link between religion and development has gained prominence in the field of development studies.³³⁵

³³⁴ Cf. K. Marshall et al (Eds), *Mind, Heart, and Soul in the Fight Against Poverty*, World Bank, 2004 Washington D.C, 2004.

³³⁵ Cf. C. Wilber & K. Jameson, "Religious Values and Social Limits to Development" in *World Development*, vol. 8 no. 7 (1980) 467- 479; Erica Bornstein, "Developing Faith: Theologies of Economic Development in Zimbabwe" in

Similarly, the role of religion in facilitating and promoting peace has received greater prominence in international diplomacy and has led to the flourishing of academic research in the field of religious peacemaking.³³⁶

Despite this increased recognition of the role religion plays in enhancing development and promoting peace, much of the existing literature in development and peace studies has ignored the socio-ecological component of development and peace. In view of the link between poverty, environmental degradation and conflicts as established in LS, I will further delve into Pope Francis' vision of integral ecology in order to argue for the integration of an ecological component in the development and peace-promoting work of the development wing of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone. This chapter will contribute to the overall aim of this work by responding to the third and fourth research questions: How can the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone use its organisational structure, its influence and widespread membership to enhance ecological awakening and responsibility in its social mission? How might the Catholic Church advance care for the environment as a vehicle for sustainable development and conflict prevention and consolidating peace in Sierra Leone?

The chapter is structured as follows: The first section discusses the evolution of the concept of development within the Catholic tradition. The section focuses on Pope Francis' contribution to CST on promoting peace as articulated in LS. Following the insights gleaned from Pope Francis' integral approach to development and peace, the final section argues for the integration of environmental concerns in the development and the peace-promoting agenda of the Catholic Church in view of Sierra Leone's status as a post-conflict and fragile state.

Journal of Religion in Africa, 2002, Vol. 32, Issue 1, 4-31; V. Beek & A. Kurt, "Spirituality: a Development Taboo" in *Development in Practice*, Vol. 10, Issue 1 (February 2000), 31-43; Gerard Clarke, "Agents of Transformation? Donors, Faith-based Organisations and International development" in *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 28, Issue 1 (Jan. 2007), 77-96; G. Clarke & Michael Jennings (Eds) *Development, Civil Society and Faith Based-Organizations: Bridging the Sacred and the Secular*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2008; E. Tomalin (Ed), *The Routledge Research in Religion and Development*, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, London 2015.

³³⁶ Cf. C. Seiple et al (Eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Security*, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2015; A. Omer et al (Eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2015; Sara Silvestri, *The Role of Religion in Conflict and Peacebuilding*, The British Academy, London, 2015.

5.4.3 INTEGRAL AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The word 'development' is a complex term, with a multitude of meanings and associations attached to it. The complexity of the term can be attributed to the wide range of contexts in which it is used and the emphasis and agendas it reflects or justifies. Gilbert Rist in his informative description of the History of Development provides examples of how the meaning and emphasis can change depending on the context in which it is being used.³³⁷

- Dictionary usage– development has to do with growth, blossoming, progress, extension, expansion etc. (*Petit Robert dictionary* 1987).
- In the context of the Global south outlined in the Report of the South Commission, produced under the chairmanship of the former Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere, development is defined as

a process which enables human beings to realize their potential, build self-confidence, and lead lives of dignity and fulfilment. It is a process which frees people from the fear of want and exploitation. It is a movement away from political, economic, or social oppression. Through development, political independence acquires its true significance. And it is a process of growth, a movement essentially springing from within the society that is developing. (South Commission, *The Challenge to the South: the Report of the South*, 1990).

- From the perspective of the United Nations,

the basic objective of human development is to enlarge the range of people's choices to make development more democratic and participatory. These choices should include access to income and employment opportunities, education and health, and a clean and safe physical environment. Each individual should also have the opportunity to participate fully in community decisions and to enjoy human, economic and political freedoms.

(UNDP *Human Development Report* 1991).

Although the concept of development has a wide range of meanings and emphasis depending on the context in which it is used, underlying each meaning is the idea of transformation, improvement and progress.

³³⁷ G. Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith* (P. Camiller, Trans.), Zed Books, London, 2006, 8-9.

More recently, the UK Development Studies Association has provided an understanding of development from an interdisciplinary perspective. Seen from this perspective, development “concerns the global challenge of combatting poverty, injustice, and environmental degradation”.³³⁸ This conception of development captures the nexus between social and environmental injustice. This section explores Pope Francis’ contribution to the theme of development. The section begins with a brief survey of *Pre-Laudato Si’* CST on development followed by an analysis of Pope Francis’ delineation of the concept of development.

5.1.1 *Pre-Laudato CST on development*

Modern CST in its concern for societal development and transformation has also taken onboard the concept of development. The concept assumed greater urgency during the pontificate of John XXIII in his bid to update the Church’s teachings so as to make them more relevant to global social dynamics. John XXIII’s *Mater et Magistra* (1961) was the first major encyclical to speak to the issue of development.³³⁹ In the face of extreme poverty in the world and the widening gap between developed and underdeveloped countries in economic and social conditions, John XXIII urged the rich nations to assist poorer nations to achieve a greater measure of economic development (MM 157-177). Vatican II in GS also devoted some attention to the notion of development in its treatment of social-economic problems. Against the backdrop of the 1950s and 1960s development models that emphasised sustained economic growth, Vatican II advocated for a balanced development model that integrates economic values and human values (such as freedom, dignity and participation) that serves the whole man taking into consideration his intellectual, moral and spiritual needs (GS 64).³⁴⁰ Although the themes related to the concept of development were discussed in the pontificate of John XXIII and in Vatican II conciliar teachings, it was Pope Paul VI who gave the concept a central place in CST. In his 1967 encyclical PP, Paul VI further expanded and clarified Vatican II’s teaching on development. In PP, Paul VI espoused an approach to development centred on the human person:

³³⁸ UK Development Studies Association, What is Development Studies, <https://www.devstud.org.uk/about/what-is-development-studies/>, date accessed 21/10/2022.

³³⁹ Cf. D. Dorr, *Option of the Poor and the Earth*, op. cit. 99-102.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 147-150.

The development we speak of here cannot be restricted to economic growth alone. To be authentic, it must be well-rounded; it must foster the development of each man and of the whole man. As an eminent specialist on this question has rightly said: “We cannot allow economics to be separated from human realities, nor development from the civilization in which it takes place. What counts for us is man – each individual man, each human group, and humanity as a whole.”³⁴¹

Paul VI’s conception of authentic development, Allan F. Deck has observed, adds important elements to the notion of economic development as it provides a larger framework that transcends purely economic development and contributes to the ongoing humanisation.³⁴²

The understanding of development articulated in PP and OA by Paul VI has provided the basis for contemporary CST on issues related to societal development in the last fifty years. John Paul II and Benedict XVI in their social encyclicals SRS (1987) and CiV (2009) reaffirmed and expanded on the ideas on development outlined in PP.³⁴³

5.1.2 ***From Integral Human Development to Integral Sustainable Development***

The language and spirit of PP and its follow-up documents are also writ large in Pope Francis’ delineation of development in LS. It has been widely acknowledged that Francis’ reflections on development in LS anticipated critical convocations of world leaders in 2015; the UN General Assembly’s ratification of the SDGs and the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris in December where an integrated approach to development was discussed.

Like Paul VI and succeeding popes, Francis insists that the current model of development which unduly focuses on economic growth is not sustainable (cf. LS 61). In view of this, he advocates for a model of development that is both integral and sustainable – a model he calls *integral sustainable development* (Ls 13, 18, 50). Like his predecessors, Francis’ teaching on development is animated by the principles of the common good, the universal destination of the resources of the earth, and solidarity with the poor. However, although there is continuity between Francis and his predecessors on the subject of development, Francis’ framing of the

³⁴¹ PP 14.

³⁴² Cf. A. F. Deck, “Commentary on *Populorum Progressio* (On the development of Peoples)” in K. R. Himes (Ed), *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, Georgetown University Press, Washington D. C. 2005, (292-314) 305.

³⁴³ Cf. M. Rapela Heidt, “Development, Nations, and “The Signs of the Times:” the Historical Context of *Populorum Progressio*” in *Journal of Moral Theology*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2017): 1-20.

concept of development through the prism of integral ecology is quite novel. Through the lens of integral ecology, Francis brings a broader cosmic dimension to Catholic teaching on development. He writes; “everything is interconnected and that genuine care for own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others”.³⁴⁴ Thus, this conception of development brings a critical lens to the link between poverty and environmental degradation.

The notion of sustainability in relation to development is not unique to Pope Francis. According to William Scott & Stephen Gough, the adoption of the idea of sustainable development in international policy can be traced to the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment which led to the Stockholm Declaration. The concept gained prominence following the publication of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) report or ‘The Brundtland Report’ (1987) titled *Our Common Future*. The report described sustainable development as development that meets

the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future. Far from requiring the cessation of economic growth, it recognizes that the problems of poverty and underdevelopment cannot be solved unless we have a new era of growth in which developing countries play a large role and reap large benefits.³⁴⁵

The Brundtland Report laid the foundation of the 1992 Rio de Janeiro UN Summit on Environment and Development³⁴⁶ and subsequent UN documents on developments such as the Millennium Development Goals (2000) and SDGs.

In LS Francis builds on this international consensus on the notion of Sustainable Development to articulate a moral and spiritual perspective of the concept. This moral vision of sustainable development runs through the entire encyclical:

- Appeal to seek a sustainable and integral development so as to protect our ‘common home’ (LS 13).

³⁴⁴ LS 70.

³⁴⁵ World Commission on Environment and Development, *Report: Our Common Future (1987)*, n. 49, <http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf>, date accessed 23/10/2022.

³⁴⁶ Cf. W. Scott & S. Gough, *Sustainable Development and Learning: Framing the Issues*, Routledge Falmer, London, 2003, 12.

- From the point of view of diagnosis, the encyclical attributes the current state of our global commons to the vision of progress and change that is oblivious to the common good and sustainable development (LS 18). This point is further emphasised in the closing section of the 5th chapter where Francis calls for a redefining of our notion of progress – one that does not leave in its wake the diminishment of the quality of human life and a deteriorated and degraded environment (LS 194).
- The call for developed countries to support policies and programmes of sustainable development (LS 52).
- Under the theme of ‘ecology of daily life’, the encyclical also treats the subject of development. It links authentic development to the improvement of the quality of human life and the quality of the environmental settings in which people live their lives. Francis asserts that environmental settings have a strong influence on how human beings think, feel, act and express their identity. Thus, urban development needs to take into account the close link between the quality of the natural environment and the quality of human life (LS 147-151). Furthermore, Francis speaks to the dire global problem of a lack of housing in both rural areas and urban centres which affects not only the poor but also other members of society (LS 152).
- The encyclical links inter-generational solidarity with sustainable development. Basing his argument on ethical considerations, Francis advocates for a development that takes into account the welfare of the present generation without compromising the needs of future generations. (LS 159).

As indicated above, Francis joins his voice to the international consensus to call for a development that is integral and sustainable. However, he brings a broader perspective to it as pointed out by Cardinal Peter Turkson:

Pope Francis is calling for something broader and more encompassing than what the world means by sustainable development. He is calling for “integral and sustainable human development”. This might seem like merely adding the extra word “integral”, but that extra word makes all the difference! In Catholic social teaching, integral human development refers to the development of the whole person and every person. Such multi-faceted development goes well beyond an ever-expanding GDP, even a better-distributed one, and merely economic or material progress. It encompasses the cultural, social, emotional, intellectual, aesthetic, and religious dimensions. It is

an invitation for each person on the planet to flourish, to use the gifts given to them by God to become who they were meant to be.³⁴⁷

From the above-cited text, Francis' moral conception of integral sustainable development in LS appeals for a re-envisioning of a model of development that promotes social inclusivity and environmental sustainability. This sits well with his call for "an integrated approach to combatting poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature" (LS 139).

Another perspective that Francis brings to the notion of sustainable development, is the voice of the Global South to the Church and the international global space. It is worth remembering that the concept of development as envisioned in the secular international discourse was and to some extent still is a one-way traffic by means of which the powerful nations of the Global North handed down principles and policies on what they perceived to be authentic development to the nations in the Global South. This approach to development as Wolfgang Sachs has rightly observed, is donor-driven, "where donors hand down capital, growth and social policies to beneficiary countries to recondition them for the global race".³⁴⁸ This approach, to use the words of Sachs is laden with "sediments of colonial history",³⁴⁹ for poverty and its related effects in the Global South is seen as a problem to be addressed through interventions from the Global North. In this sense, the people of the Global South are regarded as passive recipients in need of help from a superior donor.³⁵⁰ Francis in line with his vision of going forth to the periphery, insists that the problem of poverty which is being exacerbated by the environmental crisis cannot be resolved without the participation of the poor themselves. In an address delivered at a 2019 conference on Religions and SDGs held in Rome, Francis underscored the

³⁴⁷ P. Turkson, "Cardinal Turkson's Address to Global Responsibility 2030", in Zenith – World Seen From Rome (March 7, 2016), <https://zenit.org/2016/03/07/cardinal-turks-sons-address-to-global-responsibility-2030/>, date accessed 23/10/2022.

³⁴⁸ W. Sachs, "The Sustainable Development Goals and Laudato Si': Varieties of Post-Development?" in *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 38, Issue 12 (December 2017), 2573–2587 at 2576.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Cf. M. Vossen et al, "In Search of the Pitiful Victim: A Frame Analysis of Dutch, Flemish and British Newspapers and NGO-Advertisements" in *Journal of International Development*, vol. 30, Issue 4 (May 2018), 643–660; M. Vogt, Development Postcolonial: A Critical Approach to Understanding SDGs in the Perspective of Christian Social Ethics in *Global Sustainability*, Volume 5, 2022, 1-9.

need to listen to the voices of those who are usually excluded from discussions on development. These include “the poor, migrants, indigenous people, the young”.³⁵¹

To sum up, being a global actor, Francis’ discourse on sustainable development offers a moral reference point for international policy initiatives. As stated earlier, LS was released in anticipation of key global negotiations on social and environmental issues – the Paris Climate Summit and the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit. Some of the major issues discussed in LS were also of the highest concern in those global debates and negotiations in Paris and New York. Francis’ vision of integral sustainable development outlined against the backdrop of the impact of the global socio-ecological crisis – the lack of access to safe drinking water for the poor, the loss of biodiversity, the collapse of societies and the intensification of poverty and inequality – dovetails with the language of the UN SDGs,³⁵² albeit with some major differences in approaches and emphasis such as issues related to sexual reproductive health.³⁵³

5.2 POPE FRANCIS’ INTEGRAL ECOLOGY IN RELATION TO PROMOTING INTEGRAL PEACE

Religion can be a source of mobilisation for promoting peace or conflict or, as observed by scholar R. Scott Appleby in his work *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (2000), the interpretation of sacred religious texts can be used to endorse conflict or promote peace.³⁵⁴ Despite this ambivalence, religious traditions are considered as a rich source for peace promotion, a point echoed by Pope Francis in his 2017 address to the Religion for Peace delegation: “The religions, with their spiritual and moral resources, have a specific and unique role to play in building peace. They cannot be neutral, much less ambiguous, where peace

³⁵¹ Francis, *Address to Participants at the Conference on “Religions and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Listening to the Cry of the Earth and of the Poor”* (March 8, 2019), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/march/documents/papa-francesco_20190308_religioni-svilupposostenibile.html, date accessed 23/10/2022.

³⁵² Cf. A. J. Lyon, “Pope Francis as a Global Policy Entrepreneur: Moral Authority and Climate Change” in A. J. Lyon et al (Eds), *Pope Francis as a Global Actor: Where Politics and Theology Meet*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, Switzerland, 2018, 119-140.

³⁵³ Cf. K. Bosselmann, *The Principle of Sustainability: Transforming law and governance*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2017, 41.

³⁵⁴ R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. Oxford, 2000.

is concerned”.³⁵⁵ Working for peace constitutes an important part of the Christian message and mission. The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* spells out the Church’s self-understanding of its mission as an instrument of peace:

*The promotion of peace in the world is an integral part of the Church's mission of continuing Christ's work of redemption on earth. In fact, the Church is, in Christ, a “sacrament’ or sign and instrument of peace in the world and for the world.” The promotion of true peace is an expression of Christian faith in the love that God has for every human being.*³⁵⁶

The social teaching of the Church, which provides fundamental insights into the Church’s position on social issues, contains a rich deposit of moral principles and values that advance the cause of promoting peace in the world. This section focuses on the contribution of LS to contemporary CST teaching on promoting peace and integral peacebuilding. I shall begin by giving a brief overview of contemporary magisterial teaching on peace followed by an examination of Pope Francis’ integral ecology and its implication for the promotion of peace.

5.2.1 ***Pre-Laudato Si’ CST on Promoting peace and Peacebuilding***

Catholic teaching on peace and security has been traditionally informed by two theological positions in particular; the just war theory and pacifism. The just war theory, inspired by the writings of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, outlines the moral criteria for conducting wars and the ethical limits on the use of force. Pacifism, by contrast, holds that war is wrong because its costs always outweigh its gains.³⁵⁷ For centuries, the Church’s teaching on peace and security were largely shaped by the just war theory. However, in the years leading to the Second Vatican Council, there was a gradual revision and reorientation of the just war theory and a shift in emphasis from just war to positive peace in CST. Peace in the positive sense has to do with factors that create and sustain peace and security. Theologian Kenneth R. Himes drawing on Drew Christiansen’s conception of positive peace as a *convoy concept*, i.e., an image that “indicates

³⁵⁵ Francis, Address to a Delegation from Religions for Peace, (October 18, 2017), http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/october/documents/papa-francesco_20171018_delegati-religionsforpeace.html, date accessed 25/10/22.

³⁵⁶ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, para. 217.

³⁵⁷ Cf. Cahill, “The Changing Vision of “Just Peace in Catholic Social Tradition” in *Journal of Moral Theology*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2018, 102-108; ; L. Sowle Cahill, “Peacebuilding: A Practical Strategy of Hope” in *Journal of Catholic Social Thought*, Vol. 11, Issue 1, 2014, 47-66.

how different themes are part of the one concept of peace”,³⁵⁸ describes positive peace as follows:

It conveys a rich, multidimensional reality. This positive peace is found in the Hebrew sense of shalom. The ancient Hebrews saw peace as entailing an abundance of life within the community, a sense of well-being, having economic, social, familial, religious and political aspects. Biblically, true peace, the idea of shalom, meant that the conditions for a flourishing communal life were in place for all to enjoy.³⁵⁹

In contemporary CST, the shift towards the notion of positive peace began with the promulgation of John XXIII’s landmark 1963 encyclical *Pacem in Terris*. This shift was occasioned by the introduction of new technologies which increasingly changed the nature of warfare. John XXIII’s *Pacem in Terris* was the first papal document to be entirely dedicated to the promotion of world peace. Issued at the height of the Cold War and in the shadow of an imminent threat of nuclear warfare, the encyclical articulated the Church’s vision of peace that is grounded on the recognition, respect, safeguarding and promotion of human rights (*Pacem in Terris* n.139).³⁶⁰ In *Pacem in Terris* John XXIII challenged the reasonability of war (*Pacem in Terris* nn. 93, 112, 127, 162) and elaborated a vision of peace that goes beyond the mere avoidance of violence. Drew Christiansen points to *Pacem in Terris* as the document that laid the groundwork for CST on peace and opened the door to the other dimensions of peace – namely, justice, development, solidarity and world order – set forth in subsequent magisterial documents.³⁶¹

The Second Vatican Council which engendered discussions on a wide range of social issues in light of changes in the modern world carried forward the legacy of *Pacem in Terris* on how peace can be achieved in the global community. Vatican II’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World links peace to the notion of justice: “Peace is not merely the absence of war; nor can it be reduced solely to the maintenance of a balance of power between enemies; nor is it

³⁵⁸ D. Christiansen, “Catholic Peacemaking, 1991-2005: The Legacy of Pope John Paul II”, in *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, vol. 4, Issues 2 (September 2006), 21-28 at 22.

³⁵⁹ K. R. Himes, “Peacebuilding and Catholic Social Teaching,” op. cit. 268.

³⁶⁰ Cf. “Peace on Earth: *Pacem in Terris*” in D. J. O’Brien & T. A. Shannon (Eds), *Renewing the Earth: Catholic Documents on Peace, Justice and Liberation*, Image Books, Garden City, NY, 1977, 117-170.

³⁶¹ Cf. D. Christiansen, “Catholic Peace-making: From *Pacem in Terris* to *Centesimus annus*” *A Talk Delivered at the United States Institute of Peace* (February 5, 2001), www.restorativejustice.org/resources/docs/christiansen, date accessed 25/10/2022; see also D. Christiansen, “Catholic Peacemaking, 1991-2005: The Legacy of Pope John Paul II” in *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, Vol. 2, Issue 2 (September 2006), 21-28.

brought about by dictatorship. Instead, it is rightly and appropriately called an enterprise of justice” (GS 78). Paul VI against the backdrop of endemic poverty and its related effects – hunger, diseases, ignorance and socio-political instability especially in the developing world, delineated peace in terms of development in his 1967 encyclical PP, (also in his 1965 address to the UN), noting that “Development is the new name for Peace” (PP 76). In the same year, PP was released, Paul VI further advanced the promotion of peace with the creation of the pontifical commission (which eventually became the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace)³⁶² and also launched the idea of the observance of the World Day of Peace on the first day of the year.³⁶³

Pope John Paul II who experienced first-hand the destructive effects of war in his native Poland during World War II was unquestionably one of the foremost advocates of peace and nonviolent means of addressing injustice during his pontificate. In addition to the other dimensions of peace – human rights, justice and development – John Paul II championed the cause of peace by amplifying the importance of the culture of solidarity for the promotion of peace in his social encyclicals, his twenty-six World Day of Peace messages and other papal documents. Writing in his 1987 World of Peace message, John Paul II declared that development and solidarity are “the two keys to peace”.³⁶⁴ In the same year, John Paul reiterated the importance of solidarity for peace in a follow-up encyclical on development ‘*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* – Social Concern (1987) where he explicitly developed a theological description of the concept of solidarity and applied it to various social questions. In relation to peace, John Paul II declared that solidarity is the path to peace. “The goal of peace, so desired by everyone, will certainly be achieved through the putting into effect of social and international justice, but also through the practice of the virtues which favour togetherness, and which teach us to live in unity, so as to build in unity, by giving and receiving, a new society and a better world”.³⁶⁵ Through the lens of solidarity, John Paul II also linked the issue of peace to environmental well-being. In his

³⁶² Cf. Paul VI, *Motu Proprio Catholicam Christi Ecclesiam*, (January 6, 196).

³⁶³ Inspired by John XXIII *Pacem in Terris*, Paul VI established the World Day of Peace in 1967 and inaugurated its first observance on January 1, 1968. Since then, every Pope has had an annual address on various themes in relation to peace.

³⁶⁴ Cf. John Paul II, *Development and Solidarity: Two keys to Peace*, Twentieth World Day of Peace Message, (January 1, 1987), http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19861208_xx-world-day-for-peace.html, date accessed 26/10/2022.

³⁶⁵ John Paul II *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* – Social Concern (December 30, 1987), n. 39. Op. cit.

message for the twenty-third World Day of Peace entitled *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation* (1990), the Polish Pope focused on the threat the ecological crisis poses to world peace in addition to the arms race, regional conflicts and injustices. In light of the emerging ecological awareness, he declared that

The ecological crisis reveals the urgent moral need for a new solidarity, especially in relations between the developing nations and those that are highly industrialized. States must increasingly share responsibility, in complementary ways, for the promotion of a natural and social environment that is both peaceful and healthy.³⁶⁶

On a practical level, John Paul II promoted peace through interfaith initiatives. In recognition of the role of religion in fostering peace and solidarity, he invited representatives of world religions to Assisi to pray for peace in 1986, 1988 and 2002.³⁶⁷

The pontificate of Benedict XVI also made interventions on issues related to promoting peace and human security. Concerned with moral relativism and with the Church's teaching not becoming distorted,³⁶⁸ Benedict XVI through the World Day of Peace Messages also addressed many other social questions related to promoting peace such as fighting poverty,³⁶⁹ protecting the environment,³⁷⁰ religious freedom,³⁷¹ and educating young people in justice and peace.³⁷²

³⁶⁶ John Paul II, *Twenty-third World Day of Peace Message: Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation* (January 1, 1990) n. 10, op. cit.

³⁶⁷ Cf. M. L. Fitzgerald & J. Borelli, *Interfaith Dialogue: A Catholic View*, Orbis Book Maryknoll NY, 2006, 71.

³⁶⁸ Cf. J. Benestad, "Pope Benedict XVI on the Political and Social Order" in G. Bradley & E. Brugger (Eds.), *Catholic Social Teaching: A Volume of Scholarly Essays*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2019, 188-216; Cf also CIV n. 72.

³⁶⁹ Cf. Benedict XVI, World Day of Peace Message, *Fighting Poverty to Build Peace*, (January 1, 2009), http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20081208_xlii-world-day-peace.html, date accessed 27/10/2022.

³⁷⁰ Benedict, World Day of Peace Message, *If You want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation*, (January 1, 2010), http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliii-world-day-peace.html, date accessed 27/11/2022.

³⁷¹ Benedict XVI, World Day of Peace Message, *Religious Freedom, the Path to Peace*, (January 1, 2011), http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20101208_xliv-world-day-peace.html, date accessed 28/10/2022.

³⁷² Benedict XVI, World Day of Peace Message, *Educating Young People in Justice and Peace* (January 1, 2012), http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20111208_xlv-world-day-peace.html, date accessed 28/10/2022.

5.2.2 *Laudato Si' and Integral Peace*

In addition to being an environmental encyclical, LS has been categorised as a peace encyclical.³⁷³ Internal evidence from the encyclical itself affirms its categorisation as a peace document. Firstly, the document is inspired by St. Francis of Assisi whom Pope Francis describes as a man of poverty, a man of peace, who loved and protected creation (LS 10). Secondly, Pope Francis situates LS in the peace tradition of John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris*. In the preamble of the encyclical, Francis invokes the legacy of *Pacem in Terris* to underscore the enormity of the socio-ecological crisis confronting the world:

More than fifty years ago, with the world teetering on the brink of a nuclear crisis, Pope Saint John XXIII wrote an Encyclical which not only rejected war but offered a proposal for peace. He addressed his message *Pacem in Terris* to the entire "Catholic world" and indeed "to all men and women of good will". Now, faced as we are with global environmental deterioration, I wish to address every person living on this planet.³⁷⁴

Following in the papal tradition of his predecessors, Pope Francis has given renewed energy to the culture of promoting peace as an essential component of the Church's mission in the world. Pope Francis reiterates this aspect of the Church's mission earlier in EG:

The Church proclaims "the Gospel of peace" (Eph. 6:15) and she wishes to cooperate with all national and international authorities in safeguarding this immense universal good. By preaching Jesus Christ, who is himself peace (cf. Eph. 2:14), the new evangelization calls on every baptized person to be a peacemaker and a credible witness to a reconciled life.³⁷⁵

Francis presents his first social encyclical as part of the peace tradition of the Church. As indicated above, Pope Francis' LS draws a striking parallel to John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris* in its approach to the problem of the world on the brink of nuclear war. Like John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris* which addressed the subject of nuclear proliferation and the threats it poses to world peace in the 1960s, Francis sees the ecological crisis as a threat to the peace and stability of the world. Building on the trajectory of *Pacem in Terris* and subsequent papal teachings on peace, Francis develops his vision of peace by rearticulating the orientations of human rights, justice, integral

³⁷³ Cf. Pax Christi, *Peace Encyclicals & messages*, <https://paxchristi.org.uk/resources/previous-world-peace-day-themes/>, date accessed 28/10/2022.

³⁷⁴ LS 3.

³⁷⁵ Francis, EG n.239

development, solidarity and environmental protection as essential pathways for substantive peace.

However, unlike his predecessors who emphasised these orientations to promote ‘peace on earth,’ it seems to me, Francis has broadened them to promote not only peace on earth but also ‘peace with earth’.³⁷⁶ He acknowledges that the abuse of human rights, endemic poverty, and economic and social exclusions arouse tension and conflicts, and pose a danger to the whole of the planetary stability. Drawing inspiration from St. Francis of Assisi’s personification of the earth, ‘our common home’ as being “like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us” (LS 1). Francis asserts that the whole of the universe, brought into existence by God, is linked by “an unseen bond and together form a kind of university family” (LS 89). This universal family Francis declares – recalling biblical teaching – has been ruptured by sin, the basis of conflict and violence. He makes this painfully clear in the second paragraph of the encyclical: “The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life” (LS 2).

Human sin and the violent actions it precipitates take many forms and can have negative repercussions for the whole of creation. Francis highlights a number of such negative consequences in the context of the current social and ecological crisis; pollution and climate change, the degradation of water resources, the depletion of natural resources, the decline in the quality of human life, the weakening of societal bonds, the growth of income and wealth inequality.³⁷⁷ Francis contends that the visible impacts of aforementioned human/societal and environmental degradations are “seen in the premature death of many of the poor, in conflicts sparked by shortage of resources, and in any number of other problems which are insufficiently represented on global agendas” (LS 48). With great clarity, the Pontiff warns that the depletion of some natural resources poses a serious risk to peace. He writes, “It is foreseeable that, once certain resources have been depleted, the scene will be set for new wars, albeit under the guise

³⁷⁶ Cf. T. Winright, “Peace on Earth, Peace with Earth: *Laudato Si'* and Integral Peacebuilding” in D. R. DiLeo (Ed), *All Creation is Connected*, op. cit. 195-211.

³⁷⁷ Cf. LS 20-57.

of noble claims” (LS 57). Considering the indiscriminate destructive nature of modern weapons, he fears that such wars will be widespread and devastating for the natural environment: “War always does grave harm to the environment and to the cultural riches of peoples, risks which are magnified when one considers nuclear arms and biological weapons” (LS 57). In view of these reasons, Francis calls on political leaders to exercise visionary leadership by paying “greater attention to foreseeing new conflicts and addressing the causes which can lead to them”. (LS 57).

In response to the all-encompassing threats that the ecological crisis and its underlying unjust social systems pose for world peace and stability, Francis employs the interconnected approach of integral ecology which runs throughout the encyclical. Through the vision of integral ecology animated by an ethic of care, Francis provides a blueprint and spiritual compass for creating a more just, inclusive, peaceful and sustainable world. Given the enormity and complexity of the crisis and its multiple causes, the Pontiff notes that solutions should not be sourced from “one way of interpreting and transforming reality” (LS63). Therefore the Pope takes an unambiguous stance against the widespread belief that current economics and a technology paradigm will solve all the problems (LS 109-110). Hence Francis opts for the approach of integral ecology which is inclusive and multidisciplinary as opposed to a fragmented approach. As mentioned earlier, Francis’ integral ecology with insights from the various branches of human wisdom offers a comprehensive framework for understanding and responding to the intertwined existential crises of poverty, socio-economic disparity and severe environmental degradation. The treatment of these issues under the five component parts of integral ecology – environmental, social, economic, cultural ecologies and ecology of daily life – are also relevant to promoting positive peace.³⁷⁸

Beyond its socio-political causes, the ecological crisis is ultimately linked to a moral-spiritual crisis. This moral-spiritual crisis borne from the modern vision of exaggerated human-centeredness has obscured our [humans] understanding of the threefold fundamental and intertwined relationship with the creator, with neighbours and with the rest of creation (LS 119).

³⁷⁸ M. Power & C. Hrynkow, “Qualified Advocacy for Just Peace: The Popes’ World Day of Peace Messages (1968–2020) in Historical and Ethical Perspective” in *Peace and Change: A Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 45 no. 3, (July 1, 2020).

It is for this reason that Francis calls for a rekindling of our awareness of the universal communion with the entire creation. Francis' invitation to an ecological awareness is also a summon to re-examine the many ways our actions and inactions have contributed to the rupture of the bonds of divine, human and cosmic relationships, and embark on a journey of interior conversion' or 'ecological conversion' (LS 217) through the cultivation of a culture of ecological spirituality (LS 220).

As well as fostering a deeper appreciation of our relationship with and responsibility towards the whole of creation, ecological spirituality also necessitates a culture of peace, which is more than the absence of war. Expanding on the relationship between cultivating ecological spirituality and the culture of peace, Francis writes:

An adequate understanding of spirituality consists in filling out what we mean by peace, which is much more than the absence of war. Inner peace is closely related to care for ecology and for the common good because, lived out authentically, it is reflected in a balanced lifestyle together with a capacity for wonder which takes us to a deeper understanding of life.³⁷⁹

Although the ecological spirituality that Francis proposes richly draws from the mystical tradition of Christianity, it also invokes other traditions that are cultivated outside Christianity. For example, Francis cites the Sufi mystic Ali al-Khawwas in his reflection on the sacramental and mystical view of creation: "The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face" (LS 233). Francis' invocation of Christian and other traditions as sources of a relational spirituality reflects the encyclical's inclusive and interreligious vision. Underpinning this vision is the conviction that religions with their spiritual and moral resources exercise considerable influence in the lives of many people. It is on account of this conviction that Francis appeals to the faithful of the various religious groups to join forces in responding to the interwoven realities of the human and environmental crisis.

Undoubtedly, Francis continues to draw on the overarching theme of LS – integral ecology, the idea that 'everything is connected' – in his global advocacy for peace. In his address to the 70th session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015, Francis followed

³⁷⁹ LS n. 225.

the themes of LS in his appeal for peace and environmental justice. Echoing the theme of interconnection, Pope Francis noted that “we human beings are part of the environment. We live in communion with it, since the environment itself entails ethical limits which human activity must acknowledge and respect... Any harm done to the environment, therefore, is harm done to humanity”.³⁸⁰ In his second social encyclical *Fratelli tutti* which delves into the ‘art and architecture of peace,’ Francis also invokes the idea of interconnectedness that undergirds the integral ecology of LS to shed light on the path forward for healing the bitter divisions and challenges confronting the world such as pandemics, inequality, political instability, and migration.³⁸¹ Aspects of the integral ecology of LS have also found emphasis in some of Pope Francis’ *World Day of Peace messages*. For instance, against the backdrop of the Covid-19 health crisis, Pope Francis appealed to the ‘ethic of care’ that underpins the concept of integral ecology in the encyclical as a compass for his 2021 *World Day of Peace Message*. In his message titled, *A Culture of Care as a Path to Peace*, Pope Francis repurposes many of the themes that serve the ethic of care in LS such as the promotion of the dignity and rights of each person, the common good, solidarity, and protection of creation to promote an integrated approach to peace that speaks to both human and cosmic wellbeing.³⁸²

The contribution of Laudato Si’ to peacebuilding

The concept of peacebuilding represents a recent and creative addition to insights drawn from Catholic social teaching on war and peace by contemporary Catholic theologians, ethicists, political scientists and sociologists. According to moral theologian Lisa Cahill, the term

³⁸⁰ Francis, Address, *Members of the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization*, (September 25, 2015), http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150925_onu-visita.html, date accessed 29/10/2022.

³⁸¹ The influence of LS is writ large in *Fratelli Tutti*. Out of the many sources the encyclical cites, references to LS constitute the most citations of any single document with 23 references. Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti – On Fraternity and Social Friendship* (October 3, 2020), http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html, date accessed 29/10/2022.

³⁸² Cf. Francis, “*A culture of care as a path to peace*” Fifty-four World Day Peace Message, (January 1, 2021), http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20201208_messaggio-54giornatamondiale-pace2021.html, date accessed 30/10/2022

peacebuilding represents a convergence of the two theological positions of just war theory and pacifism.

Peacebuilding unites convictions within traditional just war theory with commitments from nonviolent pacifism. With just war thinkers, peacebuilders agree that politically motivated violence must be limited and restrained, and that societies can move past injustice to justice. Peacebuilders share the convictions of pacifists that peaceful cooperation is a state to which all societies must aspire, and that ending violence requires a conversion of hearts and minds.³⁸³

The term evolved from the field of peace studies and its conceptual origin can be traced to the Norwegian sociologist and peace activist Johan Galtung who coined the term in his work, *Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking and Peacebuilding* (1976) as an important part of positive peace.³⁸⁴ The concept gained prominence beyond the field of peace studies in the 1990s when it was introduced into international conflict resolution discourse by the then United Nations secretary-general Boutros Boutros-Ghali. In response to the rise of protracted intra-state conflicts – ethnic and secession wars – that were taking place in many countries and regions across the world following the end of the Cold War, Boutros-Ghali released his policy document *An Agenda for Peace* (1992) in which he outlined four categories of conflict management, preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding.³⁸⁵ In the document, Boutros-Ghali framed the term peacebuilding as strategies and initiatives which seek “to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict” (Para 21), “to consolidate peace and advance a sense of confidence and well-being among people” (Para. 55), and to “address the deepest causes of conflict: economic despair, social injustice and political oppression” (Para. 15).³⁸⁶ Further expansions on Boutros-Ghali’s idea of peacebuilding took place under Kofi Annan’s leadership of the United Nations with the creation of a specialised department to deal with post-conflict peacebuilding. In 2005 the United Nations established the Peacebuilding Commission as a new intergovernmental advisory body that supports peace efforts in countries emerging from conflict by bringing together relevant

³⁸³ L. Sowle Cahill, “Peacebuilding: A Practical Strategy of Hope” op. cit. 47.

³⁸⁴ V. Chetail, “Introduction: Post-Conflict Peacebuilding- Ambiguity and Identity” in V. Chetail (Ed), *Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: A Lexicon*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2009, 1-33.

³⁸⁵ Cf. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, “An Agenda for Peace”, *United Nations Document A/47/277* New York, (June 17, 1992) New York, (June 17, 1992), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/145749?ln=en>, date accessed 20/10/2022.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

actors and resources and proposing integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery.³⁸⁷

As the idea of peacebuilding was gaining a foothold in secular international policymaking institutions – with emphasis on good governance, human rights, capacity building, development and the free market economy, scholarship around religious engagement in peacebuilding began to evolve. The last two decades have witnessed an increasing interest in how peace-promoting resources from religious teachings can be used in conflict management and peacebuilding by religious scholars and theologians.³⁸⁸ In the Catholic Traditions, the collaborative work *Catholic Theology Ethics and Praxis* (2010) – a product of a research project of the Catholic Peace Network (CNP)³⁸⁹ – represents a notable contribution of the religious approach to peacebuilding. The volume presents a comprehensive/strategic approach to peacebuilding, an approach adopted by one of the contributors to the book, John Paul Lederach.³⁹⁰ The comprehensive approach to peacebuilding which Lederach had developed in earlier work, *Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (1997), moves beyond the secular liberal approach to peacebuilding which emphasises short-term objectives to a more holistic approach that stresses the creation of an infrastructure for peace:

Peacebuilding' is more than post-accord reconstruction. Here, peacebuilding is understood as a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates, and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships. The term thus involves a wide range of activities and functions that both precede and follow formal peace accords. Metaphorically, peace is seen not merely as a stage in time or a condition. It is a dynamic social construct. Such a conceptualization requires a process of building,

³⁸⁷ United Nations General Assembly, 'The Peacebuilding Commission' Resolution 60/80, (December 20, 2005), n.2 <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/563470?ln=en>, date accessed 21/10/2022.

³⁸⁸ The recognition that peace promoting resources in religious teachings can be used to promote peacebuilding initiatives has led in recent years to the flourishing of scholarly research in the role of religion in conflict management and peacebuilding; Cf. K. Hertog, *The Complex Reality of Religious Peacebuilding: Conceptual Contributions and Critical Analysis*, Lexington Books, Lanham MD, 2010, 1-38.

³⁸⁹ CNP is a U.S. based international affiliation of religious scholars, theologians, Church leaders, social scientists and activists that was founded in 2004. The group is dedicated to enhancing the study and practice of Catholic peacebuilding in conflict-prone areas of the world.

³⁹⁰ Cf. R. Scott Appleby "Peacebuilding and Catholicism: Affinities, Convergences, Possibilities", in R. J. Schreiter et al (Eds), *Peacebuilding: Catholic Theology, Ethics, and Praxis*, op. cit. (3-22) 11.

involving investment and materials, architectural design and coordination of labor, laying of a foundation, and detailed finish work, as well as continuing maintenance.³⁹¹

This approach to peacebuilding constitutes various activities and processes that attend to the entire conflict cycle – before, during and after conflict. These include addressing the root causes of conflicts through long-term reform of the underlying socio-cultural practices and the political and economic structures that encourage and perpetuate violent conflicts, conflict resolution, conflict transformation, healing and reconciliation and transition to a stable and just society. To this ‘array of processes’ Scott Appleby explains, “Catholicism brings a distinctive set of teachings, practices, sensibilities, and institutional resources”.³⁹² Nowhere is this more evident than in CST which offers a rich deposit of resources that are foundational for promoting and building peace as observed by Kenneth R. Himes in his analysis of peacebuilding in relation to CST. According to Himes, modern Catholic magisterial teachings on justice, development, solidarity, forgiveness and reconciliation carry valuable resources for peacebuilding initiatives.³⁹³ What insights does LS bring to the work of religious peacebuilding? As earlier stated, Pope Francis has continued the trajectory of modern popes in formulating peace promoting themes. However, Francis brings a new lens to these issues. In LS Francis contributes to peacebuilding initiatives in two salient ways:

5.2.2.1 *Willingness to engage in multidisciplinary dialogue*

In light of the complexity of the ecological crisis and the multidimensional threats it poses to peace, Francis advocates for a multidisciplinary approach to addressing the crisis and its multiple causes. In this regard, the Pope prudently engages and assimilates information from different perspectives – physical and social sciences, philosophy, and teachings from other Christians and religious traditions – in making his moral case. Pope Francis’ willingness to engage and dialogue with other disciplines – what Michael Yankoski has called ‘epistemological humility’ – coheres with the current of strategic peacebuilding in the field of peace studies.³⁹⁴

³⁹¹ J. P. Lederach, *Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, United States Institute of Peace, Washington DC, 1998, 21.

³⁹² R. Scott Appleby “Peacebuilding and Catholicism: Affinities, Convergences, Possibilities” op. cit. 12.

³⁹³ Cf. K. R. Himes “Peacebuilding and Catholic Social Teaching” op. cit. 265-299.

³⁹⁴ Cf. M. Yankoski, “Strategic Peacebuilding and Integral Ecology” in Celia Deane-Drummond & R. Artinian-Kaiser (Eds), *Theology and Ecology Across the Disciplines: On Care for our Common Home*, T&T Clark, London 2018, 189-214.

The notion of strategic peacebuilding embraces a comprehensive, interdependent, integrated, multidimensional and multidisciplinary approach to resolving conflicts and building peace. In the words of Scott Appleby and J. P Lederach, two scholars who have embraced the notion of strategic peacebuilding in the field of religious peacebuilding, the approach “focuses on transforming inhumane social patterns, flawed structural conditions, and open violent conflict that weaken the conditions necessary for a flourishing human community.”³⁹⁵ This aligns in some measure with the basic template of Pope Francis’ call in LS for a meaningful and transformative change of the destructive social systems and structures that underline the social and ecological crisis (LS 197).

5.2.2.2 *Integral Ecology Enriches Positive Peacebuilding Initiatives*

Following the recognition that the ecological crisis requires a multidisciplinary approach, Pope Francis proposes integral ecology as a conceptual framework that takes into account every aspect of the crisis. As we have seen, the vision of integral ecology seeks inclusive solutions to the multifaceted factors that cause or exacerbate the intertwined problems of environmental degradation, poverty and economic inequality through dialogue and institutional and structural reforms. Through the lens of integral ecology, Francis makes a strong case for forging new models of envisioning the promotion of human rights, the promotion of the common good, development, solidarity with the poor and protecting the environment. He set the tone by rearticulating an expanded understanding of CST themes from their historical anthropocentric emphasis to a broader cosmic vision of understanding reality.

This expanded cosmic understanding of CST themes in the encyclical offers a timely and powerful impetus for an integral peacebuilding framework. The interconnected framing of issues in the encyclical adds further support for positive peace ethics and outlines a new and enriching way of conceptualising positive peace. Prior to LS, threads of positive peace in CST emphasised conditions that allow human potential to flourish. In LS Francis argues that human beings cannot flourish without a proper relationship with the natural world. Thus, integral ecology with its

³⁹⁵ J. P. Lederach & R. Scott Appleby, “Strategic Peacebuilding: An Overview” in D. Philpott & G. F. Powers (Eds), *Strategies of Peace: Transforming Conflict in a Violent World*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2010, (19-14) 22.

holistic approach seeks to promote not only human development but also the flourishing of the natural world. This means that initiatives aimed at fostering positive peace – i.e., creating just social and economic conditions, and the institutions and structures that support and sustain peaceful society – cannot ignore ecological issues since humankind’s wholeness/well-being (*shalom* = security, safety, prosperity) depends on the health of the earth.³⁹⁶

5.3 EMERGENT INSIGHTS AND RELEVANCE OF POPE FRANCIS’ INTEGRAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND INTEGRAL PEACEBUILDING FOR THE WORK OF CARITAS SIERRA LEONE

In the foregone discussions, I further delved into Pope Francis’ vision of integral ecology from the perspectives of sustainable development and integral peace. What are the lessons for the socio-ecclesial context of Sierra Leone and the work of the development wing of the Catholic Church of Sierra Leone?

Brief remarks on Caritas Sierra Leone and its mission

As the official development agency of the Roman Catholic Church in Sierra Leone, Caritas Sierra Leone was established by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Sierra Leone in 1981. The Agency operates nationwide through the National Office in Freetown and the four diocesan offices and works with people of all faiths. During Sierra Leone’s decade-long civil war, Caritas Sierra Leone devoted its efforts to responding to the plight of people who were internally displaced as a result of the war.³⁹⁷ Currently, as indicated in the Agency’s strategic plan for 2020-2024, its activities centre around the following:³⁹⁸

- Post-war peacebuilding initiatives through its Justice and Peace Commission
- Healthcare delivery services
- Working with rural communities to improve food security
- Responding to disaster emergencies and humanitarian relief

³⁹⁶ Citing the 1987 pastoral letter of the Conference of Dominican Bishops, Pope Francis alludes to the integral link between promoting peace, justice and protecting the environment in the encyclical: “Peace, justice and the preservation of creation are three absolutely interconnected themes, which cannot be separated and treated individually without once again falling into reductionism” (LS 92).

³⁹⁷ Cf. Caritas Sierra Leone, <https://www.caritas.org/where-caritas-work/africa/sierra-leone/>, date accessed 22/10/2022.

³⁹⁸ Cf. Caritas Sierra Leone, *Strategic Plan 2020-2024*, May Park, Kingtom, Freetown.

- Youth empowerment
- Campaigning for gender equality
- Environmental protection and climate resilience programmes
- Campaigning to improve people-driven governance and rule of law.

As shown above, environmental justice concern forms a part of the activities of Caritas Sierra Leone. Although advocacy and reform initiatives in relation to the problems highlighted above are growing among civil society groups in the country, and despite the evident link between poverty and environmental injustice and the link between environmental injustice and violent conflict as revealed by the findings of my empirical research, concern for environmental justice issues has yet to be sufficiently developed or remains mostly patchy in the work of Caritas Sierra Leone both at national and diocesan levels. In view of this, I highlight some emergent insights from Francis' teaching on development and peace and their significance for the work of the development wing of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone in this final section.

5.3.1 *Integral Sustainable Development and the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone*

From a national perspective, Francis' multifaceted treatment of the theme of integral sustainable development challenges and offers important guidelines for Caritas Sierra Leone. Firstly, Francis' holistic vision of development challenges the prevailing fragmented approach to multidimensional poverty and inequality in the country. Since independence, Sierra Leone has followed a mixture of a state-sponsored and market-driven economic model of development, a model that has not worked out well, for it has benefited a tiny minority of the country's population. Furthermore, the market-driven economic model of development has occasioned the ravaging and irreversible destruction of traditional lands on which the majority of the country's population relies for their livelihood.

Secondly, the model of integral sustainable development espoused by Pope Francis offers a blueprint for the kind of development needed in the socio-ecclesial context of Sierra Leone. As we have seen, Francis' integral and sustainable development vision integrates human development and environmental sustainability, and it is generally in accord with the spirit of the

UN SDGs. The multidimensional approach to development in both LS and SDGs speak to the development aspirations of Sierra Leone.

This brings us to the social mission of Caritas Sierra Leone. As mentioned earlier, one of the core components of the development agenda of Caritas Sierra Leone is environmental protection initiatives and helping vulnerable communities with climate change mitigation actions. At present, much of the Agency's efforts on environmental justice issues are focused on disaster management. But given the gravity of the environmental challenges facing communities and their disproportionate impacts on the poor across the four ecclesiastical regions of Sierra Leone, I would maintain that it is time the Agency adopted a more proactive method in its engagement with environmental issues. In light of this my earlier reflection on Pope Francis' argument for an integrated approach to social and environmental injustices, I highlight two areas in which Caritas Sierra Leone could update its environmental justice initiatives.

A first area in which Caritas Sierra Leone at both national and diocesan levels could update its environmental advocacy work is by empowering parishes and local communities to be part of initiatives in addressing issues related to caring for the environment. To underscore this point, I invoke Pope Francis' vision of integral ecology as received in the Amazon Synod.³⁹⁹ The preparatory document of the Amazon Synod emphasises the importance of empowering local communities in the region who are at the receiving end of the adverse effects of environmental degradation to propose solutions.

The Church is called to deepen her identity in accordance with the realities of each territory and to grow in her spirituality by listening to the wisdom of her peoples. Therefore, the Special Assembly for the Pan-Amazonian Region is invited to find new ways of developing the Amazonian face of the Church and to respond to situations of injustice in the region, such as the neo-colonialism of the extractive industries, infrastructure projects that damage its biodiversity, and the imposition of cultural and economic models which are alien to the lives of its peoples.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁹ The Amazon Synod was a three-week Special Assembly of the Synods of Bishops for the Pan-Amazonian Region of Latin America held in Rome from October 6-27, 2019. In addition to other socio-ecclesial issues, the Synod in view of its central theme "Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology", deliberated on the current situation of social and environmental degradation in the Amazon Region in light of LS. Cf. Synod of Bishops of the Pan-Amazon Region, *Preparatory Document for the Synod on the Pan Amazon Region* (August 6, 2018), <http://secretariat.synod.va/content/sinodoamazonico/en/documents/preparatory-document-for-the-synod-for-the-amazon.html>, date accessed 30/10/2022.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid. n. 12

In *Querida Amazonia (Beloved Amazonia)*, the post-synodal apostolic exhortation promulgated by Pope Francis following the Amazon Synod, he [Francis] alludes to the idea of empowering the people of Amazon to be agents of their own development using their own cultural riches.⁴⁰¹

Caritas Sierra Leone could borrow from the proposal of empowering local communities put forward by the Amazonia synodal process. One way in which this can be achieved is by appealing to the traditional African communitarian ethic of Sierra Leone. As Kwame Gyekye explains, the African communitarian ethic prioritises the well-being of every member of the community – which includes humans (living and dead) and all constituents of nature.

The notion of shared life – shared purposes, interest, and understanding of the good – is crucial to an adequate conception of community...Members of a community are expected to show concern for the well-being of one another, to do what they can to advance the common good, and generally to participate in community life. They have intellectual and ideological as well as emotional attachments to their shared goals and values and, as long as they cherish them, they are ever ready to pursue and defend them.⁴⁰²

This African communitarian ethic which places emphasis on the promotion of the collective good of the community, in my view can serve as a vehicle of local mobilisation, especially at parish levels, by Caritas Sierra Leone in envisioning and campaigning for a bottom-to-top approach to development.

A second area in which Caritas Sierra Leone could update its environmental advocacy work is by engaging and lobbying governmental agencies to implement environmentally friendly policies. It should be noted that as a signatory to the United Nations SDG (2015), the political leadership of Sierra Leone has pledged to improve the lives of the country's citizens by drawing up and implementing policies geared towards meeting the main goals of sustainable development, reducing poverty and hunger; achieve universal education; promote gender equality; reduce child and maternal deaths; increase access to healthcare services, ensure environmental

⁴⁰¹ Cf. Francis, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Querida Amazonia* (February 2020), n. 7. (Hereafter QA).

⁴⁰² K. Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1997, 42.

sustainability and develop global partnerships.⁴⁰³ This, in my view, could provide an opening for Caritas Sierra Leone in its campaign to advocate for people-driven and ecological-minded governance structures and systems.

To sum up, the integral and sustainable approach to development which Pope Francis espouses in LS is very instructive for the development agency of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone.

5.3.2 *Integral Peacebuilding and the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone*

The context of Sierra Leone represents an ideal case for the application of an integrated approach to positive peacebuilding alluded to in LS because of its history of war, its renowned status as a success story of liberal and religious peacebuilding, and its current state of fragility. As I mentioned in the first chapter of this work, Sierra Leone was embroiled in one of Africa's most protracted and brutal civil wars from 1991-2002 following years of progressive weakening of state mechanisms due to corrupt and predatory leadership by successive governments. The war, which was characterised by nihilistic violence, caused unimaginable human suffering and destroyed most of the country's social, economic and physical assets. Beyond the human impact of the war, the conflict also had significant consequences for the natural environment. As the war spread, many internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the rural countryside fled to relatively safe urban centres and settled in informal settlements (displaced camps). With a severe shortage of resources, many IDPs resorted to the extraction of forest resources such as firewood which further aggravated existing deforestation problems.⁴⁰⁴ Also, during the conflict large scale environmental damage and degradation were caused by the various armed groups as they ruthlessly exploited mineral resources, especially diamonds to support their operations. The scale of violence reached its peak in the late 1990s when the whole country including the capital

⁴⁰³ Cf. Government of Sierra Leone, UN SDGs: *Advanced Draft Report on Adaption of the Goals in Sierra Leone* (July 2016), <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/10720sierraleone.pdf>, date accessed 23/10/222.

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. A, Conteh, "Assessing the impacts of war on perceived conservation capacity and threats to biodiversity" in *Biodiversity and Conservation*, vol. 26 no. 4 (April 1, 2017), 983-996.

Freetown was attacked and held under siege. This galvanized international diplomatic efforts to bring about a negotiated solution to end the war.

In 1999 after torturous negotiations between the government of Sierra Leone and the main insurgent opposition – the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (RUFSL), the Lomé Peace Accord was signed in the Togolese capital. The accord was facilitated by an array of international and local guarantors including the West African regional body (ECOWAS), the Organisation of African Unity (OAU, now African Union), the United Nations, the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone, Women’s groups and other civil society organisations, providing the first real hope of achieving negative peace.⁴⁰⁵ The Lomé Peace Accord paved the way for the establishment of the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) – by then the largest UN peacekeeping operation in the world. The mandate of UNAMSIL was to assist the parties to the accord in implementing the provisions of the Lomé peace agreement.⁴⁰⁶ Despite initial setbacks, the UN mission aided by other international partners especially the Government of the United Kingdom succeeded in aiding Sierra Leone to move out of civil war and begin the road to nation-building.⁴⁰⁷

Following the end of the war in 2002, Sierra Leone progressed steadily towards building peace and national recovery. In partnership with international agencies, the government of Sierra Leone set up a number of national frameworks and strategies as pathways to the process of post-war recovery, development and stabilization such as; Sierra Leone Vision 2025, the Sierra Leone Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), the Peacebuilding Consolidation Strategy (PCS), the Improved Governance and Accountability Pact (IGAP) and the creation of a dual accountability mechanism to deal with transitional justice – Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Special Court for Sierra Leone. In almost two decades since the end of the war, the country has maintained relative peace and has achieved some measure of political stability and socio-

⁴⁰⁵ Cf. D. J. Francis, “Torturous Path to Peace - The Lomé Accord and Post-war Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone” in *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 31, Issue 3 (September 2000), 357-373.

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 1270 on the establishment of the UN Mission in Sierra Leone* (October 22, 1999), <https://press.un.org/en/1999/19991022.sc6742.doc.html> , date accessed 24/10/22.

⁴⁰⁷ B. Crawford, “Sierra Leone: A Case the International Community Finally got Somewhat Right” in D. J. Francis, *When War Ends: Building Peace in Divided Communities*, op. cit. 103-122.

economic development. This has earned Sierra Leone the renowned status of a model of successful peacebuilding.⁴⁰⁸

However, notwithstanding the much-touted recovery of Sierra Leone, the peace agreement and subsequent socio-political developments have failed to acknowledge and address the root causes of the war. As one who directly experienced the structural violence that led to the civil war and also witnessed the unspeakable brutality of the conflict, I cannot agree more with Earl Conteh-Morgan's assessment of Sierra Leone's post-conflict peacebuilding process as one that has prioritised the legitimisation of government and security over addressing the underlying causes of conflict.

In Sierra Leone...peacebuilding has been viewed as a short-term activity with a disproportionate focus on demilitarisation and demobilisation as the end goal. In other words, top-level external actors, like the UN and powerful international donors, often conceived peacebuilding as ensuring the state's integrity or sovereignty while deemphasising all the structural violence factors that contributed to secondary violence of community and national destruction.⁴⁰⁹

The disconnect between state-building and addressing issues related to the long-term common good in Sierra Leone's post-war peacebuilding process has to be viewed as the main cause of the country's current state of fragility. While Sierra Leone is unlikely to slip back into civil war, the failure to address the underlying problems of conflict – poverty, lack of access to basic social services, injustice, youth exclusion, and unemployment – makes the country vulnerable to instability.⁴¹⁰ Also, as evidenced by the findings of my empirical research, the problem of environmental-related conflicts has already started happening in Sierra Leone. This worrying trend is being driven by climate change-related long dry spells the country is experiencing.

Peacebuilding is a complex costly process and post-conflict societies rarely experience a clean break from the past. However, if Sierra Leone is to make a break from a state of negative peace – i.e., the absence of war – to a state of just and positive peace, there is a need to address the drivers of conflict.

⁴⁰⁸ D. J. Francis, "Introduction: When War Ends: building peace in divided communities", 1-26 op. cit.

⁴⁰⁹ E. Conteh-Morgan "Peacebuilding and Human Security in Post-war Sierra Leone" in M. Mustapha & J.J Bangura (Eds), *Sierra Leone Beyond the Lomé Peace Accord*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2010, (133-144) 137.

⁴¹⁰ Herbert McLeod & Brian Ganson "The Underlying Causes of Fragility and Instability in Sierra Leone" op. cit.

Implication for Caritas Sierra Leone

Currently, much of the work of the Justice and Peace Commission wing of Caritas Sierra Leone on peacebuilding is focused on human development and capacity building. The threat that ecological-related issues such as the exploitation of natural resources and climate change pose to the relative peace and security of the country, has yet to factor in a systematic way in the work of the Justice and Peace Commission wing of Caritas Sierra Leone.

In view of the current environmental challenges, which are further compounding Sierra Leone's state of fragility and instability, a broader framework for building sustainable peace is required. To this end, integral efforts to building peace as alluded to in LS could be a move in the right direction. From the perspective of the Catholic Church, the Justice and Peace Commission in its peacebuilding engagements and initiatives can contribute to an integral approach to peacebuilding and peace consolidation in the country by:

- Raising awareness on ecological problems and the synergies between environmental protection initiatives, especially climate change adaptation, and peacebuilding in parish communities and schools.
- Advocating for an integrated approach to addressing the socio-ecological drivers of conflicts and instability in the country in its engagements with government agencies and other civil society groups.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I sought to argue for the integration of an ecological component in the development and peace-promoting work of the development wing of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone in light of Pope Francis' delineation of integral ecology.

My analysis of Pope Francis' integral ecology in relation to sustainable development and integral peace has shown that LS is more than an environmental or climate change document. The encyclical is a complex document that covers a lot of ground and deals with a multitude of social themes that attend to theological, social and policy issues. Through the lens of integral ecology, Francis frames his discussions of the issues within the context of Catholic social teaching.

To borrow the words of Donal Dorr, “what [Pope Francis] offers us is not just an integral ecology but a framework for an integral Catholic social teaching, which includes not just the items that Francis emphasizes but also all the other significant elements in the Catholic social tradition”.⁴¹¹ The concept of integral ecology of Pope Francis conveys the need to envision both the current ecological crisis within a broader network of other social crises and to resolve them in a multifaceted and holistic way.

Although the moral and spiritual insights which animate these themes are deeply rooted in CST, they also draw insights from secular sources and other religious traditions. Underpinned by the ideals of solidarity and fraternity, Pope Francis’ vision of integral ecology integrates concern for the natural environment and other spheres of human interest since human flourishing cannot be separated from environmental well-being.

The themes explored in this chapter namely, sustainable development and integral peace are proposals aimed at stimulating discussions and initiatives on how to deal with the existential social and environmental problems facing the world which have an outsized impact, especially on the poor in developing nations. In this regard, an integrated approach to development and the promotion of peace is relevant for the African context, particularly for Sierra Leone, a post-war country grappling with endemic poverty and difficult environmental challenges.

⁴¹¹ D. Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth*, op. cit., 467.

CHAPTER 6

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE FROM AN ECUMENICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS COOPERATION PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to assess environmental justice concerns or the lack thereof in the pastoral priorities of the local Catholic Church in Sierra Leone and to argue for the integration of environmental concern and care in its mission.

The previous chapter examined environmental justice in relation to sustainable development and integral peace. With insights from Pope Francis' integral ecology, I argued for the integration of an ecological component in the development and peace-promoting agenda of the development wing of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone. The chapter stressed that Pope Francis' integral ecology – which calls for an integrated approach to addressing poverty and other social injustices, and environmental degradation – not only provides resources but could also provide a blueprint for the social mission of Caritas Sierra Leone. This chapter focuses on environmental justice from an ecumenical and interreligious cooperation perspective in the context of Sierra Leone.

As indicated in the first chapter of this work, religion forms an integral part of both private and public life in Sierra Leone and the African continent as a whole. The Religious Traditions that dominate the religious landscape of Sierra Leone and the wider African continent – African Traditional Religions, Christianity and Islam – inform every aspect of social life on the continent.⁴¹² In the post-colonial era, African religious leaders often appeal to the vital role that religion plays in public discourse to speak to crucial challenges confronting the continent. For instance, in the 1990s – a period that has been described as Africa's second liberation – religious leaders and institutions played significant roles in the struggle for democratic governance around

⁴¹² Cf. A. S. Patterson, "Religion and the Rise of Africa" in *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Vol. 21, Issue 1 (October 2014), 181-196; O. M. Agbiji & I. Swart, "Religion and social transformation in Africa: A critical and appreciative perspective" in *Scriptura* vol.114, 2015, 1-20.

the continent and in peacebuilding initiatives.⁴¹³ More recently, during the Ebola epidemic which gripped the Mano River Basin of West Africa (comprising Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone) in 2014-2015, faith-inspired initiatives led by religious leaders from the dominant Religious Traditions in the region contributed to turning the tide against the spread of the Ebola virus.⁴¹⁴

However, despite the established culture of religious activism on the continent, the myriad of environmental challenges affecting the African continent and the threat these challenges pose to the livelihood of its peoples, many have wondered why the problem has had less traction amongst the continent's religious traditions.⁴¹⁵ With regards to the context of Sierra Leone, a country admired for its interreligious tolerance and treasured legacy of ecumenical and interfaith collaboration, I would ask this question more pointedly: Why have environmental issues not commanded decisive attention from the dominant Religious Traditions in the country given the gravity of environmental challenges facing the country? Could it be that the country's religious leaders focus on other moral issues at the expense of environmental justice or lack of agency at the grassroots? My empirical study suggests a combination of both.

In light of the overall aims of this work and the findings of my empirical research, I will argue in this chapter that the myriad of environmental challenges facing Sierra Leone require ecumenical and interreligious interventions. I deem it essential to include ecumenical and interreligious components to this work for the following reasons: Firstly, environmental degradation with its resulting effects does not respect religious boundaries as evidenced by empirical research. Secondly, other Christian traditions and the Islamic Religion present in Sierra Leone, have spiritual, prophetic, ethical and sacramental wisdom or resources on environmental issues that may offer common ground for collective religious-inspired action for addressing the

⁴¹³ Cf. A. Mazrui, "Kenya between Two Liberations" in *West Africa* (September 1991), 2-8; S. K. Elolia, "Religion and the Road to Democracy in Kenya" in S. K. Elolia (Ed), *Religion, Conflict, and Democracy in Modern Africa*, Pickwick Publications, Eugene, OR, 2012, 101-130; Lado T. Ludovic, "Religion and Peacebuilding in Sub-Saharan Africa" in Terence McNamee & Monde Muyangwa (Eds), *The State of Peacebuilding in Africa*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2021, 47-60.

⁴¹⁴ Cf. C. Greyling et al, "Lessons from the Faith-Driven Response to the West Africa Ebola Epidemic" in *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, Vol. 14, Issue 3, (July 2016), 118-123.

⁴¹⁵ Cf. E. Chitando, "Praying for Courage: African Religious and Climate Change" in *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 69, Issue 3 (October 2017), 225-234; K. Muriithi, "Environmental Justice and Ecumenism: The Lacuna in African Christianity" in *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 73, Issue 4, 524-534.

environmental problems affecting Sierra Leone. And thirdly, the participants of my empirical research overwhelmingly supported the idea of ecumenical and interfaith initiatives in addressing the environmental challenges Sierra Leone is grappling with.

As in the case of the previous chapters, I again depend on the teaching of Pope Francis as articulated in EG, LS and *Fratelli Tutti* and previous magisterial teaching before him on ecumenical and interreligious dialogue to underpin my arguments. The chapter will specifically respond to research question four: How might the local Catholic Church of Sierra Leone advance environmental care and responsibility as a common platform in its ecumenical and interreligious outreach and engagements?

The chapter is divided into five sections. The first section will present a systematic analysis of Pope Francis' teaching on ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and cooperation within the broader dialogical framework of the Second Vatican Council and post-conciliar magisterial teaching. The second section will provide a synthesis of ecological reflections in documents from the international ecumenical umbrella group – the World Council of Churches. In the third section, I will trace and discuss ecological insights from documents of interreligious groups. In the fourth section, I will attempt to explore environmental themes in two international declarations on environmental issues and in the foundational sources of Islamic teaching that underpin them namely, the Qur'an and the Hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad. In the final section, I will argue that given the already established culture of faith-based dialogue in Sierra Leone, the country's religious traditions have the advantage of prophetically advocating for environmental care and responsibility by appealing to the shared environmental values and teachings of their respective resources.

6.1 POPE FRANCIS' TEACHING ON ECUMENICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION

Dialogue is one of the consistent themes in the writings and reflections of Pope Francis. In relation to dialogue with other Christian Traditions and Religions, Francis has not only taken up the already established culture of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in Vatican Council II and post-conciliar magisterial teaching, but he has also put his personal stamp on the culture of dialogue. In his ecumenical and interreligious outreaches, Francis continues to consolidate and

expand on Vatican II's dialogical vision. Vatican II exhorted Catholics to dialogue with the world, with other Christians and with adherents of other Religions. Vatican II conciliar documents most especially GS, *Unitatis Redintegratio* (hereafter referred to as UR) and *Nostra Aetate* (hereafter referred to as NA) accentuated the Church's commitment to dialogical relationships with the modern world, other Christian communities and other Religions. This section discusses Francis' teaching on ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and cooperation.

6.1.1 Catholic Magisterial Teaching on Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue before Pope Francis

Pope Francis' teaching on the themes of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue has to be understood within the context of Vatican Council II and the reception of Vatican II's teaching.

6.1.1.1 Ecumenism

Regarding relations with other Christian Churches, Vatican II's documents; *The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (LG) and Decree on Ecumenism (UR) set the tone for Roman Catholicism's formal entry into the contemporary ecumenical movement.⁴¹⁶ UR in particular laid the foundation for a new phase of ecumenical awareness within the Catholic Church. Promulgated in November 1964, the document officially recognised ecumenism as an important priority of the Catholic Church. The Decree acknowledged that ecclesial realities which constitute the history of salvation exist outside the visible confines of the Roman Catholic Church. Over the past fifty years, the theological and pastoral insights outlined by UR have continued to guide the post-conciliar ecumenical reflections and initiatives in the Catholic Church.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁶ In these documents a new language and understanding emerged in the Catholic Church's dealing with non-Catholic Christians. The documents affirmation of the ecumenical movement provided the catalyst for the flowering of engagement in dialogue with other Christian communities. Cf. W. Kasper, *The Ecumenical movement, Presentation at the event marking the 40th anniversary of the Joint Working Group (JWG), between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC*, (November 2005), <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/the-ecumenical-movement-in-the-21st-century>, date accessed 03/11/2022; see also P. D. Murray, "Catholicism and Ecumenism" in L. Ayres & M. A. Volpe (Eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Catholic Theology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2019, 905-920.

⁴¹⁷ Cf. Vatican Council II, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Nov. 21, 1964) n. 3, 20-23; see also T. F. Stransky, "Decree on Ecumenism" in R. McBrien (Ed), *Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, op. cit. 401-402.

In the post-conciliar period successive popes beginning with Paul VI, have sought to promote the principles laid down by the Decree on Ecumenism through their writings and gestures. Pope Paul VI who began the implementation of Vatican II's decisions, made impressive ecumenical rapprochements towards other Churches and ecclesial communities. Between 1964 and 1967, Paul VI and the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I exchanged visits to Jerusalem, Istanbul and Rome. The 1967 reciprocal visits to Istanbul and Rome led to the issuing of a joint declaration that reflected the language of UR and referred to their respective Churches (the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches) as 'sister Churches'.⁴¹⁸ A similar ecumenical gesture was extended to the Anglican communion following the visit of the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey to Rome in 1966, which paved the way for the establishment of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) in 1967.⁴¹⁹ In 1965 Paul VI constituted a joint working group with the World Council of Churches to explore possible avenues of dialogue and cooperation. This initiative led to collaboration between the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches in areas of social justice and development. As an expression of goodwill and ecumenical commitment, Pope Paul VI visited the WCC's Geneva headquarters in 1969. Under the direction of Paul VI, bilateral dialogues with individual Christian Churches were initiated. Among these bilateral engagements was the outreach to the Lutheran World Federation in 1967, which eventually led to the issuing of the 1999 *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*.⁴²⁰ Paul VI's outreach to other Churches and ecclesial communities, aimed at healing centuries-old divisions and mutual suspicions among Christian communities, set in motion the reception of Vatican II's ecumenical deliberations which his successors have continued to build on.

Pope John Paul II who succeeded Paul VI in 1978 also took up ecumenism as one of the central concerns of his pontificate. In his nearly three-decade-long tenure, John Paul II made an immense contribution to ecumenism the extent of which cannot be easily summarised. In

⁴¹⁸ Cf. M. J. Ramage, "Unitatis Redintegratio" in M. L. Lamb & M. Levering (Eds), *Reception of Vatican II*, Oxford, University Press, New York, 2017, 292-323; see also Common Declaration of Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras (October 28, 1967).

⁴¹⁹ Cf. P. D. Murray, "Catholicism and Ecumenism" op. cit.

⁴²⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

addition to his writings, John Paul II fostered ecumenical relations through personal contacts with leaders of other Churches and communities and through his numerous travels around the world; he met other Christian leaders and made joint declarations that were sometimes a significant breakthrough. He built on and strengthened relations with the Eastern Orthodox Churches that Paul VI had established.⁴²¹ Emblematic of John Paul II's numerous contributions to the advancement of Christian unity is his 1995 encyclical on ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint – On commitment to Ecumenism* (hereafter referred to as UUS). It is the first encyclical to be dedicated to Christian unity since Vatican II. In view of the vital contribution UUS made to the reception of the ecumenical vision of Vatican II, I will now give a brief overview of the document.⁴²²

The encyclical – which extensively cites UR – captures and embodies the theological vision of John Paul II in relation to ecumenical issues. In the document, he emphasises that ecumenism is not an optional extra of the mission of the Church but rather it is “an organic part of her life and work, and consequently must pervade all that she is and does; it must be like the fruit borne by a healthy and flourishing tree which grows to its full stature”.⁴²³ In the spirit of UR, John Paul not only reaffirmed the Catholic Church's commitment to the ecumenical endeavour (UUS 3), he also outlined the major components of his ecumenical priorities. Constitutive of the Polish Pope's ecumenical priorities are the following main components; witness of common prayer (UUS 21-24), dialogue (UUS 28 -36), and cooperation (UUS 43).

With respect to the African continent – a continent of diverse and fast-growing Christian communities – John Paul II encouraged the African Church to dialogue with other Christians and with other religions especially Islam and African Traditional Religions in his post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995).⁴²⁴ In the document, John Paul exhorted the African Church

⁴²¹ Cf. K. J. P. McDonald, “The Legacy of Pope John Paul II: Ecumenical Dialogue” in G. O’Collins & M. Hayes (Eds), *The Legacy of John Paul II*, Burns & Oates, London, 2008, 110-128; see also J. A. Radono, “*Ut Unum Sint*: John Paul II's Ecumenical Commitment” in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia: Jubilee volume, The Wojtyla Years*, Vol. 20, The Catholic University of America 2001, 71-80.

⁴²² Described as a prophetic document in Catholic ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint* represents the single most influential document in the reception of Vatican II; Cf. W. Kasper, *That They May Be One: The Call to Unity*, Burns Oates, 2004, 34; P. D. Murray, “Catholicism and Ecumenism” op. cit.

⁴²³ John Paul Encyclical Letter, *On commitment to Ecumenism – Ut Unum Sint* (May 25, 1995), n.20.

⁴²⁴ Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa* (September 14, 1995), https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html, date accessed 04/11/2022.

to develop ecumenical relations and dialogue with Christians of other denominations so as to reach that unity which Christ prayed for. He pointed out that “such dialogue can be conducted through initiatives such as ecumenical translations of the Bible, theological study of various dimensions of the Christian faith or by bearing common evangelical witness to justice, peace and respect for human dignity”.⁴²⁵

John Paul II’s successor, Benedict XVI also expressed his unwavering commitment to the Catholic Church’s ecumenical endeavour. On April 20, 2005, the very next day after his election to the papacy, Benedict XVI in his very first address in which he outlined the vision of his pontificate stated that the fostering of Christian unity would occupy an important part of his Petrine ministry.⁴²⁶ In the years following, the German Pope continued the ecumenical contacts and outreach that had begun under his post-Vatican II successors. These include the continuation of ecumenical visits and dialogue with the Eastern Orthodox Churches,⁴²⁷ warm rapprochement with the Anglican Communion,⁴²⁸ and renewed relations with Lutherans.⁴²⁹

In summary, Vatican II and post-conciliar magisterial teaching on ecumenism encourage ecumenical dialogue and cooperation as an important part of the Church’s mission.

⁴²⁵ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 65.

⁴²⁶ Cf. Benedict XVI, First Message at the End of the Eucharistic Celebration with Members of the College of Cardinals in the Sistine Chapel (April 20, 2005), no. 5, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/pont-messages/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20050420_missa-pro-ecclesia.html, date accessed 05/11/2022.

⁴²⁷ Cf. *Common Declaration* of Pope Benedict XVI and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I (November 30, 2006), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20061130_dichiarazione-comune.html, date accessed 05/11/2022.

⁴²⁸ Cf. *Common Declaration* of Pope Benedict XVI and the Archbishop of Canterbury His Grace Rowan Williams (November 23, 2006), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20061123_common-decl.html, date accessed 05/11/2022; Benedict XVI, Apostolic Constitution *Anglicanorum Coetibus*, November 4, 2009; Ivereigh, Austen, “Bridge over the river Tiber: what will come of the Vatican’s invitation to Anglicans?” in *America Magazine* (November 16, 2009), <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/715/article/bridge-over-river-tiber>, 05/11/22.

⁴²⁹ Cf. Benedict XVI, Address to the Representatives of the Lutheran World Federation (November 7, 2007), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20071107_lutheran.html, date accessed 05/11/2022; Ronald Roberson, Pope Benedict XVI and Ecumenism: A Retrospective, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, <https://www.usccb.org/committees/ecumenical-interreligious-affairs/pope-benedict-xvi-and-ecumenism-retrospective>, date accessed 06/11/2022.

6.1.1.2 *Interreligious Dialogue*

Since the Second Vatican Council – the first ecumenical council in the history of the Catholic Church to make positive pronouncements on other religions and to recognise dialogue especially interreligious dialogue as an essential component of the Church’s evangelising mission – the Catholic Church has been actively engaged in interreligious dialogue. Vatican Council II exhorted Catholics to dialogue with the world, with other Christians and with adherents of other religions. Vatican II conciliar documents most especially GS, UR and NA accentuated the Church’s commitment to a dialogical relationship with the modern world, other Christian communities and other religions. NA set in motion a paradigm for greater engagement and dialogue with other religions which has guided post-conciliar papal teachings on interreligious dialogue. In recognition of the pluralistic nature of the world, post-conciliar Popes from Paul VI down to Pope Francis have shown great appreciation for the importance of interfaith dialogue by not only expanding on the reforms the council initiated but also developing new themes related to interfaith dialogue.⁴³⁰

In addition to papal teachings, numerous studies have been undertaken and many documents and guidelines issued on the subject of interreligious dialogue by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID).⁴³¹ Prominent among the many documents published by PCID are ‘Dialogue and Mission’ (DM, 1984) and ‘Dialogue and Proclamation’ (DP, 1991). These documents underscore the integral link between the Church’s universal mission and the task of interreligious dialogue, and they also reaffirm the Church’s irreversible commitment to dialogue with other religions. By way of definition, the 1991 document building on *Dialogue and Mission* of 1984 characterised dialogue in the context of religious plurality as:

all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment”, in obedience to truth and respect for freedom. It includes both witness and the exploration of respective religious

⁴³⁰ Cf. J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Pluralism*, Orbis Book Maryknoll NY, 2001, 158-179; see also J. L. Heft, “Catholicism and Interreligious Dialogue” in J. L. Heft (Ed), *Catholicism and Interreligious Dialogue*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, 3-22.

⁴³¹ Initially known as Secretariat for Non-Christians, the Pontifical Council Interreligious Dialogue (here after PCID) is the main office of the Catholic Church responsible for interreligious dialogue. It was instituted by Pope Paul VI on Pentecost Sunday, 1964.

convictions. It is in this third sense that the present document uses the term dialogue for one of the integral elements of the Church's evangelizing mission.⁴³²

In the 1984 document, the PCID laid out four ways of engaging in the practice of dialogue namely, dialogue of life, dialogue of action, dialogue of theological exchange, and dialogue of religious experience (DM 28-35). These four forms of dialogue were succinctly summarised in DP:

- a) The dialogue of life, where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations.
- b) The dialogue of action, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people.
- c) The dialogue of theological exchange, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values.
- d) The dialogue of religious experience, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute.⁴³³

In post-Vatican II magisterial teachings on relations with other religions, the council's emphasis on respect for other religious traditions has found expression in the vision of every post-conciliar pope, with varying emphasis and direction on how interreligious dialogue should be pursued.

6.1.2 Pope Francis' Teaching on Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue

Francis' pontificate has given a further boost to the Church's ecumenical and interreligious outreach through both teaching and gestures. Since his election to the papacy, he has made the culture of dialogue and encounter an integral part of his vision. In an address to Brazilian leaders on the occasion of the 28th World Youth Day held in Rio de Janeiro, Francis noted that:

When leaders in various fields ask me for advice, my response is always the same: dialogue, dialogue, dialogue. The only way for individuals, families and societies to grow, the only way for the life of peoples to progress, is via the culture of encounter, a culture in which all have something good to give and all can receive something good in return.⁴³⁴

Francis has displayed remarkable ecumenical and interfaith gestures since his election. He has met and prayed with leaders of other Christian and other Religious Traditions. For example in

⁴³² Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation* (June 20, 1991) no.9, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html, date accessed 06/11/2022; see also *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1984), n.3.

⁴³³ Ibid. no. 42.

⁴³⁴ Francis, *Address: Meeting with the Brazil's Leaders of Society*, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (July 27, 2013), n. 3, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130727_gmg-classe-dirigente-rio.html, date accessed 07/11/2022.

2015, Francis visited and prayed at an Evangelical Lutheran church in Rome.⁴³⁵ In 2016, Francis went to Lund, Sweden to celebrate the 500th Anniversary of the Protestant Reformation.⁴³⁶ In 2014, in a gesture of commitment to interfaith dialogue Francis prayed silently alongside the Grand Mufti of Istanbul.⁴³⁷ In February 2019, Francis made a historic visit to the United Arab Emirates where he held an interreligious meeting on ‘human fraternity’ with Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Egypt. That meeting led to the signing of the historic ‘Abu-Dhabi Declaration for World Peace and Living Together.’⁴³⁸ Many of the themes raised in the Abu-Dhabi Declaration also found expression in Francis’ second social encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, a document that in my view currently best captures Francis’ interreligious vision.

As indicated earlier, dialogue be it intra-ecclesial, ecumenical or interfaith, is a recurring theme in Francis’ teaching. For Francis, “dialogue is born from a respectful attitude toward the other person, from a conviction that the other person has something good to say”.⁴³⁹ In *Fratelli Tutti*, Francis expresses more eloquently the meaning of dialogue as “speaking, listening, looking at, coming to know and understand one another, and to find common ground”.⁴⁴⁰

6.1.2.1 *Ecumenical Dialogue*

Although Francis has displayed remarkable ecumenical gestures as noted above, he has written little on the theme of ecumenism. In his seminal papal document EG where Francis wrote at length on the importance of dialogue for the internal working of the church, for the church’s

⁴³⁵ Cf. Francis, Address: *Visit to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Rome* (November 15, 2015), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_20151115_chiesa-evangelica-luterana.html, date accessed 07/11/2022.

⁴³⁶ J. A. Esteves, “Pope Francis to visit Sweden on 500th anniversary of the Reformation” in *America Magazine* (June 01, 2016), <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/pope-francis-visit-sweden-reformations-500th>, date accessed 07/11/22.

⁴³⁷ Cf. D Ball, “Pope Francis Prays in Mosque in Show of Commitment to Christian-Muslim Relations” in the *Wall Street Journal* (November 29, 2014) <https://www.wsj.com/articles/pope-francis-prays-in-mosque-in-sign-of-commitment-to-christian-muslim-relations-1417282839>, 07/11/2022.

⁴³⁸ Cf. Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to the United Arab Emirates: Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together (February 4, 2019), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html, 07/11/2022.

⁴³⁹ J. Bergoglio & A. Skorcka, *On Heaven and Earth: Pope Francis on Faith, Family, and the Church in the Twenty-First Century*, A. Bermudez & H. Goodman (Trans), Image Book, New York, 2013, xiv.

⁴⁴⁰ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, op. cit. no. 198.

engagements and initiatives which support the dignity of each person and the common good, for engagements with culture and the sciences,⁴⁴¹ the Pope devotes three paragraphs to ecumenism.⁴⁴²

In these paragraphs of EG, Francis underscores the importance of ecumenism for promoting world peace, promoting the unity of the human family and promoting unity among those who profess faith in Christ Jesus.⁴⁴³ A cursory reading of these paragraphs will show what has already been said about ecumenical dialogue in Vatican II and post-Vatican II magisterial reflections. However, if one reads the paragraphs in tandem with Francis' overall vision as articulated in EG and his subsequent documents, one will discover that Francis has put his own stamp on the Church's ecumenical outreach namely the culture of encounter. For Francis, authentic dialogue is rooted in encountering and engaging others despite our differences.⁴⁴⁴

In summary, Francis through his gestures and writings is reviving the ecclesiological vision of Vatican II which unequivocally recognized ecumenical dialogue as an essential component of the Church's mission.

6.1.2.2 *Interreligious dialogue*

As I noted earlier, respect for other religious traditions has found expression in the vision of every post-conciliar pope. Pope Francis' pontificate continues this same dialogue perspective.

Unlike ecumenism, Francis has dedicated a substantial amount of literature on the subject of interreligious dialogue. In EG Francis devotes nine paragraphs to interreligious dialogue (EG 250-258). He emphasises the importance of dialogue for promoting peace in the world: "Interreligious dialogue is a necessary condition for peace in the world, and so it is a duty for Christians as well as other religious communities".⁴⁴⁵ He also connects interreligious dialogue to the notion of the common good. As observed by S. B. Roberts, Francis' references to the subject of dialogue and

⁴⁴¹ Cf. Francis, EG nn. 238 -258.

⁴⁴² Ibid nn. 244-46.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Cf. Francis, *Homily: Celebration of Vespers on the Solemnity of the Conversion of Saint Paul the Apostle* (January 25, 2015), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150125_vespri-conversione-san-paolo.html, date accessed 08/11/22.

⁴⁴⁵ EG 250.

interfaith relations are made mostly in the context of concern for the common good.⁴⁴⁶ In an ecumenical and interreligious meeting in Nairobi Kenya held during his 2015 visit to East and Central Africa, Francis asserted that dialogue and cooperation between religious leaders is an important service to the common good.⁴⁴⁷

The encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* also envisions interreligious dialogue and cooperation as a moral imperative for the religious traditions of the world. Although the document is not primarily about interreligious dialogue as such, it is evident that dialogue among religions informs Francis' call for religion to be at the service of fraternity.⁴⁴⁸ This underpins Francis' argument that dialogue and cooperation among religions can inspire the various peoples and cultures of the world to overcome divisions that fuel hatred and violence around the world.

What perspective does Pope Francis bring to the culture of interreligious dialogue? In an analysis of Pope Francis' approach to interreligious dialogue, James L. Fredericks explains that every Pope since Vatican II with the exception of Paul VI "has provided a vision of how the church is to pursue its ministry of interreligious engagement".⁴⁴⁹ While Pope John Paul II's agenda emphasised 'dialogue of spirituality' based on his recognition of universal human spirituality, and Benedict XVI (albeit with significant reservations about the Church's interreligious overtures) stressed that interreligious engagements must be based on 'truth' as well as charity, Pope Francis on the other hand in his commitment to promoting the culture of interreligious encounter and dialogue is more inclined towards 'dialogue of fraternity'.⁴⁵⁰ The concept of fraternity is a consistent theme in Francis' vision. It [fraternity] appears with its related adjectives nineteen times in EG; it was the central theme of his first World Day of Peace Message (*Fraternity, the Foundation and Pathway to Peace*, 2014) where the term appears more than forty times; it is

⁴⁴⁶ Cf. S. B. Roberts, "Is the Pope Catholic? A Question of Identity in Pope Francis's Practical Theology of Interreligious Dialogue" in H. Kasimow & A. Race (Eds), *Pope Francis and Interreligious Dialogue: Religious Thinkers Engage with Recent Papal Initiatives*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, Switzerland, 2018, 130-144.

⁴⁴⁷ Cf. Francis, *Address: Ecumenical and Interreligious Meeting*, Nairobi Kenya (November 26, 2015), http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_20151126_kenya-incontro-interreligioso.html, date accessed 08/11/2022.

⁴⁴⁸ Cf. *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 274.

⁴⁴⁹ J. L. Fredericks, "The dialogue of fraternity: Pope Francis's approach to interreligious engagement" in *Commonweal*, Vol. 144, Issue 6 (March 24, 2017), <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/dialogue-fraternity>, date accessed 09/11/2022.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

used nine times in LS and more recently he has dedicated a whole encyclical to the subject of fraternity (*On Fraternity and Social Friendship*). The term fraternity is closely akin to the notion of solidarity and as J. Fredericks has observed, Francis' usage of the term is an adoption of John Paul II's principle of solidarity developed in the social teachings of John Paul, especially in his encyclical SRS⁴⁵¹ In SRS, John Paul II wrote that solidarity "is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual because we are all really responsible for all".⁴⁵²

6.1.2.3 *Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue in Relation to Environmental Justice*

In recognition of the role of religion in shaping worldviews and attitudes, Francis emphasizes the urgent need for and importance of dialogue for care for our common home in LS. Drawing on John Paul II's theological synthesis of the term solidarity, Francis appeals for a new and universal solidarity, a solidarity that takes into account our fraternal relations with the earth, its current and future inhabitants and the whole of creation.⁴⁵³

The concept of fraternity is one of the principles that informs LS's central theme of integral ecology along with the recurring thread of interconnected relations. According to Francis, the language of fraternity summons humankind to right relationships with all beings who share our common home. He warns that "if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs" (LS 12).

The language of fraternity also animates Francis' invitation to dialogue. As one of the key terms in the encyclical, the word dialogue is used twenty-three times and forms part of the line of approach and actions Francis proposes. Given the magnitude of the ecological crisis and its underlying causes, Francis acknowledges that no one person or discipline can have all the answers (LS 63). In light of this, he sets the entire encyclical within a dialogical framework.

⁴⁵¹ J. L. Fredericks, "The dialogue of fraternity: Pope Francis's approach to interreligious engagement", op. cit.

⁴⁵² SRS no. 38.

⁴⁵³ Cf. LS 14.

- The encyclical is addressed to everyone: Francis expresses the desire to “enter into dialogue with all people about our common home” (LS 3).
- In the same spirit of dialogue, Francis acknowledges the contribution of other Christians, adherents of other religious communities, scientists, philosophers, theologians and civic groups in enriching the Church’s thinking on socio-ecological questions. In a special way, Francis pays deference to the prophetic role of the leader of the Eastern Orthodox Church Patriarch Bartholomew (LS 7). Francis also makes reference to the ninth-century Muslim mystical writer Ali-al-Khawwas to remind believers of the mystical significance of nature. This is highly significant, as it is the first time in history that a papal document has explicitly cited an Islamic scholar (LS 233).
- The entirety of chapter five focuses on the subject of dialogue and the various groups that need to engage in the dialogue. The various arenas for dialogue so as to address the burning global ecological crisis as well as the socio-economic and political issues that induce the degradation of both the human and natural environment including the following: the international community (LS 163-175), national and local levels (LS 176-181), governance and economic planning (LS 189-198), dialogue between religion and science and among religions – interreligious dialogue (LS 199-201).

Although the ecumenical and interreligious perspectives of dialogue are not well developed in LS nevertheless, they form part of the central motive of the encyclical namely, an appeal to the entire human community to make a concerted effort in saving the earth – our common home – for both its current and future inhabitants. In the face of the interrelated social and environmental crisis, Francis exhorts the religious traditions of the world including indigenous religions to engage in fruitful dialogue: “The majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers. This should spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity”.⁴⁵⁴ Implicit in Francis’ appeal is the recognition of the role of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and collaboration in promoting religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence in a pluralistic world. In addition to this traditional role of ecumenical and interfaith dialogue in fostering peace, Francis

⁴⁵⁴ LS no. 201.

expands the boundary of dialogue and collaboration among Christians and other Religions to include addressing the structural causes of environmental injustices.

Five years after the promulgation of LS, the Interdicasterial Working Group on Integral Ecology of the Holy See published a document for the implementation of LS entitled, *The Journey Towards Care for our Common Home* (2020). The document offers proposals and actionable goals for the practical implementation of LS at every level of the Church. Among the proposals outlined in the document are ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and cooperation. In the 10th chapter of the document – which is devoted to ecumenical dialogue, the Interdicasterial Working Group posits that through prayer, awareness, education and concrete initiatives Christian Churches can play a significant role in addressing environmental issues.⁴⁵⁵

Similarly, in chapter 11, the Working Group noted that “There is an urgent need for the faithful of the various religious groups to join forces in promoting an ecologically responsible social order based on shared values”.⁴⁵⁶

In line with the teaching of LS, the document of the Interdicasterial Working Group redirects the course of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and extends their functions beyond their traditional role of fostering peaceful co-existence to include caring for the environment.

6.2 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE CONCERNS AND THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

Following the coming to light in the second half of the twentieth- century of the compelling evidence of human-induced worldwide occurrences of ecological disasters, the World Council of Churches (hereafter WCC) has emerged as a dominant voice in drawing attention to the dangers of the excessive exploitation of the earth’s resources.⁴⁵⁷ In this section, I will attempt to examine

⁴⁵⁵ Cf. Interdicasterial Working Group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology: *The Journey Towards Care for our Common Home, Five Years after Laudato Si’*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020, 93-94.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid. 99.

⁴⁵⁷ By way of background information, the WCC is the umbrella ecumenical group for Protestant and Orthodox Churches which came into existence in 1948. The WCC seeks a vision of visible unity in one faith and eucharistic fellowship, and also promotes a common witness in mission and evangelisation. The Roman Catholic Church is not a member of the WCC but it has a working relationship with the organisation. Established on the ideals of encounter, dialogue, and collaboration, the WCC with its affiliate organisations, has served as the leading ecumenical platform for human dignity and rights advocacy since its inception. Cf. M. Beach (Ed), *Introducing the World Council of Churches*, World Council of Churches, Geneva 2008, https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/File/WCC_Intro_brochure_EN.pdf, date accessed 10/11/2022.

WCC's involvement in environmental issues. I deem it necessary to include a discussion on the environmental concerns of the WCC for three reasons. Firstly, the WCC is the broadest, most inclusive and most organised ecumenical group in the contemporary ecumenical landscape. Secondly, the Council of Churches in Sierra Leone, the ecumenical forum for mainline Protestant Churches in Sierra Leone, is an affiliate of WCC. And thirdly, the WCC as indicated in this chapter, was one of the first international religious organisations to warmly receive LS.

WCC's and environmental justice issues

When discussions about how to address the widespread human-induced ecological disasters around the world started in the 1960s, the WCC and the wider ecumenical community were incredibly slow in taking up ecological issues as an urgent matter. The earlier references to the subject of creation in WCC's deliberations and publications were limited to creation's anthropological significance. According to Wesley Granberg-Michaelson (who has been associated with WCC's environmental agenda over the years), the ecumenical community's view of creation from the perspective of its usefulness to humankind in the early 1960s reflected the theological disposition of that time:

The movement of history was the starting point. "Nature was secularised and this was applauded. Creation here is nothing more than the backdrop or stage for the main drama of history. This was consistent with both neo-orthodox theology, which a strong influence on earlier ecumenical thought, and the orientation of those who stressed the urgency of social and political revolution as the new starting-point for any ecumenical theology.

It should be noted that 'neo-orthodoxy' also known as crisis theology or dialectical theology, is a Protestant theological movement that arose in the early twentieth century in opposition to the doctrines of nineteenth-century liberal theology. It is particularly associated with two towering twentieth-century theologians, Karl Barth (1886-1965) and Emil Brunner (1889-1966). Barth and his associates appealed to those tenets of Protestant Reformation theology that emphasise the absolute transcendence of God and the distance between God the Creator and his creatures.⁴⁵⁸

Thankfully, however, with vigorous persuasions from theologians like Joseph Sittler (1904-1987), the WCC gradually started to discuss ecological issues at its assemblies. It will be

⁴⁵⁸ Cf. M. B. Schepers, "Neo-orthodoxy" in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, op. cit. vol. 10, 238-239.

recalled that Sittler in a paper presented at the World Council of Churches meeting in New Delhi in 1961, advocated for an ecumenical response to the ecological crisis.⁴⁵⁹

However, it was not until the 1970s that WCC placed the ecological issue on its ecumenical agenda. The breakthrough came in WCC sub-unit Church and Society consultative meeting on *Science and Technology for Human Development* in Bucharest, Romania in 1974.⁴⁶⁰ It was at the Bucharest meeting that the ecumenical community discussed the concept of sustainability in relation to the ecological crisis.⁴⁶¹

The Bucharest consultations catalysed the commissioning of a programme for 'A Just Participatory and Sustainable society' at the WCC Nairobi Assembly in 1975. Following the Nairobi meeting, the WCC discussed environmental issues within the framework of *Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation* (JPIC) at the two subsequent assemblies in Vancouver (1983) and Canberra (1991). At those assemblies the WCC committed itself to addressing the ecological concerns by proposing various initiatives, culminating in the WCC's participation at United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.⁴⁶² At the Rio summit, the 'WCC issued a "Letter to Churches" which underscored the urgency of the situation posed by the deterioration of the earth's capacity to sustain life.'⁴⁶³ Over the past two decades, the WCC has steadily strengthened its advocacy on environmental issues such as climate change through various initiatives. It has contributed to the elevation of ecological discourse and promotion of ecological praxis at various international global summits.

By way of summary, since it started engaging with environmental issues in the 1970s, the WCC along with its affiliate working groups has emerged as a leading prophetic voice against the

⁴⁵⁹ Cf. H. P. Santmire, "Reformation Traditions (Lutheranism and Calvinism)" in B. R. Taylor (Ed), *The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Nature*, op. cit. 341-343; J. Sittler, "Theology for Earth" in *The Christian Scholar*, Vol. 37, No. 3, September 1954, (367-374) 367; J. Sittler, "Theology for Earth" in *The Christian Scholar*, Vol. 37, No. 3, September 1954, (367-374) 367.

⁴⁶⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴⁶¹ Cf. L. Vischer, "Climate Change, Sustainability and Christian Witness" in *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 49, Issue 2, April 1997, 142-161.

⁴⁶² Cf. E. M. Conradie, *Christianity and Ecological Theology: Resources for Further Research*, Sun Press, Stellenbosch, 2006, 142-145.

⁴⁶³ W. Granberg-Michaelson, "Creation in Ecumenical Theology" in D.G. Hallman (Ed), *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1994, 100.

wanton ecological destruction of our global commons and continues to advocate for environmental sustainability around the world.

6.3 INTERRELIGIOUS GROUPS AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

As I noted earlier, following changes within the Catholic Church initiated by Vatican II, interfaith dialogue has now been firmly established as an essential component of the evangelising mission of the Church. In the words of Pope Francis, interfaith dialogue is a providential sign of our times.⁴⁶⁴ The last few decades have witnessed a flourishing of interreligious dialogue and cooperation on a wide range of issues ranging from theological exchange to social issues such as the promotion of human development and peacebuilding. However, as in the case of ecumenical dialogue and cooperation, environmental concern was not an area of interest in faith-based and interfaith advocacy until the awakening of ecological consciousness in recent years. In this section, I briefly explore the outlines of some interfaith statements on environmental issues. For the purpose of this work, I will focus on documents released by the Parliament of World's Religions and the World Conference on Religion and Peace. I discuss interfaith engagement with environmental issues in light of the warm reception LS has received in interfaith circles and more importantly in view of the established culture of interfaith dialogue and cooperation in Sierra Leone.

6.3.1 *The Parliament of the World's Religions*

The Parliament of World's Religions is the world's leading and inclusive interfaith movement. It was created to promote harmony among the world's religions and spiritual communities and foster their engagement with global institutions. It has its origins in the 1893 World Columbia Exposition in Chicago, USA where the first gathering of world religions took place. In 1993, on the century of the Parliament, a second convening was held in Chicago. Among the issues raised at the 1993 Parliament were social inequalities, pluralism, ecology, women's issues etc.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶⁴ Cf. Francis, *Address to the Delegation of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations* (June 30, 22), <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2022/june/documents/20220630-jewish-committee.html>, date accessed 10/11/22.

⁴⁶⁵ Cf. M. Stoerber, "World's Parliament of Religion" in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, op. cit. vol. 14, 845-847.

Since the 1993 gathering, the Parliament has increasingly engaged with environmental issues including climate change. In its 1993 ground-breaking declaration, *Towards a Global Ethic: An Initial Declaration* drafted by the Catholic theologian Hans Küng,⁴⁶⁶ the religious leaders made passing references to ecological issues. For instance, in the first paragraph of the declaration, the delegates condemned the abuses of the ecosystems and affirmed the interdependence between the human and other creatures: “We are interdependent. Each of us depends on the well-being of the whole, and so we have respect for the community of living beings, for people, animals, and plants, and for the preservation of Earth, the air, water, and soil”.⁴⁶⁷

Although ecological themes do not feature prominently in the 1993 declaration, the document provided the framework for the Parliament’s future engagement with environmental issues. Building on the 1993 document the Parliament’s 1999 Cape Town meeting, which produced the document, *A Call to our Guiding Institutions*, called attention to the importance of environmental sustainability.

The issue of sustainability addresses the relationship of basic human needs to the continued viability of the Earth. Today the human family numbers nearly six billion. If our present rate of population growth and resource consumption continues, we are likely to approach and then exceed the limits of the Earth’s ability to support us. Economic analysis suggests that to meet even the basic needs of so many would require a huge increase in agriculture and industry, prompting thoughtful persons to ask whether the Earth can possibly sustain such demands...The challenge is to find sustainable ways to peacefully meet the needs of all people while preserving the integrity of the whole community of life on Earth.⁴⁶⁸

From the statement cited above, it appears the Parliament was eschewing the idea of framing social issues in economic terms by world leaders and global institutions with little or no regards for the well-being of the natural environment.

In the 2009 meeting held in Melbourne Australia, the Parliament devoted much of its deliberations to issues of environmental sustainability and climate change.⁴⁶⁹ Through the lens

⁴⁶⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴⁶⁷ The Parliament of the World’s Religions, *Towards a Global Ethic: An Initial Declaration*, 1993, <https://parliamentofreligions.org/global-ethic/towards-a-global-ethic-an-initial-declaration/> date accessed 11/11/2022.

⁴⁶⁸ The Parliament of the World’s Religions, *A Call to our Guiding Institutions*, 1999, 19, <https://parliamentofreligions.org/publications/6578/>, date accessed 11/11/2022.

⁴⁶⁹ Cf. The Parliament of the World’s Religions, *Make a World of Difference: Hearing Each Other, Healing the Earth*, Melbourne 2009, <https://parliamentofreligions.org/parliament/2009-melbourne/> date accessed 12/11/2022.

of its central theme, *Make a World of Difference: Hearing Each Other, Healing the Earth* the Melbourne gathering of religious leaders connected environmental degradation to other underlying issues of social instabilities.⁴⁷⁰ Environmental sustainability was also the main focus of the Parliament of Religions 2015 meeting held in Salt Lake City, USA. Informed by the theme of the event, *Reclaiming the Heart of our Humanity*, the 2015 gathering issued a declaration on climate change entitled, *Embracing our Common Future*. In the declaration, religious leaders pledged to:

- To take all possible measures to reduce greenhouse gases, including the full and aggressive implementation of the UNFCCC Paris Agreement.
- To transition to clean, safe and renewable energy in developed countries.
- To adopt a green energy path of development in developing countries, with needed financial support and technical assistance.
- To greatly increase energy efficiency at all levels.
- To stop deforestation and pursue re-forestation worldwide.
- To cease pollution of oceans and damage to their ecosystems.
- To make necessary changes in our consumption and lifestyles.
- To end poverty and achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals.⁴⁷¹

The declaration concluded with a commitment to embracing an ecologically conscious future: “The future we embrace will be a new ecological civilisation and a world of peace, justice and sustainability, with the flourishing of the diversity of life”.⁴⁷²

The timing of the 2015 declaration on climate was very significant. As seen in the document’s references to international initiatives on addressing environmental challenges, the document was issued on the heels of important global events aimed at mitigating the effects of climate change and other environmental problems. From Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si’* to the Paris Climate Agreement, the year 2015 witnessed important landmark secular and religious interventions on caring for the environment.

⁴⁷⁰ Cf. P.I.O. Ingram, “Working with Climate Activists and Other Religious Traditions” in E. M. Conradie & H. P. Koster (Eds), *T&T Clark Handbook of Christian Theology and Climate Change*, T&T Clark, London, 2020, 136-146

⁴⁷¹ Parliament of World Religion, *Embracing Our Common Future: An Interfaith Call to Action on Climate Change* in *Kosmos Journal of Global Transformation* (December 1, 2015), <https://www.kosmosjournal.org/news/buddhist-climate-change-statement-to-world-leaders/> date accessed 12/11/2022.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

To sum up, the World Parliament of Religions, since its 1993 meeting and the issuing of the historic document, *Declaration Towards a Global Ethic*, has increasingly engaged with and advocated for environmental sustainability at its assemblies including its recent 2021 meeting which was held online.

6.3.2 *The World Conference on Religion and Peace*

The origins of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (hereafter referred to as WCRP) dates back to the early 1960s during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. As an international multi-religious platform, the WCRP works to bring religious leaders and religious resources to bear in interfaith cooperation for peace at global, regional and national levels. Its advocacy work focuses on human rights, peacebuilding and environmental protection.⁴⁷³ Among the notable successes of WCRP in its peace-promoting initiatives is the role it played in helping the interreligious Council of Sierra Leone to broker the Lomé Peace Accord that led to the end of the Country's decade-long civil war.⁴⁷⁴

With regards to environmental protection initiatives, the Interfaith Summit on Climate Change held in collaboration with the World Council of Churches in 2014, represents the defining initiative of the WCRP on environmental issues. The summit which preceded the United Nations Summit on Climate Change brought together religious leaders representing nine religions from around the world. It conveyed the concerns and proposals of faith communities to government leaders and inter-governmental agencies.⁴⁷⁵

The summary of those concerns and proposals found expressions in a statement signed by more than thirty faith leaders. Among the main highlights of the document titled, *Climate, Faith and Hope: Faith Traditions Together for a Common Future*, are the following:⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷³ Cf. J. G. Melton, "World Conference on Religion and Peace" in J. Gordon Melton & Martin Bauman (Eds), *Religions of the World: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Beliefs and Practices*, Vol. 1 2019, 3127.

⁴⁷⁴ Cf. L. S. Graybill, *Religion, Tradition and Restorative Justice in Sierra Leone*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 2017, 16-17.

⁴⁷⁵ Cf. Elias C. Abramides, "Religious Responses to Climate Change: Turning faith into Action" in Grace Ji-Sun Kim (Eds), *Making Peace with the Earth: Action and Advocacy for Climate Justice*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 2016, 85-108.

⁴⁷⁶ Interfaith Summit on Climate Change, *Climate, Faith and Hope: Faith Traditions Together for a Common Future* (September 14, 2014), <https://www.interfaithclimate.org/the-statement.html>, date accessed 12/11/2022.

- The faith leaders not only recognised climate as a major obstacle to the alleviation of poverty but also as a severe threat to the peace and stability of the world.
- They [religious leaders] committed to promoting disaster mitigations and using religious and spiritual resources, pledge to stimulating consciences among religious adherents and communities to consider the climate crisis as a matter of urgency.
- They shared the conviction that the climate crisis requires an integrated approach to curbing and mitigating its effects based on the principles of mutual trust, fairness, precaution and intergeneration justice.
- They strongly appealed to the developed and rich nations to support poorer nations that are significantly vulnerable to the effects of climate change.
- They encouraged heads of governments who were to attend the UN Climate Change Summit to contribute to the Green Climate Fund aimed at aiding climate resilience and access to renewable energies for all people.
- They called on all governments to express commitment to limiting global warming and to share in the efforts to formulate and implement Low Carbon Development strategies.
- They requested all States to commit to a far-reaching global climate agreement in Paris in 2015.

The highlights of the statement from the WCRP show what faith leaders using their religious resources and shared values can bring to discussions about promoting ecologically conscious faith communities and sustainable living.

It is worth noting that the documents explored above are not systematic theological statements on protecting and caring for the environment. Nevertheless, the influence of religious beliefs and convictions are writ large in these documents and therefore they have theological insights that are relevant for this research.

6.4 ECOLOGICAL CONCERN IN ISLAM

Environmental concern in Islam as in Christianity has not been historically an area of scholarly interest until the awaking of ecological consciousness in recent years. However, this does not mean Islamic teaching is silent on the protection of the environment. As in every sphere of life in the Islamic tradition, the Qur'an and the Hadith provide ethical guidelines for environmental ethics.⁴⁷⁷ In this section, I will briefly discuss Islamic thought on taking care of the environment by commenting on two international declarations on environmental issues and the foundational sources of Islamic teaching that underpin them namely, the Qur'an and the Hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad. I conclude with brief remarks on some of the common ground and differences between Pope Francis' teaching on environmental care as articulated in LS and the 2015 *Islamic Declaration on Climate*. The inclusion of this section in the chapter is necessitated by the religious context of Sierra Leone. As I indicated in the first chapter of this work, more than 75 percent of Sierra Leoneans identify themselves as Muslims and also leaders of Muslim communities form an integral part of the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone.

6.4.1 *Environmental Concerns in International Islamic Declarations*

In light of the heightened awareness of the human-induced ecological crisis of our times, concern for the environment has become a topical issue at international Islamic gatherings in recent times. Since the first Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers was held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in 2000, Muslim leaders and environmentalists have issued statements on environmental issues, the most recent being the *Islamic Declaration on Climate Change* (2015).

In the 2000 Jeddah Declaration, representatives of the Islamic World agreed that environmental protection is an integral part of sustainable development and cannot be considered separately. Through the prism of development, the Muslim leaders at the Jeddah conference committed to alleviating poverty, improving food insecurity, supporting and

⁴⁷⁷ Cf. L. Wersal, "Islam and Environmental Ethics: Tradition Responds to Contemporary Challenges" in *Journal of Religion and Science*, 09/1995, Vol. 30, Issue 3, 451-459.

empowering women and youth in sustainable development, combating threats to social instability and preserving the environment and its natural resources.⁴⁷⁸

In 2015, Islamic leaders and environmentalists meeting in Istanbul, Turkey issued the *Islamic Declaration on Climate Change*. The document, which was issued ahead of the Paris Climate Summit, drew upon Islamic teaching as espoused in the Qur'an to articulate an argument for action. The declaration's preamble invokes the Islamic core belief in God as the Creator of the World.⁴⁷⁹ Upon this affirmation, the drafters of the declaration set about to give a theological interpretation of the climate crisis noting that humans are responsible for the current state of the earth.

Our species, though selected to be caretaker or steward (*khalīfah*) on earth, has been the cause of corruption and devastation on it that we are in danger of ending life as we know it on our planet. This current rate of climate change cannot be sustained, and the earth's fine equilibrium (*mīzān*) may soon be lost.⁴⁸⁰

As seen in the text cited above, the drafters appealed to the Qur'anic principles of *khalīfah* – which speaks to humankind's status as God's steward – and *mīzān* – which speaks to the notion of cosmic interdependence to highlight the failure of humankind to live up to its duty of safeguarding God's creation. In view of these declarative credal affirmations, the document draws upon scientific data, notably the 2014 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to shed light on the severity of the climate crisis and its impacts on the earth's system including its disproportionate impacts on poor and disadvantaged communities around the world.⁴⁸¹

Following the highlighting of the severity of the crisis, the declaration laments the slow pace of progress at the international level in addressing the issue.⁴⁸² The declaration concludes with a series of appeals to:⁴⁸³

⁴⁷⁸ Cf. *Jeddah Declaration on the Environment from an Islamic Perspective* http://www.issacharfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/jeddah_declaration.pdf, date accessed 13/11/2022.

⁴⁷⁹ Cf. *Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change*, (August 18, 2015), no. 1.1, https://www.ifees.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/climate_declarationmmwb.pdf, date accessed 13/11/2022.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 1.3

⁴⁸¹ Cf. *ibid.*, nn. 1.5-1.7.

⁴⁸² Cf. *ibid.*, no. 1.8.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, nn. 3.1-3.6.

- International institutions and global leaders to respect the prior commitments they have made in relation to the climate issue especially, the Kyoto Protocol and make a more robust agreement at UN Summit in Paris.
- The developed nations and oil-producing states to curb their greenhouse emissions, reduce their dependence on fossil fuel, support poorer nations in developing renewable energy sources and recognise their moral obligation to reduce consumption so that poorer regions of the world may benefit from what is left of the earth's resources.
- People of all nations to work towards a framework that prioritises sustainability and justice for those at the receiving end of adverse effects of the climate crisis especially vulnerable countries and indigenous communities.
- Corporations, finance and the sector to shoulder the responsibility for the adverse consequence of their profit-making activities and to support initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable development.
- People of other faiths to work together in bringing these objectives to fruition.
- And finally, all Muslims wherever they may be, to come together in order to bring about a resolution to the challenges of the climate crisis.

To sum up, the Islamic declarations explored in this subsection, speak to the fact that creation belongs to God – Allah and consequently humans are to care for it and treat it with respect. The failure of humans to do so has resulted to the current climate crisis. Hence, the appeal to the human community at every level to adopt sustainable ways of living.

6.4.2 *The Teachings of the Qur'an and the Hadiths on Protecting the Environment*

As in the case of the declarations explored above, Muslim environmentalists draw upon the Qur'an and the Hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad to generate environmentally friendly principles. The Qur'an and the Hadiths have a number of references to humans' relationship to the natural environment and ethical teachings on safeguarding the environment.

6.4.2.1 *The Qur'an and Care for the Environment*

Islamic teaching on environmental issues begins with al-Qur'an. Central to the Qur'anic perspective on the natural world are the principles of *Tawhid* (divine unity), the human position *Khalifa* (vice-regency), and *al-Mizan* (coherence or balance).⁴⁸⁴

- **The doctrine of *Tawhid*** – the Oneness and Uniqueness of God. The doctrine of *Tawhid* holds that “there is one, absolute, transcendent Creator of the universe and all that exists...This oneness of God constructs the understanding of nature in Qur'an and links nature to the divine without making it divine”.⁴⁸⁵ Thus, humankind's relations to the environment hinges on faith in God [Allah] as the Creator and the Sustainer of the universe who created everything for a reason: “God is the Creator of everything. He is the guardian over everything. Unto Him belong the keys of the heavens and the earth” (Qur'an 39:62).
- **The human position as *khalifa*** – the Qur'an teaches that man is the vice-regent of God – the *khalifa*, the trustee of God (see Qur'an 2:30-34). According to the Islamic scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr, man's status as God's vice-regent means “he must be active in the world, sustaining cosmic harmony and disseminating the grace for which he is the channel as a result of his being the central creature in the terrestrial order”.⁴⁸⁶ As *khalifa*, humans have the moral responsibility to use the resources of the earth judiciously; for God created the universe and the resources therein (see Qur'an 2:29) for the benefit of all creatures. Hence, the Qur'an forbids wastefulness and extravagance: “It is He who produces both trellised and untrellised gardens, date palms, crops of diverse flavours, the olive, the pomegranate, alike yet different. So, when they bear fruit, eat some of it, paying what is due on the day of harvest, but do not be wasteful: God does not like wasteful people” (*Al-An'am* 6:141).⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁴ Cf. F. Khalid, “Islam and the Environment - Ethics and Practice an Assessment: Islam and the Environment” in *Religion Compass*, 11/2010, Vol. 4, Issue 11, 707–716.

⁴⁸⁵ F. Harpci, “Green Book: Qur'anic teaching of creation and Nature” in M. Shafiq & T. Donlin-Smith (Eds), *Nature and the Environment in Contemporary Religious Contexts*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle Upon Tyne, 2018, (165-181) 166-167.

⁴⁸⁶ S. H. Nasr et al, *The Need for a Sacred Science*, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005.

⁴⁸⁷ Text taken from M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (Trans), *The Qur'an*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, 91.

- ***Mizān (coherence or balance)*** – the principle of *mizān* refers to the orderly and coherent disposition within creation which points to God, the Creator who governs the universe in an orderly fashion.⁴⁸⁸

As for the earth, We have spread it out, set firm mountains on it, and made everything grow there in due balance (*Al Hijr* – Qur’an 15:19); We have created all things in due measure;” (*al-Qamar* – Qur’an 54:49); He has raised up the sky. He has set the balance so that you may not exceed in the balance: weigh with justice and do not fall short in the balance (55:7-9).⁴⁸⁹

The principle of balance reinforces the Qur’anic vision of cosmic interrelatedness and interdependence as highlighted in *Al-An’am* (Qur’an 6:38): “There is no creature that crawls upon the earth, nor a bird that flies upon its wings, but that they are communities like yourselves—We have neglected nothing in the Book—and they shall be gathered unto their Lord in the end.” The notion of interdependence holds that humankind and other creatures constitute a community. According to Saadia Chishti, the prominence of interdependence in Qur’anic teaching is an imperative for environmental ethics: “As viceregents or stewards, individuals are personally responsible for the care and preservation of brethren communities, be they human, plant, or animal. In this context, every life-form possesses intrinsic value independent of its resource worth to humanity”.⁴⁹⁰

6.4.2.2 ***The Hadiths and Environmental Sustainability***

The Hadiths or the traditions of Prophet Muhammad also touch on environmental-related themes such as sustainable use of the land, conservation of water, treatment of animals and protection of trees.⁴⁹¹ For example, Iman Al-Bukhari reports that the Prophet perceives of the earth as an abode of worship: “The earth has been created for me as a mosque and as a means of purification” (Al-Bukhari I:331).⁴⁹² Reading into this Hadith, S, Nomanul Haq has pointed out

⁴⁸⁸ Cf. F. Harpci, “Green Book: Qur’anic teaching of creation and Nature” op. cit.

⁴⁸⁹ Texts taken from M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (Trans), *The Qur’an* op. cit.

⁴⁹⁰ S. A. K. Khan Chishti, “An Islamic Model for Humans and the environment, in R. C. Foltz (Eds), *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust (Religions of the World and Ecology)*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA., 2003, (67-82) 76.

⁴⁹¹ Cf. F. De Chatel, “Prophet Mohammed (SAW): A Pioneer of the Environmentalism” in *The Islamic Bulletin*, vol. 10 no. 23, 5-7, 2003.

⁴⁹² S, N. Haq, “Islam” in D. Jamieson (Ed), *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, Blackwell Publishers Ltd., Oxford, 2001, (111-129) 120.

that the declaration of the earth as a place of worship places the earth in a high symbolic status, hence the Prophet calls for the protection of the earth.⁴⁹³

The Prophet Muhammad also alludes to environmental sustainability and ecological interdependence when he encouraged Muslims to plant trees: “If a Muslim plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person or animal eats from it, it is regarded as a charitable gift (sadaqah) for him” (Sahih al-Bukhari 2320, Book 41, Hadith 1).⁴⁹⁴ Reflecting on this Hadith, Fatima Essop has suggested that in light of our contemporary context, the above text could be drawn upon “to encourage communities and governments to plant trees to counter the effects of deforestation”.⁴⁹⁵

In sum, the foundational sources of Islamic teaching, the Qur’an and the Hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad are supportive of safeguarding the environment.

6.4.3 *Points of Common Ground and Differences between Pope Francis’ Position in Laudato Si’ on Care for the Environment and the 2015 Islamic Declaration on Climate Change*

As I indicated in the fourth chapter of this work, LS was warmly received in the Muslim communities, especially at the Istanbul conference where participants made explicit reference to the importance of LS and how the encyclical message is in harmony with the message of the Istanbul declaration. Similarly, Cardinal Peter Turkson who played a leading role in the drafting of LS has openly praised the Islamic Declaration on Climate Change: “It is with great joy and in a spirit of solidarity that I express to you the promise of the Catholic Church to pray for the success of your initiative and her desire to work with you in the future to care for our common home and thus to glorify the God who created us”.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹³ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴⁹⁴ Cited in F. Essop, “An Islamic Legal Framework for the Protection of the Environment” in M. Christian Green & M. Haron (Eds.), *Law, Religion and the Environment in Africa*, *op. cit.* (109-128) at 123.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁶ Cardinal Peter Turkson on the Islamic Declaration on Climate Change cited in M. McGrath, “Islamic call on Rich Countries to end Fossil Fuel use”, BBC News (August 18, 2015), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-33972240>, date accessed 14/11/2022.

There are some clear and implicit commonalities and differences between Pope Francis' position in LS and the Islamic Declaration. Listed below are a few of the important similarities and differences between the two documents I have identified.

- Both documents refer to creation as God's gift to humankind that deserves to be treated with respect.
- Both documents speak to the special place of humans in the universe and their role as caretakers or stewards of God's creation.
- Both documents connect the climate crisis to the reality of poverty, consumerism and the wanton destruction of nature and its resources.
- Both documents appeal to scientific data and consensus to highlight the severity of the climate crisis.
- Both documents appeal to people of other Religious Traditions to work together in addressing the crisis.

Despite these points of common ground, the two documents have very clear differences. I highlight two major differences.

- Theologically, although both documents affirmed that God is the creator of the world, they differ markedly on the theological underpinnings of this affirmation. Whereas Pope Francis in LS grounds his argument in the core Christian belief in the trinitarian God who through the Person of Jesus Christ took on human flesh (incarnation) to underscore God's closeness to creation (LS 91-96), the Islamic Declaration is underpinned by the teaching of the Qur'an on God as the creator. The Islamic teaching on creation emphasises the absolute transcendence of God. God as Creator is transcendentally beyond his creation (Qur'an 42:11).
- Whereas the scope of LS is much more extensive, going beyond the issue of climate change as evidenced by the encyclical's treatment of a multitude of social and environmental issues, the Islamic declaration is narrowly focused on the climate change crisis and its impact on the earth's system.

In summary, the commonalities in the documents provide a possible meeting point for Christians and Muslims to dialogue and collaborate in addressing the climate crisis.

6.5 POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS OF ECUMENICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN RELATION TO ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE FOR THE CONTEXT OF SIERRA LEONE

Having discussed the ecumenical and interfaith dimensions of environmental justice in light of Pope Francis' call in LS for Religions to collaborate in addressing the environmental crisis, this section discusses environmental justice in relation to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue from the contextual perspective of Sierra Leone. What does Francis's appeal for ecumenical and interfaith engagements and collaboration to be part of the solutions in addressing the socio-ecological problems confronting the world mean for Sierra Leone? Here, I specifically focus on the theme of interfaith dialogue in relation to environmental justice in light of the work of the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone - the umbrella group for Christian and Muslim Religious Leaders in the country.

Firstly, Francis' affirmation of the importance of dialogue – which is also echoed by the ecumenical, interfaith and other religious documents explored in this chapter – as an important path to fostering solidarity and consensus building in the face of difficult challenges confronting our global commons not only endorses the culture of dialogue among religions but provides great encouragement and impetus for strengthening interfaith cooperation in Sierra Leone, where there is already an established culture of interfaith dialogue and corporation. As mentioned earlier, Sierra Leone is well known for its religious tolerance, a phenomenon that has existed in the country since the pre-colonial era. In the West African sub-region where religious difference, particularly between Christians and Muslims has been a cause of violence (Nigeria as a case in point), in Sierra Leone, there is an unusual degree of interreligious tolerance. This phenomenon has been attributed to a number of social factors such as shared familial background (for e.g. both my paternal and maternal grandparents were devout Muslims and some of my relatives are practising Muslims), intermarriages, shared educational institutions etc.⁴⁹⁷ At the height of the decade-long civil war that plagued the country – the causes of which have been attributed in part to the dereliction of the prophetic function of religious leaders – leaders of religious communities harnessed the country's enviable religious tolerance heritage to bring the warring factions to the

⁴⁹⁷ Cf. P. S. Conteh, *Inter-religious Encounters and Dialogue in Sierra Leone: Historical and Contemporary Endeavour*, Xlibris Corporation, Bloomington, IN, 2011, 19-20.

negotiating table, an initiative that led to the formation of the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone (hereafter referred to as IRCSL).

The IRCSL officially came into existence on April 1, 1997.⁴⁹⁸ The idea of creating an integrated interfaith platform to advocate for a peaceful resolution of the conflict was inspired and supported by the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP). The council's formation was preceded by several consultative meetings facilitated and financed by WCRP. The various consultative encounters eventually led to a one-day conference on *The Role of Religious Community in Reconciliation, Reconstruction and Development* held on April 1, 1997. The conference was attended by over two hundred Muslim and Christian delegates from Sierra Leone. The groups represented at the conference included the Supreme Islamic Council, the Sierra Leone Muslim Congress, the Federation of Muslim Women Associations in Sierra Leone, the Council of Imams, and the Sierra Leone Islamic Missionary Union. Constituent Christian communities included the Council of Churches in Sierra Leone (which represented eighteen Protestant denominations), the Pentecostal Churches Council and representations from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sierra Leone. At the conference, the Muslims and Christians leaders proposed and adopted two statements: *Shared Moral Concerns* and *Shared Values and Common Purpose* which identifies common moral values and principles in the Islamic and Christian religions.⁴⁹⁹

IRC SL demonstrated remarkable moral courage in facilitating dialogue among the various warring factions. Despite numerous setbacks and challenges, the mediative role of the IRC SL led to a negotiated settlement of the conflict which helped to end the war in 2002. Following the end of the war, the IRC SL made a significant contribution to post-conflict reconstruction, consolidation of peace and reconciliation. The IRC SL role in the resolution of the civil war and its post-war peacebuilding initiative earned it both local and international acclaim. Today the council is regarded as one of the most credible local institutions in the country. In recent years, the Inter-

⁴⁹⁸ Cf. L. S. Graybill, *Religion, Tradition and Restorative Justice in Sierra Leone*, op. cit., 7-29; see also P. S. Conteh, "The Role of Religion During and After the Civil War in Sierra Leone" in *Journal for the Study of Religion*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (November 2011), 55-76.

⁴⁹⁹ Cf. P. S. Conteh, "The Role of Religion During and After the Civil War in Sierra Leone" op. cit. 65-66.

religious council has been active in promoting dialogue and reconciliation among the country's political parties especially during and after contentious national elections. Also, the council has continued to serve as a coordinator for the interfaith response in moments of national crisis including natural disasters and health crises. For example, during the 2014/15 Ebola outbreak which gripped Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia, the IRCSL provided emotional, spiritual and material support to the general populace.⁵⁰⁰

Secondly, Francis' proposal for interfaith dialogue and action to be part of the process of addressing the structural causes of poverty, injustice, exclusion and environmental degradation offers a possible roadmap and motivation for a new way of engaging in interreligious initiative and collaboration in the country. Since the end of the civil war, interfaith engagements in the country have largely followed the reactive approach that was employed during the civil war. There is no doubt that the historical antecedents and factors that led to the decade-long civil war continue to persist and remain the underlying causes of the country's constant fragility and propensity to instability. In light of the gravity and urgency of the socio-environmental challenges facing Sierra Leone, the question arises whether it is time the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone structured its faith-based initiatives and cooperation in a proactive way that allows faith leaders and actors to be part of the process in addressing the underlying causes of conflict. My response to this question is a definitive yes.

In my view, proactive interfaith dialogue and engagement in Sierra Leone has the potential of empowering faith-based communities in the country to influence government policies on important social issues including the myriad of environmental problems confronting the country. This point came across very well in an interview I conducted with one of the Catholic Bishops during the data-collection phase of my empirical research. When asked about the role of religion in shaping attitudes of the Sierra Leonean citizenry in relation to environmental care and responsibility, the Bishop had this to say:

If we all agree as religious leaders to address [the environmental issue], the impact will be tremendous. But unfortunately, we have not prioritised environmental issues. Other issues have

⁵⁰⁰ C. Greyling et al, "Lessons from the Faith-Driven Response to the West Africa Ebola Epidemic" in *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, Vol. 14, Issue 3, (July 2016), 118-123.

engaged our attention... what I have noticed is that we have not seen the link, or we the religious leaders have not helped our people to see the link between our faith in God as creator and our responsibility towards taking proper care of his creation. We have focused on other moral issues and have not emphasised the ecological dimension of faith. But if we do that, then we would even impact government policy in relation to environmental issues.⁵⁰¹

Additionally, interfaith dialogue and cooperation in relation to environmental issues offer an opportunity for religious leaders and adherents to get involved in conversations regarding the prevention of environmental disasters in the country. A case in point is the August 14, 2017, mudslide that led to the death of hundreds of Sierra Leone. The sad event of August 14 was a disaster waiting to happen and had religious leaders been proactive in drawing attention to the dangers of the fast-paced deforestation of the mountains overlooking the city, that disaster would have been forestalled. However, faith-based communities and leaders only acted following the disaster as seen in this press release issued by the Council of Churches in Sierra Leone (CCSL):

As the largest Christian organization in the country, the Council of Churches in Sierra Leone laments the present spate of disaster [sic] in Freetown and mourns the death of hundreds of poor and innocent people who lost their lives in this needless and preventable disaster. In the same vein, we empathize with the thousands of people including mainly women and children who survived the disaster and now live under life-threatening conditions with no place they could call home.

All Sierra Leoneans are aware that the entire city of Freetown lies below the slopes of surrounding hills that span east to west. Year after year, there is massive destruction of natural vegetation for farming, firewood and for building houses. In addition, stone mining has become a huge profession in the city. Through these activities, the soil is laid bare making it vulnerable to excessive run-off water and mudslides in the rainy season. Freetown goes through this every year with people losing their lives.⁵⁰²

The statement of CCSL and other Religious Groups in the country paints a picture of a dereliction of prophetic duty on the part of the religious leaders in the country. As seen from the text cited above, the CCSL and the IRCSL were very much aware of the underlying causes of the disaster but little or nothing was done on their part to prevent it.

⁵⁰¹ Taken from the transcript of an interview conducted with one the respondent of my empirical research, May 25, 2022.

⁵⁰² Council of Churches in Sierra Leone, "Statement on the August 14, 2017 Flooding and Mud Slide in Freetown" published in *Global Ministries* (Aug 18, 2017), https://www.globalministries.org/council_of_churches_in_sierra_leone_statement_on_the_august_14_2017_flooding_and_mud_slide_in_freetown/, date accessed 14/11/2022.

Finally, the proposals for dialogue which Pope Francis advances in LS also encourages dialogue of life. (cf. LS 14). In the final chapter of LS Francis reminds us that caring for creation through daily actions can transform one's community (LS 211). This has practical implications and relevance for the context of Sierra Leone. As I noted earlier in this chapter, dialogue of life has to do with daily life interaction between people from different religious traditions. It entails coexisting peacefully with "the other" in spite of obvious religious differences. It speaks to a sense of community, and participation, respecting the rights and responsibilities of each person, and the well-being of the community. Dialogue of daily life seeks to respond to the following questions: How should I treat my neighbour? How can I be just to others in my daily interactions?

Care for the environment, which is seen as a matter of justice, if cultivated through the lens of dialogue of life or daily interaction in the faith-based communities of Sierra Leone can help in addressing some of the mundane ecological hazards in the country such as the indiscriminate disposal of plastic and household wastes. As rightly observed by some of the participants of my empirical research, when environmental issues come to the fore, the focus is mostly directed on large-scale environmental destruction by corporate groups whilst overlooking environmental degradation caused by ordinary people at the grassroots level. One participant put it more eloquently during an interview I conducted in the Western part of the country: "Sometimes we give the impression that those who violate the environment are just the big people. But to some extent, people at the grassroots level are not innocent bystanders".⁵⁰³

The dialogue of life if informed by ecological education – which according to Pope Francis can promote environmental responsibility and also encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly impact our surroundings (LS 214) – can be a useful tool in promoting environmental care and responsibility at the grassroots level in Sierra Leone. Religious beliefs have been recognised as a powerful incentive in shaping attitudes and worldviews. In their collaborative essay titled, *Incentive Systems: A Theory of Organisation* (1961), Peter Clark and James Q. Wilson have argued that belonging to a group could offer multiple incentives to group members. These include material incentives, i.e., incentives that have to do with tangible rewards that have

⁵⁰³ Taken from the transcript of an interview conducted with one the respondents of my empirical research, May 25, 2022.

monetary value; solidarity incentives, i.e., incentives that have to do with intangible rewards such as the status that results from group membership; and purposive incentives, i.e., incentives that are underpinned by belief systems and commitment to value-driven fulfilment.⁵⁰⁴ Seen from the perspective of religious faith, purposive incentives can motivate individuals to work for social transformation.

As I have shown in this chapter, Christianity and Islam, the dominant religions practised in Sierra Leone, provide ample religious incentives for environmental care and responsibility. If ecological education is prioritised at places of worship, schools and local communities, a kind of education that would help religious adherents to see the link between their faith in God as creator and their responsibility towards taking proper care of God's creation, it could serve as a motivating factor for people of faith in Sierra Leone to translate the ecological incentives in their respective religions into action in their everyday living.

Concluding Remarks

The aim of this chapter has been to examine environmental justice concerns from the perspective of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and cooperation in light of Pope Francis' invitation to other Christian and Religious traditions to enter into dialogue and cooperate for the health and sustainability of the earth, our global commons.

Building on Vatican II's conciliar teaching on ecumenism and interreligious dialogue and their reception in the magisterial teaching of his successors, Francis maintains in LS that the current ecological crisis, the impacts of which transcends religious boundaries, requires dialogue and cooperation among followers of all religions given that Religions play a paramount role in nurturing respect for creation and in protecting the environment. Furthermore, it has been established that the clarion call of Pope Francis LS for an accelerated and augmented ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and cooperation in light of the worsening ecological problems around the world has been echoed by other Christian denominations, ecumenical groups and interfaith

⁵⁰⁴ Cf. P. B. Clark, & J. Q. Wilson, "Incentive Systems: A Theory of Organizations" in *Administrative Science Quarterly*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1961, 129–66.

organisations as attested to by the various ecumenical and interfaith documents explored in this chapter.

Drawing on Pope Francis' teaching in LS on the urgent need for Religious adherents to dialogue and collaborate for sake of the earth systems' health and sustainability, I argued that the environmental challenges confronting Sierra Leone, a country that has an established culture of ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, demands decisive attention from the main ecumenical and interreligious organisations in the country. I illustrated that the dominant religions practised in the country – Christianity and Islam – have sound ecological teachings and if harnessed properly, they could help in shaping attitudes of ordinary religious adherents about caring for and protecting the environment and even influence government policies in favour of environmental protection and sustainability. Hence, the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone has the advantage of addressing the myriad of environmental problems in collaboration with other Churches and the Muslim communities.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TOWARDS AN ECOLOGICALLY MINDED AND PRAXIS-BASED CATHOLIC CHURCH IN SIERRA LEONE

Introduction

The overall aim of this thesis is to assess environmental justice concerns or the lack thereof in the pastoral priorities of the local Catholic Church in Sierra Leone and to argue for the integration of environmental concern and care in its mission.

In view of the overall aim of my research, this final chapter will attempt to respond to the question, what concrete contribution can the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone make in addressing the environmental challenges facing the country? In other words, I intend to narrow down my discussion on environmental justice concerns in the socio-ecclesial context of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone to the practical implications of my research. Drawing on the findings of my empirical research (chapter 2) and the insights gleaned from Pope Francis' encyclical *LS* and the wider CST on the environment, I argue for the urgent need to have an ecologically minded and eco-justice praxis-based local Catholic Church in Sierra Leone. In addition to the proposals I have already made in the preceding chapters of the second part of this work (chapters 4, 5 & 6), I will further make concrete suggestions by means of which the Church in Sierra Leone can proactively engage with socio-ecological issues.

The chapter proceeds in three steps. First, I will recall the findings of my empirical research on the current state of environmental justice concerns in the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone and interface them with the environmental-related themes I have discussed in the preceding chapters of this work. I will next present a case study of how the Catholic Church of Kenya is responding to environmental justice issues in the context of Kenya and highlight how the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone can learn from its best practices and challenges. I intend to draw on the experience of the Catholic Church in Kenya to illustrate how other local Churches are engaging in everyday practice of care for the environment. And finally, I will proffer and discuss practical recommendations and suggestions for concrete action in the mission of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone in relation to environmental justice issues.

7.1 HIGHLIGHTS OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AND THEORETICAL CHAPTERS

The overall objectives of this thesis have been partly accomplished in the preceding chapters of this work. In this section, I will sum up the findings and insights garnered from my empirical research and interface them with the key insights from environmental-related themes I have drawn from LS and wider CST on caring for and protecting the environment.

Highlights of the key findings from the empirical research	Key insights from <i>the theoretical chapters</i>
<p>1. Communities in Sierra Leone are facing a wide range of ecological problems ranging from land and water degradation to climate change-induced environmental problems such as long dry spells (section 1.3).</p>	<p>Drawing on Pope Francis’ reforming agenda which provides space for local churches to assume greater responsibility for their own pastoral and social concerns, I maintained that the environmental challenges facing communities in Sierra Leone are urgent pastoral problems crying for tangible action from the Church (general introduction and chapter 2).</p>
<p>2. Although there is a high level of awareness of the severity of environmental problems affecting communities in Sierra Leone, and some pockets of initiatives aimed at mitigating the problems in the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone, concern for environmental justice issues has yet to be fully integrated into the Church’s mission (chapter 2, section 2.4).</p>	<p>This thesis is premised on the understanding of the social mission of the Catholic Church, of which social justice is an essential component. As one of the central tenets of CST, the Church’s commitment to social justice demands that it advocates for the improvement in the way public affairs are conducted and to raise its voice in defence of the poor and marginalised. In LS, Pope Francis through the lens of integral ecology connects social and environmental injustice and proposes an integrated approach to addressing the underlying causes of endemic poverty and environmental degradation.</p> <p>Following the line of argument developed by Pope Francis in his delineation of integral ecology, I argued that the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone should reimagine its social mission and fully incorporate environmental justice concerns into its pastoral priorities in light of the severity of environmental challenges affecting vulnerable communities in Sierra Leone (section 4.3)</p>

<p>3. It was discovered that environmental problems are exacerbating poverty and amplifying existing socio-economic challenges in Sierra Leone with disproportionate impacts on the livelihood of impoverished and deprived communities in the country. However, despite the heightened awareness Pope Francis has brought to the issue by elevating to it one of the highest and most authoritative means of official teaching in the Catholic Church, concern for environmental justice issues remains mostly patchy in the work of Caritas Sierra Leone, the development wing of the Catholic Church in the country (chapter 2, section 2.4).</p>	<p>In the discussion on environmental justice in relation to sustainable development, I critically engaged with Pope Francis' synthesis of the concept of development which builds on earlier CST on integral human development. In line with his integral approach to addressing challenges of poverty, injustices and environmental degradation, Pope Francis in LS advocates for a vision of development that is both integral and sustainable.</p> <p>Through an appeal to the concept and meaning of development, as articulated in LS and earlier CST documents, I maintained that there is an urgent need for the development wing of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone to recalibrate its development agenda and integrate environmental justice issues into its plans and priorities in light of the intertwined link between endemic poverty and environmental degradation affecting communities across the ecclesiastical region of Sierra Leone (sections 5.1 & 5.3).</p>
<p>4. Another important insight gleaned from the study is the emergence of environmental-related conflicts in some parts of Sierra Leone. My empirical study indicated that as a result of the impact of climate change, Sierra Leone is experiencing recurrent changing weather patterns and extreme weather such as long dry spells. These, coupled with other social and economic problems, have led to conflicts among some rural communities in Sierra Leone, especially in the north-eastern part of the country (chapter 2, section 2.3).</p>	<p>It has been established that competition for access to natural resources such as water, farming and pastoral lands can trigger violent conflicts. This problem is already manifest on the African continent as evidenced by empirical study.</p> <p>In recognition of the threats that ecological problems and their underlying socio-economic systems pose to the peace and stability of our common home, Pope Francis building on earlier CST peace tradition, advocates for not only for peace on earth but also peace with the earth. Against the backdrop of Sierra Leone's status as a post-war country and given the fact ecological related problems have the potential to undermine the country's fragile peace and stability, I drew on Pope Francis' synthesis of 'peace on earth and peace with the earth' to call for the Justice and Peace Commission of Caritas Sierra Leone to adopt an integrated approach in</p>

	<p>its peace-promoting mission, an approach that takes into account the social and ecological drivers of conflicts (sections 5.2 & 5.3.2).</p>
<p>5. My empirical study also revealed that there is overwhelming support among the research participants for ecumenical and interfaith cooperation in addressing the environmental challenges in Sierra Leone (chapter 2, section 2.4.4).</p>	<p>Against the backdrop of the adverse effects of environmental problems, which cut across denominational and faith boundaries, and in view of the already established culture of peaceful co-existence and dialogue among the dominant faith communities in Sierra Leone – Christianity and Islam, I explored environmental justice concerns from the perspective of ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and cooperation. Using Pope Francis’ emphasis on ‘the urgency and importance of dialogue among religions for care for our common home’ as a starting point, I argued that environmental degradation and its impacts, particularly on poor and vulnerable communities across Sierra Leone should be an ecumenical and interreligious concern.</p> <p>The main emergent insight garnered from the discussions on environmental justice concerns from the lens of ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and cooperation is that environmental problems are not only socio-economic challenges but are also linked to a crisis of values and since the dominant religions practised in Sierra Leone possess sound teachings and wisdom on humankind’s proper relationship with the environment, an enhanced ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and collaboration on environmental justice issues could help in shaping attitudes and influencing government policies on environmental care and protection (chapter 6).</p>

As illustrated above, the findings of my empirical research and the emergent insights from the theoretical chapters of this work show that the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone can contribute majorly to responding to and addressing the environmental challenges affecting communities across the country. Based on the findings and arguments made earlier this thesis, in what follows

I shall suggest practical recommendations regarding how the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone can become an ecologically conscious and praxis-based church. To do so, there is a need to highlight the efforts and initiatives of other local churches in response to the environmental justice challenges affecting its socio-ecclesial contexts.

7.2 A SAMPLE CASE STUDY: THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN KENYA AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

As I noted earlier in this thesis, although the post-Vatican II Catholic Church in Africa has dealt with pertinent issues such as inculturation, poverty and disease, justice, peace, reconciliation etc., its response to the ecological challenges affecting their socio-ecclesial context is still largely invisible despite the fact that the ecological crisis is having outsized effects on the continent. Although environmental justice issues formed part of the deliberations of the Second African Synod (2009), concern for environmental issues has not generally gained much traction in the African Church. However, although the environmental question has generally received scant attention in the African Church, some local Churches particularly in East Africa are making tangible efforts to respond to the environmental challenges affecting their socio-ecclesial context. For the purpose of this work, I present a case study of how the local Catholic Church in Kenya is responding to the environmental problems affecting its context. I have opted to present a case study of the initiatives of the local Church of Kenya because of its long history of environmental activism dating back to the 1990s. It is worth noting that the environmental challenges in Kenya are similar to those experienced in Sierra Leone. These include land degradation, loss of vegetation, reduction of biodiversity and wildlife, increased intensity and occurrence of drought and floods due to climate change, increase occurrence of resource-related conflicts and increase in poverty.⁵⁰⁵

Kenya has a long history of environmental activism as embodied by the pioneering work and legacy of the late Nobel laureate Wangari Maathai (see chapter four) who in 1977 founded the Green Belt Movement in order to address environmental degradation, especially deforestation. Within the context of faith-based communities, the Catholic Church has been at the forefront of

⁵⁰⁵ Cf. World Bank, *Kenya Country Environmental Analysis*, World Bank, Washington, DC 2019, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33949>, date accessed 30/12/2023.

environmental advocacy in Kenya since the early 1990s. In his essay on Christian environmentalism in Kenya published in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* (2008), Samson Gitau has provided an insightful historical account of the early phase of the involvement of the local Catholic Church of Kenya in environmental justice issues.⁵⁰⁶ Gitau highlights three cases of such involvements.

The first case Gitau cites is that of the concerted protest by local Catholic parishes in Thika town south-central Kenya against environmental pollution of their community as a result of the indiscriminate discharge of industrial waste and toxic gas. The town of Thika, one of the most industrialised areas in Kenya, is perceived to be one of the most heavily polluted municipalities in the country. After years of public lamentation and complaints to the local authorities without success, congregations from local parishes led by their parish priests and with support from the Kenya Catholic Bishops' Conference held a peaceful demonstration punctuated by prayers and speeches. The demonstration brought the issue to the attention of President Daniel Arap Moi's government, which ordered the local authorities to resolve the problem. The intervention of the central government and local authorities eventually led to some pollution mitigation measures.⁵⁰⁷

The second case Gitau highlights is that of the initiatives of the environmental campaigner Father John Koingo of Limuru, Archdiocese of Nairobi. Inspired by the biblical mandate for humans to be stewards of creation (Gen. 1:29), Father Koingo promoted care for the environment through environmental education and the conservation of indigenous trees. He initiated tree planting in his locality by starting a tree nursery that specialises in indigenous trees.⁵⁰⁸

The third case Gitau references is that of Wangari Maathai's engagement with local Churches including Catholic parishes as a platform to sensitize Kenyans about the need to protect the environment. Maathai extensively and creatively used Christian teaching on care for the

⁵⁰⁶ Cf. S. Gitau, "Christian Environmentalism in Kenya" in Bron Taylor (Ed), *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, op. cit., 305-306.

⁵⁰⁷ Cf. *ibid*

⁵⁰⁸ Cf. *ibid*

environment in dialogue with African indigenous environmental ethics to advocate for a spiritual connection with nature. Maathai's environmental sensitization campaigns encouraged members of Christian communities to plant trees in their school and church compounds and farmlands.⁵⁰⁹

The Kenya Catholic Bishops' Conference and environmental care

More recently, the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (hereafter KCCB) has picked up the environmental cause. The KCCB's engagement with environmental issues predates the promulgation of LS. In 2012, KCCB issued a statement entitled *Pastoral Approach to Care for God's Creation*. Drawing on the Catholic tradition which teaches that creation is part of God's plan of salvation, the Kenyan Bishops' conference pledged its commitment to "promote environmental care from an integral pastoral perspective". The document proceeded to underscore the severity of the environmental challenge confronting Kenya noting that it "has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions which cannot be ignored". It concluded with an invitation to all Catholics in Kenya to actively protect the environment.⁵¹⁰

The document (The *Pastoral Approach to Care for God's Creation*) was followed by a seven-year strategic plan with the following objectives:

- To enhance the coordination of Catholic Church in Kenya initiatives in environmental care and protection right from the Catholic family to the small Christian community parish level up to the national level;
- To sensitise and educate Kenyans on their urgent role of stewardship in environmental care and protection through proper management of environmental resources on a sustainable basis;
- To regenerate about 20% of forest cover in degraded national/diocesan shrines, church compounds and church institutions land in the country, emphasising water-conserving trees around water sources. This will benefit nature and the Kenyan population as a whole as they enjoy and experience God's presence in a well-managed environment;
- To develop sustainable land and water management projects challenging adults, youth and children to cherish environmental care and protection;
- To develop environmentally friendly sources of energy;
- To build partnerships with other like-minded organisations in Kenya and provide opportunities for exchange programmes.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

⁵¹⁰ Cf. KCCB, *Pastoral Approach to Care for God's Creation* (March 2012).

⁵¹¹ Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Catholic Church in Kenya: Long-term Plan on the Environment* (September 2012).

Although the Kenya Bishops' pastoral letter and its accompanying strategic plans predate LS, the vision and priorities of the documents resonate with the teaching of Pope Francis in LS. For instance, the documents present the ecological challenge as a moral problem that requires an integrated pastoral response.

In line with their commitment to promote environmental care in the Catholic Church in Kenya, the Kenya Bishops organised an environmental-themed workshop in partnership with the World Wildlife Fund in November 2014. The workshop which had as its main theme "Faiths care for nature and protect wildlife" sought to create awareness about environmental care and sustainability within the Church structure, from families to parishes; and to the national level. Among the main highlights of the workshop was a presentation of the overview of the Catholic Church's teaching on the environment. The workshop concluded with a proposal to draw up a strategic plan for concrete action in promoting environmental care.⁵¹²

It can be seen from the above discussion that the Catholic Church in Kenya prior to the promulgation of LS had a relatively sustained concern for environmental care and sustainability.

Reception and implementation of Laudato Si'

The Kenya Catholic Church provides an inspiring example of engagement with LS on the African continent. Within the intervening years since the encyclical's release, attempts have been made by the Kenyan local Church to localise and implement the contents of the encyclical in its pastoral priorities. For instance, on the occasion of the celebration of Family Day of the Archdiocese of Nairobi in August 2015, the Archbishop of Nairobi John Cardinal Njue, issued a pastoral letter in which he provided a localised summary of the key teachings of LS for the Catholic community of Nairobi.⁵¹³

⁵¹² Cf. E. X. Obiezu "Questions of Special Urgency: Understanding Holy See Interventions at the United Nations on Africa's Development in the Light of the Theological Principles of Gaudium et Spes" in C. Orji & Joseph Ogbonnaya (Eds), *Christianity and Culture Collision: Particularities and Trends from a Global South*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2016, 177-200.

⁵¹³ Cf. D. N. Munene, "Kenya Cardinal Endorses *Laudato Si'* in Archdiocese Family Day Pastoral Letter (August 12, 2015), <http://cynesa.org/cynesablog/kenyan-cardinal-endorses-laudato-si-in-archdiocese-family-day-pastoral-letter/#sthash.nXMbz1ko.dpbs>, date accessed 5/01/23.

Following the launching of the UN SDGs, the KCCB in its commitment to addressing environmental-related challenges affecting its socio-ecclesial context issued a localised version of the SDGs – which as I have stated earlier, dovetails in some measures with the language and spirit of LS. On the SDGs that deal with environmental issues (goals 13-16), the KCCB outlined localised strategies and plans of action with emphases on education and capacity building, advocacy at the national level, engaging interfaith groups, conservation of church-owned lands, promotion of common values and strengthening institutions.⁵¹⁴

In October 2018, the KCCB in its bid to respond to Pope Francis' call in LS to listen to the 'cry of the earth and the cry of the poor' launched an environmental awareness campaign through its development wing, Caritas Kenya. The campaign which was aimed at helping Catholics and the Kenya populace as a whole to gain awareness and understand the importance of caring for and protecting the environment also pressed for concrete ecological initiatives that Kenya should take to protect the environment.⁵¹⁵

Grassroots initiatives since the publication of Laudato Si'.

At the grassroots level, Kenyan Catholics in various parish communities across the local dioceses in the country are showing real commitment to environmental protection and sustainability. For example, the Catholic Diocese of Kericho as part of its ongoing efforts to promote environmental care in light of LS, has been empowering its parish communities and schools to incorporate environmental conservation and protection into their activities.⁵¹⁶

In addition to local diocesan grassroots initiatives, Catholic religious orders/ congregations and charity organisations working in communities across Kenya have integrated creation care and sustainable development programmes into their community-based activities.

⁵¹⁴ Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Faith and Sustainable Development Goals: Catholic Church of Kenya-long Term Plan 2015-2025*, <http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/Catholic%20Kenya.pdf>, date accessed 06/01/2023.

⁵¹⁵ Cf. Caritas Kenya, "The Catholic Church in Kenya Launches a One-year Environmental Campaign", *Caritas News* (October 2018), <https://caritaskenya.or.ke/the-catholic-church-in-kenya-launches-a-one-year-environmental-campaign/>, date accessed 5/01/2023.

⁵¹⁶ Cf. J. A. Okoth, "Kericho Diocese Cares for Environment from Grassroots" in AMECEA News (September 25, 2020), <https://communications.amecea.org/index.php/2020/09/25/kenya-kericho-diocese-cares-for-environment-from-grassroots/>, date accessed 06/01/2023.

For example, the Society of Jesus (Jesuit) in Kenya are engaged in a wide variety of projects that attend to both developmental and environmental issues. In an article published in the *Journal of Jesuit Studies*, James Strzok, an American Jesuit currently working in East Africa has provided a detailed account of the sustainable developmental projects of the Jesuits in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. In a region being severely impacted by climate change, Strzok chronicles how the Jesuits are working with local communities to mitigate the consequences of climate change through sustainable practices. These include construction of eco-friendly buildings, generation of geothermal heat from borehole water, the harnessing of solar energies, the construction of biolatrines that generate methane gas for cooking, tree planting and ecological education.⁵¹⁷ Similarly, international Catholic development agencies such as CAFOD through local partners are also working with local communities on issues related to climate change and environmental degradation.⁵¹⁸

Young Catholics in Kenya have also embraced LS and are showing greater commitment to environmental sustainability. One of the groups animating the implementation of the encyclical at the grassroots level is Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa (CYNESA). Since the publication of LS in 2015, CYNESA has been engaging young people in parish communities and schools through workshops and social media platforms such as Facebook.⁵¹⁹

Lessons

I would like to conclude this theoretical survey of environmental justice concerns in the Catholic Church of Kenya by highlighting some simple but significant lessons I believe we can draw from the brief overview outlined above.

⁵¹⁷ Cf. J. Strzok, "Ready to Change the World? Start Here! What are Jesuits Doing in East Africa?" in *Journal of Jesuit Studies*, Vol. 3, Issue 4 (September 2016), 577-592.

⁵¹⁸ Cf. CAFOD, "Kenya's Hidden Food Crisis" *CAFOD News* (June 17, 2022), <https://cafod.org.uk/news/international-news/kenya-s-hidden-food-crisis>, date accessed 17/02/22.

⁵¹⁹ Cf. CYNESA, "Environmental Education for Youth" in Global Catholic Climate Movement *Eco-Parish Guide: Bringing Laudato Si' to Life* (2016), 2, <https://ourcommonhome.org/media/docs/GCCM-Eco-Parish-Guide-English.pdf>, date accessed 18/01/23.

1. Notwithstanding its limited economic and structural resources, the Catholic Church of Kenya has recognised the environmental challenges affecting communities across the country as concrete existential problems that demand an integrated pastoral response from the Church.
2. Over the years the Kenya Catholic Church through its various organs has launched and promoted environmental awareness and education training programmes based on CST. These training programmes have targeted every level of the Catholic community in Kenya; priests religious, seminarians, Catholic men and women and youth groups.
3. The Catholic Church in Kenya warmly received LS and has sought to incorporate and localise its main teaching in the already established environmental projects.
4. The development wing of Kenya Catholic Church, Caritas Kenya at both national and diocesan levels is showing greater commitment to environmental issues in its developmental agenda. As indicated earlier, Caritas Kenya in view of the local context has localised the contents of LS and UN SDGs.
5. There appears to be a broad-based effort in the Church to promote environmental care at the grassroots level. Parish communities and institutions across the country's Catholic dioceses are being empowered to participate in environmental projects as evidenced by the planting of millions of trees in the last seven years.
6. At the national level, the Kenya Bishops Conference through statements and pastoral letters, have prioritised environmental justice issues. Since the publication of LS, the KCCB either as an independent conference or part of the regional East Africa bishops conference – the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA), has issued statements backing the main concerns of the encyclical – listening to the twin-cries of the earth and the poor. Furthermore, the KCCB has been engaging the Government on pressing environmental-related concerns. For example, in November 2021, it issued a statement in which the Bishops urged the Government of Kenya to take decisive action on climate change-induced drought.⁵²⁰

⁵²⁰ F. Nzwili, "Kenyan Bishops Urge Decisive Action on Climate Change-induced Drought" in *The National Catholic Reporter*, <https://www.ncronline.org/earthbeat/justice/kenyan-bishops-urge-decisive-action-climate-change-induced-drought>, date accessed 06/01/2023.

The above survey of the initiatives of the Catholic Church in Kenya provides an admirable example of how the various organs within the Kenyan Church are working together to promote care for the environment as an integral part of the church's mission. It is still early to make a conclusive assessment of the Kenyan Church's engagement with ecological issues and to make a determination of how well the initiatives mentioned above have worked. However, it seems to me the initiatives of the Catholic Church in Kenya are largely clergy driven. Nonetheless, these initiatives provide a window into its commitment to promoting environmental care as an integral component of the Church's mission in its socio-ecclesial context.

It should be noted that the Catholic Church in Kenya and that of Sierra Leone despite the thousands of miles separating the two countries and some cultural differences, have a lot in common: They are both growing and vibrant churches with a large youthful population; they are both developing churches facing similar economic and developmental challenges; and they are experiencing similar environmental challenges. Hence, some of the Kenyan Church's initiatives such as the introduction of ecological education in catechetical programmes, ecological formation of pastoral agents, the promotion of environmental care and protection in parish settings, the integration of sustainable development practices in the work of the Church's development wing, the integration of educational modules on environmental care in schools/institutions, the promotion of environmental care and protection in ecumenical and interreligious spaces, and building partnership and working with governmental and non-governmental institutions on issues related to environmental sustainability, could be adapted and applied in the context of Sierra Leone.

In summary, the integral pastoral approach to caring for and protecting the environment being implemented in the Catholic Church in Kenya could offer a template to other local Catholic Churches like that of Sierra Leone in mainstreaming environmental justice concerns in their pastoral priorities. Furthermore, the initiatives of the Kenyan Church provides concrete evidence of the ecclesiological vision that the pontificate of Pope Francis is envisioning – a vision of that space for local Churches to assume greater responsibility for their own pressing pastoral concerns.

7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS: TOWARDS DEVELOPING AN ECOLOGICALLY CONSCIOUS CHURCH IN SIERRA LEONE

So far in this thesis, I have made the case for integrating environmental care and protection into the mission of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone given the current reality of severe environmental problems affecting communities across the country. I have demonstrated that a contextualised version of Pope Francis' integral ecology as articulated in LS could offer a roadmap for the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone to respond to the twin cries of the poor and the earth.

I acknowledge that the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone is faced with other pressing problems such as endemic poverty, food insecurity, the threats of diseases etc., and taking on ecological justice issues (which requires a lot of resources; financial and otherwise) may offer significant challenges to the church's meagre resources. Furthermore, I acknowledge that promoting environmental care may clash with the immediate economic needs of some of the communities that are being affected by environmental problems across Sierra Leone. However, notwithstanding these tensions, I have demonstrated in this thesis that it behoves the Church to integrate environmental justice concerns in its missions due to the fact that care for creation is an essential component of faith in God, the Creator (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 280).

In view of this, I situate the recommendations I proffer in this section within the framework of Pope Francis' call for the cultivation of ecological virtues in LS.

8.3.1 *Virtue Ethics in Relation to Care for the Environment*

The goal of Pope Francis' care-based approach to environmental justice, it should be noted, is the cultivation of ecological virtues. Although there is no systematic synthesis of virtue ethics in LS, Francis alludes to the idea of virtue ethics in the final chapter of LS which attends to the practical implications of the encyclical. According to Francis, "Only by cultivating sound virtues will people be able to make a selfless ecological commitment" (LS 211). And further, Francis' emphasises that Christians need

an "ecological conversion", whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of

God's handiwork is essential to life of *virtue*, it is not an optional extra or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.⁵²¹

Francis' call for the cultivation of virtues that could help to change human attitudes and character in relation to the environment in my view underscores the importance of the role of religious faith in shaping human behaviour, a point Denis Edwards has rightly echoed in his book, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* (2006):

Religious faith has an important contribution to make to the ecological movement. It can give meaning and motivation, build an ecological ethos, and contribute to the foundations of an ecological ethics. For many people around the globe religious faith continues to provide fundamental meaning. For such people, ecological commitment can receive its deepest grounding only at a religious level. For those who belong to the Christian community, ultimate meaning is found in the idea that God is with us in Jesus of Nazareth and in the grace of the Holy Spirit.⁵²²

Pope Francis' emphasis that religious faith can be important in shaping an ethic of care for the environment supports one of the insights gleaned from my empirical research.

Virtue ethics focuses principally on the moral agent and takes into account the context of the moral agent, rather than social systems or the morality of actions.⁵²³ As I noted above, Pope Francis does not provide in LS a systematic account of ecological virtue. Therefore, a few comments on virtue ethics in relation to care for the environment will be helpful.⁵²⁴ I am

⁵²¹ LS n. 217; italics mine.

⁵²² D. Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll NY, 2006, 2.

⁵²³ Cf. N. M. Rourke, "Calling Forth the Invisible, Spreading Goodness: Virtue Ethics in *Laudato Si'*" in D. R. DiLeo (Ed), *All is Connected: Voices in Response to Pope Francis' Encyclical on Ecology*, op. cit. 154-167; Philippe Crabbé, "Laudato Si - Six Years Later" in L. Hufnagel (Ed), *Ecotheology - Sustainability and Religions of the World*, IntechOpen, London, 2023, 60-77.

⁵²⁴ Although not a major concern here, it is worth noting that the natural law tradition has an enormous influence on Catholic ethics. In view of the Second Vatican Council's call for the Church to dialogue with the modern world through the reading of the signs of the times in light of the Gospel (GS nn. 4, 11 & 44), there have been attempts by Catholic theologians to revise natural law and apply it in more fruitful and positive ways to contemporary ethical issues: cf. S. Pinckaers, *Morality: The Catholic View*, St. Augustine's Press, South Bend IN, 2001.

Hence one would expect the natural law tradition to be part of theological discourse on environmental issues. As noted by the International Theological Commission, "There cannot be an adequate response to the complex questions of ecology except within the framework of a deeper understanding of the natural law, which places value on the connection between the human person, society, culture, and the equilibrium of the bio-physical sphere in which the human person is incarnate": International Theological Commission, *In Search of a Universal Ethic: A New Look at the Natural Law*, 2009, n.82.

However, as Brennan Hill has rightly observed, the application of natural law to Catholic environmental ethics is not without problems because traditional reflections on natural law have tended to view nature from a static standpoint and the ethics flowing from it have been rather absolute, legalistic and anthropocentric. But as acknowledged by contemporary ecological science, nature is dynamic. Therefore, in order to properly apply natural law theory to environmental ethics, it must be updated, and its mechanistic worldview set aside: B.R. Hill,

depending here on Celia Deane-Drummond's virtue-oriented approach to environmental care which to me coheres with Pope Francis' virtue ethics in LS. I do not intend to present a detailed literature review of Deane-Drummond's virtue ethics except to summarise the main thread in her synthesis of virtue ethics. In her book, *The Ethics of Nature* (2004), Deane-Drummond argues that Thomas Aquinas' reflection on the four cardinal virtues of prudence (practical wisdom), justice, fortitude and temperance offers "a good starting point on the ethics of nature."⁵²⁵ Deane-Drummond contends that although Aquinas' theological reflection on the four cardinal virtues is heavily anthropocentric, a scientifically modified version of Aquinas' virtue ethics has potential theoretical and practical advantages for developing an environmental ethic that goes beyond purely humancentric interests. In the face of the ethical dilemma that the climate change phenomenon has precipitated, Deane-Drummond succinctly summarises what her virtue-oriented approach entails in her book, *A Primer in Ecotheology: Theology for a Fragile Earth* (2017):

Climate change is a good example of the kind of ethical dilemma that is extremely complex and requires a range of perspectives if we are to have any hope of arriving at an adequate response. Christian reflection on hope, along with other important virtues such as faith, charity, humility, justice, temperance and prudence marks a distinctive approach to developing environmental virtues compared with secular alternatives and there are biblical imperatives for developing such virtues. Behind such a hope is faith in God's providential care, but care is not to be divorced from taking human responsibility for how we act. My own preference is to use practical wisdom or prudence as a way of discerning how we might decide what it means to act justly, to love sincerely, or to express temperance while allowing for generosity. But courage in the face of adversity, or fortitude, is going to become increasingly relevant as we face the need not just for attempting to stave off climate change, but also for adaptation to its accelerating impacts.⁵²⁶

Deane-Drummond's vision of Christian environmental ethics as summarised in the above-cited text suggests that the contemporary environmental challenges require the exercise of virtues

Christian Faith and the Environment, op. cit. 290-291; see also C. McCluskey, *Natural Law Theory and Climate Change* in D. E. Miller & B. Eggleston (eds.), *Moral Theory and Climate Change: Ethical Perspectives on a Warming Planet*, 2020, 157-176.

In attempting to resolve the anthropocentric emphasis in the natural tradition, there were attempts by Catholic intellectuals in the late 20th century such as Alasdair MacIntyre to adjust the natural theory in order to take into account the contemporary understanding of ecological science. It is within this context that theological discourse on virtue ethics has to be understood: Cf. A. C. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, Duckworth, London, 1999.

⁵²⁵ C. Deane-Drummond, *Ethics of Nature*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2004, 9.

⁵²⁶ C. Deane-Drummond, *A Primer in Ecotheology: Theology for a Fragile Earth* op. cit. 114.

especially the cardinal virtues of prudence, fortitude, justice and temperance in order to foster ecologically informed lifestyles.

In this thesis, I have hinged my theological arguments on the theme of justice, one of the cardinal virtues. Against the background of the intertwined link between environmental degradation and other forms of social injustice in the context of Sierra Leone, I considered the two dimensions of justice – social and environmental justice – through the prism of Pope Francis’ integral ecology. Francis’ integral ecology which connects the dots between social and environmental justice, I noted, draws heavily on the biblical understanding of justice which contains within it the idea of right relationship with God, the Creator, with others and the whole of creation. And since the environment has intrinsic value and dignity as Francis has abundantly made clear in LS, I maintain that the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone should reimagine its social mission and integrate environmental concerns in its mission through the lens of justice. But environmental advocacy through the lens of justice alone is not enough. As Deane-Drummond has rightly stated, “justice is inclusive of a virtue ethic and is indeed one of the virtues. Without virtue any principles of obligation fall on deaf ears”.⁵²⁷

Therefore, relying on Deane-Drummond’s virtue oriented-approach to the environmental question, I suggest that the response of Catholic Church in Sierra Leone to the environmental problems confronting it should also be guided by the other cardinal virtues of prudence, fortitude (courage) and temperance.

7.3.2 **Recommendations**

In this subsection, I suggest practical recommendations for building an ecologically minded Catholic Church in Sierra Leone. These recommendations should not be seen as a comprehensive template for addressing all of Sierra Leone’s complex environmental challenges but rather they are meant to foster ecological virtues and also to stimulate discussions on promoting and mainstreaming environmental justice concerns primarily in the Catholic Church and also other faith-based communities in Sierra Leone. These include the following.

⁵²⁷ C. Deane-Drummond, *Ethics of Nature*, 42.

8.3.2.1 *Developing a Long-term Contextual plan on Environmental Justice Issues*

This research has shown that care for creation is no longer a marginal concern in the global Catholic Church. Put differently, caring for and protecting the environment forms an integral part of the Church's commitment to social justice issues. In view of the serious environmental problems confronting communities in Sierra Leone, there is a need for the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone to listen to the cry of the earth together with the cry of the poor in its socio-ecclesial context. In order to respond to the twin cries of the earth and the poor, the Church has to become an ecologically minded and active church. The starting point in my view is to develop a long-term contextual environmental justice programme. As seen in the case of the Catholic Church in Kenya, environmental justice programmes need to be developed through ecclesial policy ideas and proposals.

Such a plan can be developed within the framework of a consultative meeting and in light of the re-introduction of the synodal process as a way for the Catholic Church at the local, national, regional and global levels to address pertinent issues affecting the Church, a synodal path to addressing Sierra Leone's environmental challenges could provide a platform for the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone to critically address the issue and draw up a long-term plan on how to respond to it. As discussed in the general introduction of this work, the synodal process as articulated by Pope Francis involves consultations, dialogue, listening and making decisions together (*what affects all should be discussed by all*) among the entirety of the Church. Furthermore, the synodal process provides opportunities for the various components of the Church to journey together, to discern their problems together to propose initiatives and make decisions in addressing them (see, judge and act). This resonates very well with Deane-Drummond's suggestion in her discussion on deliberation as one of the facets of prudential decision-making. She writes,

deliberation relies not just on the expertise of a few, but on common deliberation of citizens drawing on their own experience. The capacities to make decisions...to take advice from others, to have foresight in a way that accurately anticipate the future as far as it is feasible to do so; all these qualities of prudence are...vital in environmental decision-making.

In this regard, in developing a contextual long-term plan on environmental justice issues, the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone should provide space and opportunity for its diverse members including the poor and deprived who are more gravely impacted by environmental problems to be part of the process of deliberation. The synodal process proposed here could be piloted at the level of deaneries before bringing it to the diocesan and inter-diocesan levels.

7.3.2.2 *Training Pastoral Agents in Ecological Ethics and Spirituality*

This research has established that the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone not only has the religious resources to respond to the environmental challenges confronting its socio-ecclesial context, it also has the responsibility to do so. In enhancing its initiatives in environmental care and protection, the Church should consider training its pastoral agents (i.e. priests, religious brothers and sisters, catechists and seminarians) in ecological ethics and spirituality.

In the current training programmes for Sierra Leone's Catholic pastoral agents, only a small fraction of the Church's teaching on care of the environment factor in the curricula of the local seminary and other formation institutes. I am not saying that the formation of pastoral agents in Sierra Leone is completely oblivious to the Church's teaching on environmental care. However, it does not go far enough in preparing them for meaningful and effective engagement in faith-based environmental work in their pastoral settings. I say this against the backdrop of my own formation experience. Although we were introduced to the idea of stewardship of creation in the theology of creation course during the theological phase of my priestly formation, environmental awareness and care was merely treated as an appendix to the main goal of the course, namely, to highlight the connection between creation and salvation of human beings. As of the time of the writing of this final chapter, the interterritorial seminary that serves the local Catholic Churches of Sierra Leone and the Gambia is yet to introduce a course that primarily focuses on environmental/ecological care.

In view of the heightened awareness of the link between faith and ecological responsibility and given the fact that environmental degradation is severely impacting the livelihood of the poor in deprived communities – who constitute the bulk of the Church's members – there is an urgent need for the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone to empower its pastoral agents through

ecologically informed theological, ethical and practical formation/training so as to effectively accentuate its pastoral response to environmental problems. To enhance the process of an ecologically-informed education of its pastoral agents, the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone should consider the following: -

- i) Incorporating a course on ecology and care for the environment into the curricula of the local seminary and other formation houses. Furthermore, ecological concerns should be integrated into existing courses in theology, ethics, homiletics and pastoral counselling.
- ii) Integrating ecological concerns into the ongoing formation programmes (retreats, seminars and workshops) for priests and religious so as enhance ecological consciousness and engagements in their respective ministries and assignments.
- iii) Integrating care of the environment as an essential component of the catechetical training of catechists and other ministers in parish communities.

7.3.2.3 Developing a catechesis on care for the environment in parishes and Catholic schools

My empirical research on the current state of the Catholic Church's engagement with environmental issues in Sierra Leone (chapter 2) revealed that there is a high degree of unawareness of the Church's teaching on the environment among ordinary Catholic church-goers in the country. As in the case of the training and formation curricula of Sierra Leone's Catholic pastoral agents, the catechetical programmes for would-be Catholics across the dioceses in Sierra Leone are oriented towards the promotion of the Church's evangelising mission – i.e., the sharing of the Good News of Jesus Christ in order to foster Christian discipleship. In my experience, the prevailing catechetical programmes in the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone have not helped Catholics to see the connection between their faith and their responsibility towards caring for and protecting the environment.

If the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone is to offer a credible pastoral response to the ecological challenges in the country, it should consider revising its catechetical programmes to include ecological teaching of the Church. This, in my view, will help Sierra Leonean Catholics to connect Christian discipleship with their responsibility to care for the environment. Here I invoke the recommendation of the Second African Synod and one of the goals of the *Laudato Si'* Action Plan.

It could be recalled that the delegates of the Second African Synod (2009) against the backdrop of the deleterious effects of the environmental crisis on the African continent called on local Churches to promote environmental education and awareness in their ecclesial communities.⁵²⁸ Similarly, the *Laudato Si' Action Plan* released by the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, tasks the various sectors of the Church to implement environmental sustainability in light of LS. One of the goals of the action plan is the promotion of ecological education. It calls for "re-thinking and re-designing curricular and institutional reform in the spirit of integral ecology in order to foster ecological awareness and transformative action".⁵²⁹

In the context of Sierra Leone, developing a localised version of an ecological education programme based on the teaching of the Church in dialogue with some elements of the African Traditional worldview and ethics will help parishes communities and schools not only to learn about the Church's teaching on the environment and the key messages of LS but also to empower them to be actively involved in caring and protecting the environment in their personal spaces and communities.

7.3.2.4 Integrating Ecological Concerns in the Development Agenda of Caritas Sierra Leone

My empirical research has revealed that although there is some evidence to suggest that Caritas Sierra Leone at national and diocesan levels is engaging with environmental justice issues, the agency's approach to ecological concerns is mostly patchy. In light of this finding, I argued in chapter five of this work that given the fact that environmental degradation and the climate crisis are intimately linked to poverty and conflict, there is an urgent need for Caritas Sierra Leone to prioritise environmental justice concerns in its agenda. Furthermore, in line with the same argument, I propose that in developing a blueprint policy for its environmental justice agenda, the following recommendations be considered:-

- i) To develop a localised action plan for sustainable development goals through the lens of *Laudato Si'* as in the case of Caritas Kenya.

⁵²⁸ Cf. Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, *Final Propositions*, the 22 proposition, op. cit.

⁵²⁹ Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, *Laudato Si' Action Plan* (May 24, 2021), <https://laudatosiactionplatform.org/>, date accessed 8/01/23.

- ii) To form Care of Creation Teams in parish communities. The main goals of these teams should be to promote a deeper awareness of care for the environment in their communities; to help implement the environmental justice policy proposals of their respective diocesan development agency; and to animate small Christian communities in their parishes in practical ways to care for the environment such as the proper disposal of plastic and household wastes.
- iii) To involve local communities in environmental protection initiatives. Pope Francis in LS makes it abundantly clear that people in communities being affected by the environmental crisis must be included in the conversations regarding finding solutions to the problem. Hence, one of the goals of the *Laudato Si' Action Plan* is “community engagement participatory action” (goal 7). This goal resonates very well with one of the essential elements of the worldview and traditional ethics of Sierra Leoneans (Africans in general), namely, the centrality of community (see Chapter four of this work). If Caritas Sierra Leone is to effectively respond to the twin cries of the poor and the earth, it should actively involve local communities in its environmental protection projects. As custodians of their lands, forests, water sources and other natural resources, local communities are best placed and effective at protecting their environment. Furthermore, through such engagements, Caritas Sierra Leone can mobilise and empower communities, especially mining areas to hold to account local and central government authorities on the use of the resources in their localities.⁵³⁰
- iv) To empower women’s voices in relation to environmental justice and sustainability. As evidenced by my own empirical research, it is an established fact that women and girls in poor and deprived areas of the world bear the brunt of environmental degradation. In rural communities across Sierra Leone women are at the forefront of subsistence farming. They are also responsible for the management of resources needed for sustenance such as water and firewood. As a result of these responsibilities women and girls are gravely being impacted by climate change and its effects. Furthermore, women constitute the majority of the Catholic Church’s membership in Sierra Leone. Therefore, in effectively responding to the cry of the

⁵³⁰ Cf. CAFOD, *Engaging 2030 Agenda through the Lens of Laudato Si'* (January 2018), <https://cafod.org.uk/about-us/policy-and-research/church-and-development/engaging-in-the-2030-agenda>, date accessed 09/01/2023.

earth together with that of the poor, Caritas Sierra Leone needs to include initiatives that target the empowerment of women and girls.

- v) To engage and empower young people as an essential constituent in responding to the twin cries of the poor and the earth. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis identifies young people as a powerful demography in addressing the environmental crisis (LS 13). The Catholic Church in Sierra Leone is not only blessed with a growing youthful population, it has vibrant youth organisations in all the dioceses. If the Church in Sierra Leone is to respond to the environmental challenges in the country meaningfully and effectively, Caritas Sierra Leone should harness and facilitate the energy and passion of young Catholics for they are not only the bridge to future generations, they are also drivers of change.

7.3.2.5 ***Expanding the Prophetic Voice of the Church to Environmental Justice Issues***

As I mentioned in the general introduction of this research thesis, Vatican II made a clarion call to the Catholic Church to reprise its prophetic role and relate the Gospel to the critical issues of the day. Nowhere is this call made more clearly than in the Council's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* where the Council Fathers call on the Church to read the modern world and apply Church teaching in light of the 'signs of the times.' (GS 4). Within the context of the African Catholic Church, Vatican II's emphasis on the prophetic role of the Church in society was echoed at the First and Second Africa Synods. The post-synodal apostolic exhortation of the First African Synod, *Ecclesia in Africa* places a strong emphasis on the prophetic role of the Church: "The Church must continue to exercise her prophetic role and be the voice of the voiceless".⁵³¹ Although the whole people of God share in the prophetic ministry of the Church, the Bishops, who constitute the teaching office of the Church (*magisterium*) are primarily tasked with the responsibility of exercising this ministry on behalf of the people of God.

Across the African continent, Catholic bishops in the post-conciliar era have been powerfully using their prophetic ministry platform to speak to important social issues. For instance, the Catholic Bishops of Sierra Leone in the period leading up to the 2018 general Elections, issued a pastoral letter titled *Journeying Together Towards Peaceful and Credible Elections* in which they

⁵³¹ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa* n. 70, op. cit.

appealed to Catholics and all Sierra Leoneans to refrain from actions that could destabilise the country's fragile peace and to work for the common good:

We appeal to all Sierra Leoneans to work for the common good. We have to assume responsibility for our own development and not to wait for others to do it. Our progress must be borne on our shoulders and then others will follow us. When adversity affects us we all suffer. Ebola, civil war and conflict did not have a party colour. All Sierra Leoneans suffered. Our commitment brought an end to the civil war and the Ebola epidemic; it renewed our democracy and peace and brought infrastructural growth. We need this same dedication and commitment to address poverty, illiteracy, food insecurity and corruption. Let us put communities at the heart of development and then our country will experience true prosperity that benefits everyone.⁵³²

As seen in the above-cited text, there are precedents of leaders of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone using their prophetic voices to shed light on social issues. I have demonstrated in this research that environmental degradation is related to other forms of social injustice. In the face of Sierra Leone's severe environmental challenges, the leadership of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone has a responsibility to reclaim its prophetic voice and sound the alarm in relation to the said challenges. Therefore, I propose that the Catholic Church's leadership in the country expand its prophetic advocacy ministry to environmental issues using the following spaces:

- i) *Homily/sermon*: The homily/sermon forms an important part of the proclamation of the Word of God (Sacred Scriptures) – which as I have noted in this thesis is replete with incentives and motivations to care for God's creation. It [homily] provides an impactful space for the ongoing religious formation of Catholics the world over. To promote a broader conversation about care for the environment among Catholics in the country, the Catholic Church should encourage its ministers to integrate ecological messages in their daily and Sunday homilies so as to cultivate ecological consciousness and spirituality. Furthermore, homilies on/during the celebration of environmental days or seasons such as the *Season of Creation* (September 1 – October 4) – established by Pope Francis in 2015, could be used to convey messages on environmental responsibility and sustainability.
- ii) *Pastoral letters*: As one of the teaching tools that bishops use to articulate Church teaching on important matters in their particular Churches, pastoral letters could be used as a platform

⁵³² Catholic Bishops of Sierra Leone, Pastoral Letter: *Journeying Together Towards Peaceful and Credible Elections* (June 4, 2018).

for Catholic bishops both individually and collectively to communicate messages oriented towards ecological awareness and protection.

iii) *Ecumenical and interfaith solidarity*: As already highlighted, leaders of faith communities in Sierra Leone over the years have used their voices through the ecumenical and interreligious forums to bring national attention to important societal issues. The environmental challenges Sierra Leone is confronted with as this research has established, are not only exacerbating poverty, they also pose threats to the country's fragile peace. The Catholic Church in its ecumenical and interfaith outreach should network with other faith communities in the country to advocate for environmental care and concern in Sierra Leone. In view of the severity of the problem, faith-based advocacy should go beyond reactive relief interventions. It requires establishing ecological forums within the ecumenical and interreligious bodies that will raise environmental awareness and facilitate policy and practical initiatives at regional and national levels.

iv) *Dialogue with the government at national and local levels*: As I noted in the first chapter of this work, the local Catholic Church in Sierra Leone is an influential religious and social institution and a leading actor in the country's human capital development. Therefore, the Church is well-placed to engage the government on policy initiatives regarding environmental protection. In line with the proposition of the Second African Synod and that of Pope Francis in LS which insist that governments take stronger measures to protect the environment, I suggest that the leadership of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone as part of its prophetic role, strongly encourages the government at the local and national levels to prioritise environmental concerns in governance policy and action plans with emphasis on the following:

- To enforce existing laws and administrative statutes regulating environmental protection.
- Protect public lands around water reservoirs and forest reserves.
- To promote and invest in sustainable agricultural practices.
- To prioritise climate change mitigation and adaptation measures in development programmes.

- To ensure meaningful participation of local communities in the implementation of development programmes in their localities.
- To prioritise funding and resources to communities historically and currently harmed by large-scale extraction of mineral resources.
- To pass legislation that makes land reclamation an essential component of mining contracts with small and large-scale mining companies.

Concluding Remarks

The goal of this final chapter was to narrow down the findings of the empirical part and the insights drawn from the theoretical chapters to the practical implications of the entire study. From the synthesis of the study, it has been established that the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone not only has the religious resources and incentives to prioritise environmental justice in its pastoral priorities, it has the moral responsibility to do so.

Given this normative responsibility of the Church to respond to the *cry of the poor* together with the *cry of the earth*, I have proffered practical recommendations by means of which the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone can meaningfully and effectively prioritise environmental justice concerns in the country. Drawing on the ongoing integral pastoral response of the Catholic Church in Kenya to the ecological challenges confronting its context, I proposed that the Church should incorporate care for the environment in the various sectors of both its *ad intra* and *ad extra* mission activities.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION TO THE THESIS

My specific aim in this research thesis has been to argue for the mainstreaming of environmental justice concerns in the pastoral priorities of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone. To accomplish this task, the first part of this work sought to present the socio-environmental challenges confronting Sierra Leone and to provide evidence-based data on the current state of the Church's engagement with environmental issues.

The second part of the research sought to make the case as to why the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone should incorporate concern and care for the environment in its mission *ad intra* and *ad extra*. I framed my discussion around Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* and the wider CST on the environment in dialogue with other authors who have written extensively on the subject matter. Drawing on one of the central tenets of Catholic Social Teaching namely, the Church's commitment to social justice, which demands that the Church at both global and local levels stands in solidarity with the poor, I argued that the local Catholic Church in Sierra Leone adopts an integral pastoral approach to social and environmental justice issues in the various facets of its mission in light of the intertwined link between human-induced environmental degradation and poverty.

To accomplish the overall goal of this work, the discussions in the chapters that comprise this work were guided by the six research questions that were developed during the design phase of the study:

- The first research question sought to understand the extent to which the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone is engaging with environmental issues in the various facets of its mission. In order to respond to the first research question, I found it imperative to conduct an empirical research in four parishes from each of the four dioceses that comprise the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone. My analysis of the interviews and questionnaires data revealed that despite the awareness of the pressing environmental challenges in the country and the religious incentive

to care for the environment, the local Catholic Church in Sierra Leone and by extension the other Religious Traditions in the country are yet to seriously engage with the issue.

- The second research question explored how the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone can use the teachings of the Church to enhance an ecological awakening and responsibility both within and outside the Church. In answering this question, I first made an attempt to trace and examine environmental-related themes from relevant magisterial documents that were issued prior to the pontificate of Pope Francis (chapter three). Second, I drew on the overarching theme of Pope Francis' encyclical LS – *integral ecology*, to argue that since social and environmental justice are intricately linked as evidenced by the findings of my empirical research, the integral approach proposed by Pope Francis in LS could offer a blueprint for the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone in addressing the interlinked socio-environmental problems affecting communities across the country (chapter four).
- The third research question explored how the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone might operationalise the Church's teaching on environmental sustainability in its development agenda. In response to this question, I drew on Pope Francis' synthesis on integral sustainable development – which seeks to address issues of poverty, other forms of social injustice and environmental degradation – to argue for a contextualised version of sustainable development practices in the work of Caritas Sierra Leone (chapter five).
- Against the backdrop of the interwoven link between environmental problems and violent conflicts as evidenced by my empirical research, the fourth research question explored how the Church might advance environmental justice as a way of fostering integral peace and promoting conflict prevention in its peacebuilding and peace consolidation mission in Sierra Leone, a post-war and fragile country. In answering this question, I drew from Pope Francis' reflection in LS on integral peace to argue for the incorporation of an integrated approach to peacebuilding – an approach that takes into account the link between environmental problems and conflicts – in the Justice and Peace Commission of Caritas SL (chapter 5).
- The fifth research question inquired into how the Church might advance environmental justice concerns as a platform for ecumenical and interreligious cooperation. In responding to that question, I drew on Pope Francis' teaching on environmental justice within the

framework of ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and cooperation to illustrate that the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone has the advantage of addressing environmental challenges confronting Sierra Leone from the perspective of ecumenical and interfaith initiatives given the synergy and commonalities in Christian and Islamic (the two dominant faith groups in Sierra Leone) teachings on humankind's relation to the environment and in light of the already established culture of dialogue among the faith communities in the country (chapter six).

- In view of the findings of my empirical research and the insights gleaned from the preceding theoretical chapters, the final research question dealt with the practical implications of the research; the concrete contributions the Catholic Church can make in addressing the environmental challenges confronting the country. In responding to this question, I presented a case study of the initiatives of the Catholic Church in Kenya in response to the environmental challenges in its ecclesial setting and how the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone can learn from the good practices of the Kenyan Church. In light of the insights garnered from the Kenyan experience, I have advanced practical proposals towards envisioning an ecologically minded and praxis-based Catholic Church in Sierra Leone. These include developing a long-term plan on environmental justice concerns, formation of pastoral agents in eco-justice and spirituality, developing a pastoral catechesis programme on care for the environment in parish communities and schools, integrating fully environmental justice concerns in the development agenda of the Church and expanding the Church's prophetic voice to environmental-related issues in both within and outside the Church (chapter seven).

Given that care for creation is an essential part of faith in God, the Creator, its status as one of the most influential religious communities in Sierra Leone, and in view its widespread membership and organisational structure, it is the conclusion of this thesis that listening to the *twin cries of the poor and of the earth* is a matter of urgent pastoral concern for the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone to respond to.

CONTRIBUTION TO RESEARCH

This research thesis offers a contribution to the ongoing debate on how religious beliefs, teachings, and practices can be harnessed to promote environmental care and responsibility among people of faith.

This study has spotlighted the lack of sustained engagement with environmental justice issues in the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone and by extension in the vast majority of national Churches on the African Continent. Through an appeal to Pope Francis' landmark encyclical, *Laudato Si'* which has brought renewed attention to care for the environment and made it a mainstream theological issue, this thesis has endeavoured to make an important geographical and contextual contribution to the existing academic literature on the subject of the relationship between religion and care for the environment from the perspective of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone. To date, there is no academic research focused specifically on environmental justice concerns in the context of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone. Thus, the findings of the empirical part of this research and the arguments made in the theoretical part have shown that a theological reflection on the topic of environmental justice in relation to the mission of the Church is not only relevant but very necessary both academically and pastorally.

Against the backdrop of the severity of the reality of environmental problems, a reality that is gravely impacting the livelihood of the poor – who constitute the bulk of the membership of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone, this thesis is an appeal to the Catholic Church and other faith communities in Sierra Leone to pastorally respond to groaning of the poor and the earth in the country.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In addition to the limitations of the empirical study discussed in chapter two of this thesis, this entire study evidently has limitations. Prominent among its limitations is its broad focus on the entire local Catholic Church in Sierra Leone comprising four ecclesiastical regions. The focus on the entire Catholic Church in Sierra Leone, whilst intentional, was ambitious and sometimes I was too hesitant to fully engage and explore other specific questions and nuances of the subject matter. This means I left some questions unanswered. For instance, the ethical dilemma between

the moral responsibility of the Church to promote care for environment and the immediate economic needs of some of the communities suffering from the consequences of environmental degradation.

Nonetheless, this research thesis has opened up several other directions for future research. For example, future research into the environmental justice concerns in the context of the Catholic Church and other Faith communities could investigate the link between:

- Environmental justice and liturgical worship – this could further explore the relationship between liturgical worship and duty to care for the earth and why Catholics in Sierra Leone do not seem to see the connection between faith in God and caring for their environment.
- Environmental justice and gender empowerment – this can probe further the gender and environmental nexus and identify how gender sensitive strategies can be incorporated in the development programmes of the Church.

It is my hope that this thesis offers a starting point for future academic engagements with environmental justice issues in Sierra Leone and other ecclesial and geographical contexts.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Research Questionnaire for Parishioners and for Priests, Religious and Seminarians: *‘The Place of Environmental Justice in the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone’*

BACKGROUND RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

Dear Sir/Madam/Rev/Fr/Sr./Seminarian

You are being invited to take part in this research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why this research is being carried out and its intended outcome. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

The purpose of the research

I am conducting a research on the need for the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone to incorporate and mainstream care for the environment in its pastoral priorities. My research seeks to explore how the religious faith of Catholics in Sierra Leone can serve as a moral force in championing the cause of environmental justice in the country.

Why you have been chosen?

You are being selected as a participant in this research because you are an integral member of the Catholic community in Sierra Leone and your voice on issues affecting the Catholics and the generality of the Sierra Leonean population matters.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary and if you do not wish to participate, you have the right to refuse or discontinue.

What will happen to you if you take part?

There are no risks in taking part in this study. In fact, your contribution will enrich the body of knowledge on the subject under consideration.

Assurance of confidentiality

I assure you that will not be identified by name or any other information that may identify you in the analysis of the data generated from this research. All responses will be profoundly appreciated and will be treated with confidentiality.

Statement on data and the results of the research study

The information or data to be generated will be used for the purpose mentioned above and will be made available in the public domain. Also, I intend to use the findings for this research and my subsequent analysis, for future academic writings on the subject under investigation – articles, conference presentations and academic papers.

Paper copies of the questionnaires will be securely stored in a locked-protected storage (locked filing cabinet/drawer) and will be preserved only during the course of my study. Upon successful submission of my thesis, they will be securely destroyed.

Who has reviewed this study?

The study has been reviewed and approved by members of the College of Arts Research Ethics Committee, University of Glasgow (**contact email:** arts-ethics@glasgow.ac.uk)

Thank you once again for your participation in my research. I am most grateful.

Deepest appreciation,

Robert Michel Sowa (Rev)

PhD Student,

Theology and Religious Studies

School of Critical Studies

College of Arts, University of Glasgow

Contact email: XXXXXXXX@student.gla.ac.uk

RESPONDENT'S CONSENT

- I confirm that I have read the background information for this research, and I understand that my participation is voluntary.
- I agree to take part in this research. By ticking the 'YES BOX' below I understand that this will be equivalent to my signing a consent form and will be understood as signifying my consent to participate.

YES

WHAT TO DO NEXT

- Please make sure you have ticked the participation consent 'YES BOX' above.
- Please place your completed questionnaire in the envelope provided and seal it.
- Please return the envelope in the drop box located at the parish Church.

THANK YOU



COLLEGE OF ARTS: SCHOOL OF CRITICAL STUDY

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARISHIONERS

Gender: Male Female

Diocese Parish.....

Age brackets: 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65 and over

Date

QUESTIONS

SECTION ONE: RELATIONSHIP TO THE CHURCH

- 1. Are you a Catholic? or intend to be one?
2. How important is your relationship with the Catholic Church (Parish community) to you?
3. How important to you is the Church's engagement with social justice issues?
4. How would you describe your level of awareness about Catholic Social Teaching

SECTION TWO: LEVEL OF ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

- 5. How would you categorise your level of awareness regarding environmental issues and concern?
6. What are the urgent or pressing environmental challenges facing your community? Tick the boxes that apply to you.

7. Do you believe in Climate change? YES NO

- a). **On a scale of 1 to 10 please indicate the level of threat climate change poses to:**
- b). crop production/ food security 1 2 3 4 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- c). availability of safe drinking water 1 2 3 4 4 5 6 7 8 9
 10
- d). **life expectancy in general in your community and other deprived areas in Sierra Leone?**
 1 2 3 4 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

8. **Are you aware of the causes of environmental challenges in your area?** YES NO If YES, suggest some of them.
- timber logging
 - poor farming methods
 - unregulated housing construction
 - national infrastructural development
 - overgrazing
 - Other (please state)
-

SECTION THREE: THE ENGAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN SIERRA LEONE WITH ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES.

9. **How concerned is the Catholic Church of Sierra Leone about environmental issues?**
- Very concerned
 - concerned
 - somewhat concerned
 - neither concerned nor unconcerned
 - not concerned
- Explain your answer
-
-

10. **In light of the environmental challenges facing Sierra Leone, should environmental concern occupy an important place in the Catholic Church’s pastoral priorities?** YES NO
- Give reasons for your answer
-
-

11. **How concerned are your local clergy or religious congregation with environmental protection?**
- very concerned
 - concern
 - somewhat concerned
 - not concerned

12. **Is your local parish educating /creating awareness about environmental care and responsibility?** YES NO. If yes, in what ways?

reflection/sermons retreat /seminars engaging the parish schools and institutions on environmental sustainability raising awareness about environmental issues through church notices/ parish bulletin.

13. **Have you heard about Pope Francis' encyclical "On the Care of our Common Home - Laudato Si'"?** YES NO. If yes describe the level of awareness about *Laudato Si'*.

very aware moderately aware very little none at all

14. **Among the following, what do you think best captures Pope Francis's teaching and Catholic social teaching in general on the environment?**

- Humans are created by God to dominate the rest of creation.
- Humans have an unlimited right to exploit the resources of the earth.
- God will always take care of the earth regardless of what humans do.
- By virtue of their creation in God's image and likeness, humans are called to till and keep the garden of the world.
- The earth has unlimited resources to support human consumption.

15. **In what ways would you like your parish community to integrate Pope Francis's teaching on care for the environment into parish life?** Please tick the suggestion(s) that best suit your community.

- policy advocacy on land degradation
- planting trees for reforestation
- waste management
- community engagement on sustainable land management
- youth engagement in environmental protection
- conducting environmental cleaning campaigns
- all of the above
- other (please specify)

16. **Indicate below how you would like your diocesan development office (CARITAS) to operationalise the proposals of Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* into their development projects?**

Please tick suggestion(s) that best suit your community.

- to develop practical ways to respond to *Laudato Si'*
- to advocate for environmental justice in community-based work
- to strengthen community involvement in developmental projects and responsiveness to environmental problems.
- to assist and complements projects intended to lessen the impacts of environmental problems in communities overburdened by large scale mining activities.
- to collaborate with other civil society groups to encourage government and civic leaders to enact/enforce environmental protection laws.

to engage parishes, schools, and higher institutions of learning in promoting ecological awareness and responsibility.

17. Do you think the Catholic Church of Sierra Leone should dialogue and collaborate with other Churches (Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran, Evangelical Churches), other religious traditions (Muslim communities) and adherents of African Traditional Religion (ATR) on environmental concerns?

Yes I agree Neither agree nor disagree No, I disagree

Explain your answer.....
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**Thank you for responding to the questions in this
questionnaire.
Your contribution is highly appreciated.**



COLLEGE OF ARTS: SCHOOL OF CRITICAL STUDY

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PRIESTS, RELIGIOUS AND SEMINARIANS

Diocese Parish/Institution

Age brackets: 18-24 [] 25-34 [] 35-44 [] 45-54 [] 55-64 [] 65 and over []

Date.....

QUESTIONS

1. Are you aware of the pressing environmental problems in your community? Please indicate the problems.

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2. What are the causes of environmental degradation/problems in your community? How far are these problems man-made?

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3. Please state whether you have been personally affected by climatic and/other environmental problems. And if so how?

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4. What steps have you taken to address the challenges of environmental degradation? (E.g. waste management, planting trees, water management, conducting environmental cleaning campaigns etc.).

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5. How would you describe your level of awareness of the Church's teaching on environmental care and responsibility?

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6. What approaches have you taken to involve the local community in environmental awareness and responsibility?

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7. How would you categorise your diocesan/congregation engagement with environmental issues?

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8. If your diocese has programmes oriented towards environmental issues, in what ways have these programmes incorporated or promoted themes/contents of Pope Francis' encyclical on care for the environment (*Laudato Si'*)?

9. In what ways have you utilised *Laudato Si'* and its themes/contents in your ministry/study? Briefly explain.

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10. To what extent does concern and care for the environment factor into your formation or training? Explain in a paragraph to two.

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11. In light of the growing awareness among young people about the threat environmental degradation poses to their aspirations and wellbeing, do you think environmental theology

should be introduced as a course into your seminary curriculum? Please outline some suggestions.

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**Thank you for responding to the questions in this
questionnaire.
Your contribution is highly appreciated.**

Appendix 2 – Interview Guide for Religious Leaders and Directors/Focal Persons of the Development Agency of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone (CARISTA Sierra Leone)

BACKGROUND RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

Dear Archbishop/Bishop/Rev/Sheik/ Fr/Mr./Ms,

Invitation

You are being invited to take part in this research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why this research is being carried out and its intended outcome. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

The purpose of the research

I am conducting a research on the need for the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone to incorporate and mainstream care for the environment in its pastoral plans and action. My research seeks to explore how the religious faith of Catholics in Sierra Leone can serve as a moral force in championing the cause of environmental justice in the country.

Why you have been chosen?

You have been selected for this focused interview because you are a religious leader/ your Agency is an integral component of the Church's social mission and the subject of this study affects your religious community and the wider population of Sierra Leone. Thus your voice and perception of the research problem matter.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary and if you do not wish to participate, you have the right to refuse or discontinue.

What will happen to you if you take part?

There are no risks in taking part in this study. In fact, your contribution will enrich the body of knowledge on the subject under consideration.

Assurance of confidentiality

I assure you that any personal information obtained from this interview will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. If you do not wish to be identified, any information that could identify you will be kept strictly confidential.

Statement on data and the results of the research study

The information or data to be generated will be used for the purpose mentioned above. Also, I intend to use the findings for this research and my subsequent analysis, for future academic writings on the subject under investigation – articles, conference presentations and academic papers. Any significant material from this interview will only be quoted in my thesis and future publications upon your explicit consent.

The data to be generated from the interview will be preserved only during the course of their analysis and it will be electronically stored on a password-protected computer and backup disks. The electronically stored data is to be preserved only during the course of my study and will be securely destroyed upon successful submission of my thesis.

Who has reviewed this study?

The study has been reviewed and approved by members of the College of Arts Research Ethics Committee, University of Glasgow (**contact email:** arts-ethics@glasgow.ac.uk).

How can you access information relating to you if you suspect misuse of information/used for purposes other than the intended purpose of this research?

You have the right to request for the write-up of this interview in order to check its accuracy. Also, you can contact me or my supervisor if you have concerns regarding the misuse of the information gained from the interview or use for purposes other than the intended purpose of this research. If you are not comfortable doing this, you can also contact the College of Arts Ethics Office of the University of Glasgow.

Thank you once again for your participation in my research. I am most grateful.

Deepest appreciation,

Robert Michel Sowa (Rev)

PhD Student,

Theology and Religious Studies

School of Critical Studies

College of Arts, University of Glasgow

Contact email: XXXXXXXX@student.gla.ac.uk

RESPONDENT'S CONSENT

- I confirm that I have read the background information for this research. YES
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time during the project, without having to give a reason. YES
- I agree to take part in this interview. By ticking the 'YES BOX' below I understand that this will be equivalent to my signing a consent form and will be understood as signifying my consent to participate.

THANK YOU



COLLEGE OF ARTS: SCHOOL OF CRITICAL STUDY

INTERVIEW GUIDE – RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Gender: Male Female

Age brackets: 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65 and over

RELIGION.....

DENOMINATION

Date

This discussion guide is developed to help the researcher in conducting this semi-structured interview. This guide a number of issues concern the environmental challenges facing Sierra Leone. It is not a rigid question-format interview but a flexible guide to help stimulate discussion and to gain insights into the subject matter. They include:

1. Awareness of the nature and gravity of environmental challenges facing your community and Sierra Leone as a whole.
2. Awareness of the major causes of environmental problems in your community and the country as a whole.
3. Perception of the impact/consequences of the various environmental challenges on the livelihood of the poor and marginalised in your community and other parts of the country.
4. The role of religion in shaping attitudes about caring for the environment.
5. Religious resources/teachings on environmental sustainability.
6. Prospects of faith-based and interfaith/religious initiatives in raising awareness and tackling environmental challenges.



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INTERVIEW GUIDE – DIRECTORS/FOCAL PERSONS OF THE DEVELOPMENT AGENCY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN SIERRA LEONE (CARISTA SIERRA LEONE)

Gender: Male Female

Age brackets: 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65 and over

NATIONAL/DIOCESE

Date.....

This discussion guide is developed to help the researcher in conducting this semi-structured interview concerning the environmental challenges facing Sierra Leone. It is not a rigid question-format interview but a flexible guide to help stimulate discussion and to gain insights into the subject matter. They include:

1. Brief details about the work of your agency
2. Awareness of environmental challenges in your ecclesial region and major causes.
3. Perception of the impact/consequences of various environmental issues on the livelihood of the poor and deprived communities in your ecclesial region and the country as a whole.
4. Degree/level of your agency's engagement in environmental issues.
5. Specific programs your agency has implemented or intend to implement that are aimed at protecting the environment in your ecclesial communities.
6. The extent to which local people/lay communities leaders/ women/ youth groups are involved or will be involved in these projects.
7. Coordination among various diocesan developmental agencies and other civil societies/the lack thereof.
8. Awareness of Pope's Francis encyclical *Laudato Si'* in your agency.
9. Specific strategies/ways have your agency has incorporated the themes/content of *Laudato Si'* into its work.
10. Whether and how your agency makes the contents of *Laudato Si'* and Catholic Social Teaching, in general, accessible to parish communities/schools/ and higher institutions.
11. The extent of advocacy and community witness on sustainable developmental projects.