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Laudato Si's Integral Ecology: The Heart of the Ethics of Spiritan Mission and the New Political Movement in Nigeria

Chike Anyigbo CSSp

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Chike Anyigbo CSSp, is a lecturer at the Spiritan International School of Theology (SIST) Attakwu, Enugu. He has a Ph.D. in Bio-ethics/Medical Ethics (2017) from Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, USA and joined the SIST faculty in 2020. He teaches the course *Ethical Issues of Life and Death*, and four other courses in the Department of Religion and Cultural Studies. As a Chaplain in Centura Health Mercy Regional Medical Center, Durango, Colorado, he was a member of the Ethics Committee of the Board. He co-authored a Book Chapter in *Cascading Challenges in the Global Water Crisis* published in 2019 by Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

LAUDATO SI'S INTEGRAL ECOLOGY: THE HEART OF THE ETHICS OF SPIRITAN MISSION AND THE NEW POLITICAL MOVEMENT IN NIGERIA

INTRODUCTION

The document of General Chapter XXI, Bagamoyo II, specifically outlined the influence of the papal encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, in animating our Spiritan mission in the world. It is a call to renew the integral relationship with ourselves, others and with God.¹ This invitation, based on *Laudato Si'*, is at the heart of Spiritan Spirituality.² *Laudato Si'* employs the term, “integral ecology”, as interchangeable with that of “human ecology” indicating the similarity of these two concepts.³ This article maintains a preference for the term, “integral ecology”, as reflected in the *Bagamoyo II* document.⁴

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis talks about the “throwaway culture” which results from the failure to emulate the organic recyclable pattern of nature. He gives an example,

... plants synthesize nutrients which feed herbivores; these in turn become food for carnivores, which produce significant quantities of organic waste which give rise to new generations of plants.⁵

The pope views Saint Francis of Assisi as exemplary in the efforts toward solidarity with all people and especially the most abandoned.⁶ This vision of solidarity with the vulnerable is the platform that holds our Spiritan mission and it is also the underlying principle of our Spiritan motto, *Cor Unum et Anima Una* (One heart and One Soul).⁷ In effect, this vision represents the “integral ecology”

1. Congregation of the Holy Spirit, *Bagamoyo II, XXI General Chapter* (Strasbourg Cedex 2: Editions du Signe, 2022), 19.

2. *Ibid.*, 20.

3. Victor U. Jamahh, “Human Ecology and Solidarity in *Laudato Si'* in the Light of the Roman Canon,” in Ijezie, Luke E., Audu, Stephen & Acha, Agnes I., eds., *Theology and Ecological Issues*. Port Harcourt, Nigeria: CATHAN Publication, 2017, 335-340.

4. *Bagamoyo II*, 19.

5. Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015, 22.

6. *Ibid.*, 10.

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which the pope advocates in *Laudato Si'*.⁸ It becomes a transformative vision which invites humanity to a renewed disposition towards all God's creatures. A disposition that propels us to accept our interconnectedness, and thus, eschew any domineering or utilitarian-based relationship with other constituents of planet Earth.⁹ The emphasis of Pope Francis is on an ethical approach requiring an all-embracing change in humanity's attitude to creation. Here, the pontiff, in addition, draws from the lecture notes of Patriarch Bartholomew and concurs that all ought to "... replace consumption with sacrifice, greed with generosity, wastefulness with a spirit of sharing."¹⁰

By way of introducing the concept of "integral ecology" in this encyclical, the pontiff briefly explains the import of the discipline of ecology. For the pope, the focus of ecological research needs to be based on the interconnectedness of nature and the environment. Humanity is part of nature, and the impact of human activities cannot be isolated as risk-free to the environment.¹¹ It is obvious that the ongoing climate change and environmental degradation cannot be dissociated from humankind's economic development and consumption patterns. Pope Francis urges that a remedy consists in seeking mechanisms that will restore the integral relationship that sustains all things.

We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.¹²

However, the pontiff's concern for the conservation of the environment is much more than that. Not only are there expectations on humans with regard to respecting the intrinsic value of nature despite its instrumentality to economic growth, but in the same vein, the human person is invited to a moral relationship with their own kind since

7. Walter van de Putte (transl. 1967), *The Provisional Rule of the Missionaries of the Holy Heart of Mary: Text and Libermann's Commentary* Pittsburgh, USA: Center for Spiritan Studies, 2015, 65-69.

8. Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 10, 137.

9. *Ibid.*, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11.

10. Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 9.

11. *Ibid.*, 137, 138.

12. *Ibid.*, 139.

all are God's gift to one another. Pope Francis beckons for solidarity among humans that eschews the throwaway culture which obviously demeans or excludes some individuals, especially the vulnerable in present day society. His earnest invitation reiterates the three-dimensional approach of Spiritan mission in the world, namely, respectful engagement, dynamic identification with the other, and interventions to improve the quality of life of people.¹³ How far the Spiritans in history and in the twenty-first century have embraced these ideals is an ongoing debate with an openness to constant conversion and transformation.

This article will also consider the initiative of the new political movement in Nigeria as an effort to bring change and restore dignity to the citizenry. The outcome of this effort hangs in the balance. In the next section, a brief excursus highlighting environmental ethics will show the compatibility of Spiritan mission and this new movement's concerns with those of *Laudato Si'*.

The encyclical, Laudato Si' is rooted in the principles of environmental ethics, ... It is a novel discipline concerned with moral considerations pertaining to environmental issues. Indeed, issues of solidarity, justice and sufficiency are foundational to this discipline.

THE HIGHLIGHT OF ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

The encyclical, *Laudato Si'* is rooted in the principles of environmental ethics, an offshoot of applied ethics that proves useful to policymakers. It is a novel discipline concerned with moral considerations pertaining to environmental issues. Indeed, issues of solidarity, justice and sufficiency are foundational to this discipline. The highlight of environmental ethics is the endeavor to understand the principles and norms which ought to guide human interaction with the natural environment and what implications might arise from these interactions. Similarly, ecology deals with the relationship of humans to other forms of nature or life within the earth's biosphere (regions of life within the surface and the atmosphere of an inhabited planet such as the earth or any other planet in the universe). It encompasses all the areas of the earth teeming with life – from whatever holds the trees in place, the ocean floor, the peak of the mountains, and the rainforest vegetation. In other words, it is obvious and trite to restate that the earth as a planet is one. The boundaries negotiated by about 195 sovereign nations in the world have no basis when it comes to the commonly circulating waters of the oceans, lakes, and rivers, air, wildlife, and birds' migratory routes, among others. Planet Earth is topographically interdependent but burdened by political divisions

13. Chike Anyigbo, "Solidarity with the Vulnerable: Global Healthcare Ethics in Spiritan Perspective" (*PhD diss.*, Duquesne University, 2017), 113.

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in the world charged by intractable disputes among its inhabitants.¹⁴ In addition, problems emerge based on an inordinate human exploitation of nature based on self-aggrandizement. The anomalies abound in deforestation practices, industrial pollution, loss of species and wildlife, and overuse of natural resources via illegal or sharp practices. Sharp practices such as overmining, have negative outcomes for future generations.¹⁵ In sum, the human person should be accountable in building a sustainable relationship between self, the other, God, and all created reality in existence.¹⁶ The expectation of this sustainable relationship is the ethical call at the heart of Spiritan mission.

ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS AND SPIRITAN MISSION

The central focus of the Spiritan Congregation is availability for the salvation of souls in our missionary endeavors. Spiritan mission gives special attention to the vulnerable, the underserved and those who have scarcely heard the good news of the gospel. In this focus on the vulnerable lies the shared interest of our co-founders, Fr. Claude-François Poullart des Places (1679-1709) and Venerable François Marie-Paul Libermann (1802-1852). Historically, not discounting the resounding inspiration of Poullart des Places, the Spiritan missionary zeal received much impetus and direction from his successor nearly a century and half later, François Libermann, sending confrères to join the early evangelization of Africa. Libermann clearly outlined his manifesto which highlights his ecclesiology of particular churches and his missiological style in an extensive memoir to

14. Holmes Rolston III, "Value intrinsic Values on Earth: Nature and Nations," in, ten Have Henk A. M. J., and Emmanuel Agius, et al., eds., *Environmental Ethics and International Policy*. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2006, 48-49. Holmes Rolston III, "Value in Nature and the Nature of Value," in, Light, Andrew, and Holmes Rolston III, eds., *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*. Victoria, Australia: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2003, 143-153.
15. Robin Attfield, "Environmental Ethics and Global Sustainability" in ten Have, Henk A. M. J., and Emmanuel Agius, et al., eds., *Environmental Ethics and International Policy*. Paris: UNESCO, 2006, 69-70. Robin Attfield, "Saving Nature, Feeding People, and Ethics," in, Light, Andrew, and Holmes Rolston, *Environmental Ethics*, 463-471.
16. Edward Osang Obi, "The Church in Africa and the Challenges of Climate Change: Pathways to African Ecological Ethics," in, Ilo, Stan Chu, Nora K. Nonterah, and Idara Otu, eds., *Faith in Action Vol. I: Reform, Mission and Pastoral Renewal in African Catholicism since Vatican II*. Abuja, Nigeria: Paulines Publications Africa, 2020, 356-384.

confrères working in Dakar and Gabon. In a letter that is dated November 19, 1847, Libermann pushed for the founding of local churches and the formation of a local clergy and for the emancipation of the Black race. He wrote,

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tioned the
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Don't judge by first impressions or by what you are used to in Europe. Forget about Europe, its ways of thinking, its customs, its conventions. Be African with the Africans, and you will learn how to judge them as they should be judged. Be a Negro with the Negro, so as to form them into what they can be, not along European lines, but according to their own way of being. Relate to them as if you were their servants and they were your masters, adapting yourselves to their style of doing things. Your sole purpose in all this must be to perfect and sanctify them and to raise them up from their oppressed state to become a people of God. This is what St. Paul meant when he told Christians to be all things to all men so as to win them for Jesus Christ.¹⁷

The above admonition, given in the early nineteenth century, is a visionary projection of an ethical approach to mission and to the promotion of justice. The collaborative approach to mission in the *Libermann Memorandum of 1846 to Propaganda Fide* is consistent with Pope Francis' call to Synodality – a journeying together as the People of God and listening to one another.¹⁸ Libermann wisely cautioned the missionaries in his time to avoid prejudices but to listen and observe for themselves the way of life of the Blacks they encountered and to endeavor to promote their freedom and human dignity.¹⁹ A disciple of Libermann, Fr. Charles Duparquet, in spite of opposition, earnestly canvassed for the promotion of a local clergy. Study of his writings however, also show interest in pioneering adventures and ex-

17. Libermann's missionary charter as translated and documented in the *Spiritan Anthology*. De Mare, Christian, *A Spiritan Anthology: Writings of Claude-François Poullart des Places (1679-1709) and François Marie-Paul Libermann (1802-1852)*. Roma, Italy: Congregation of the Holy Spirit, 2011, 281-287.

18. *Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality, For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission*. Vatican City: Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, 2021), 1.2. www.cccb.ca accessed on 05/04/2023.

19. *A Spiritan Anthology*, 286.

All the Spiritans but one (...) at that time remained aloof from the movement for abolition.

The Spiritan calling to mission today invites each confrère to the virtue of availability.

ploration to advance colonization. Here we see a conflict of interest capable of derailing the ideals of a collaborative approach to working with Blacks and the promotion of African culture.

Libermann and other Spiritan collaborators despite their excellent visionary stance, failed to support a movement towards the abolition of slavery and the slave trade that had gradually gained traction within French Catholic circles. In a recent article, Fr. Elochukwu Uzukwu CSSp observed that all the Spiritans but one (Alexander Monnet, 10th superior general of the Congregation) at that time remained aloof from the movement for abolition. Their lean support for absolute liberation – Libermann’s refusal to sign the form for the abrogation of slavery – is expressed in their concern that the Blacks, on gaining freedom, would abandon their new-found faith.²⁰ Practices such as the buying back of child-slaves in East Africa to populate the mission schools raised concerns with *Propaganda Fide* in Rome.²¹

The ethical approach to Spiritan Mission in the twenty-first century will consistently highlight a renewal of our three great pillars of integral liberation. The first is the respectful engagement which encompasses the attributes of availability, listening and dialogue with any and everyone. Dynamic identification with the other is the second pillar which incorporates the ideas of respectful inculturation, action for justice and peace and solidarity in community. The third and final pillar is intervention to improve the quality of life of people we encounter in mission through education, community development, and being the voice of the voiceless.²² In other words, the Spiritan calling to mission today invites each confrère to the virtue of availability. It is a disposition that creates opportunity for interaction with all of God’s creation, and thus, building relationships that lead to the flourishing of all of humanity alongside all creation in praise of God, as Pope Francis intends in *Laudato Si*.²³ This disposition underscores the integral ecology which implies giving respect and dignity to all – human and non-human species – each in their own right. To reiterate regarding Spiritan endeavors, the Holy Spirit will provide guidance and lead the way to a fulfilled humanity. The

20. Elochukwu Uzukwu, “In Lockstep with Père Charles Duparquet – Synodality as the Catholic Missionary Insertion within Novel Sociality”, in *Spiritans Horizons*, 2022, 43-45.

21. *Ibid.*, 42-47.

22. Chike Anyigbo, *Solidarity with the Vulnerable*, 113-162.

23. Victor Usman Jamahh, *Human Ecology and Solidarity*, 337.

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next section will turn to Nigeria and the emerging awareness that poor economic growth and care for the wellbeing of people is largely caused by a lack of will for the common good in many state actors. In this regard, this next section will briefly discuss a new political movement in Nigeria; a country that now hosts the greatest population, by origin, of Spiritans in the world. The Spiritan influence on a large proportion of the Nigerian population, especially through evangelization and education, cannot be minimized or overemphasized.

THE NEW POLITICAL MOVEMENT IN NIGERIA

The growing awareness among a cross-section of the populace of the ills of the existing corrupt system of governance in the country has resulted in a new political movement in Nigeria. It is questionable how many state actors have the common good of the people at heart in exercising their duties. Each electioneering year, there is a charade of politicians hungrily canvassing for the people's votes in a pretext of humility and concern for the common good. Often the same crop of politicians saddled with corruption, embezzlement and false contracts engage in massive vote buying to retain their seats in the National Assembly (Congress) or to get themselves elected to their second and final tenure in office.

The consciousness is growing among the populace that such politicians, as described above, are responsible for the lack of economic growth that underpins the backwardness of our country. Despite the abundance of natural resources, Nigeria records the worst statistics for unemployment and poor working conditions, etc. in Africa. Furthermore, the awareness is growing that it is time for change – to vote out all those politicians who fattened themselves with stolen state funds. It is now a moment of realization among the cross-section of the populace that the time is here for the people to fully participate in choosing who governs their affairs in government. There is an increasing realization that the Nigerian Constitution devolves the power to the people to vote in or to vote out candidates for political offices and to follow up in monitoring their performance in office.²⁴

The invitation to active participation is specifically extended to Christians by urging them to exercise their voting rights as citizens.²⁵

24. Matthew Hassan Kukah, "The Responsibilities of Christians to State in the 1999 Nigerian Constitution" in Ijezie, Luke E., Stephen Audu, & Agnes I. Acha, eds., *The Christian, Elections and Faithful Citizenship in a Pluralist Society*. Port Harcourt, Nigeria: CATHAN Publication, 2019, 354-368.

25. John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd Edition. Vaticana: Libreria Editrice, 1997, 2240.

More so, individuals in the church may not only exercise their voting rights but may also vie for elected offices. However, as an institution, the Church can participate in politics, not as her individual lay members may do by choice, but in order to influence a change in the oppressive structures of the society.²⁶ Indeed, not many know that Catholic social teaching has for long encouraged the laity's active participation in politics and society to seek the common good in a manner that reflects their Christian formation. The idea of living out the common good in society, as implied in the Church's social teaching is not limited to Christians but to every citizen of every sovereign nation.²⁷

Thanks to technology, individuals or groups can truly identify with social injustices experienced by others in distant countries.

Bishop Matthew Kukah, citing Pope St. John Paul II's encyclical, observes that the social teaching of the Church stays ahead of the times as it understands the world as a global village and promotes an increase in interdependence around the globe. Thanks to technology, individuals or groups can truly identify with social injustices experienced by others in distant countries. This awareness, in turn, engenders solidarity protests from far and near urging governments to address such injustices.²⁸ For instance, in September 2022, protests in the streets of Tehran grew to international levels with women and men marching in condemnation of the Iranian authorities. These protests were occasioned by the death in police custody of a young Iranian woman, Mahsa Amini, arrested for her failure to cover her head properly with the hijab. Her death is alleged to have resulted from the severe beatings she received from the religious morality police. Amini is listed posthumously in the *Forbes* list of 100 most influential women in the world.²⁹ However, the new political movement in Nigeria,

26. Stanley Onyema Anyanwu, "The Relationship between the Church and the Political Community: The Case of Nigeria," in, Ijezie, Luke E., Stephen Audu, & Agnes I. Acha, eds., *The Christian, Elections and Faithful Citizenship*, 408-424. See also, B. A. C. Obiefuna & Anthony Ikechukwu Kanu, "Church and Politics in Nigeria: Towards a Philosophy of Collaboration," in, Ijezie, Luke E., Stephen Audu, & Agnes I. Acha, eds., *Religious Faith and Public Service in Nigeria: Ambiguities and Paradoxes*. Lagos, Nigeria: CATHAN, 2014, 371.

27. Matthew Hassan Kukah, *Democracy and Civil Society in Nigeria*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books Limited, 1999, 234-242.

28. *Ibid.*, 238. See also: John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. Vaticana: Libreria Editrice, 1987, 38.

29. Maggie McGrath, "Mahsa Amini: The Spark That Ignited A Women-Led Revolution," in, *Forbes*. December 6, 2022 www.forbes.com accessed on 08/04/2023.

grounded in the growing awareness of the common good, is impelled by the END SARS protest that will be discussed in the next section as it contributes to the new consciousness.

Hundreds of innocent unarmed protesters were directly shot at, killed, maimed and injured by the Nigerian military forces at the command of the ruling civilian government.

THE END SARS PROTEST

This new political movement, some have argued, began noticeably with the END SARS protest in 2020 at the Lekki Toll Gate, Lagos State, Nigeria, where hundreds of innocent unarmed protesters were directly shot at, killed, maimed and injured by the Nigerian military forces at the command of the ruling civilian government. END SARS is an acronym for the agitation for the abrogation of the special anti-crime squad of the Police forces. Due to a neglect of government oversight, SARS (Special Anti-Robbery Squad) engaged in the illegal extrajudicial killings of young boys and disposing of their bodies at will. Such violence dates back to the military style operations during the era of military regimes in Nigeria. Ever since that ugly incident in 2020, the same current government in power has failed to investigate the perpetrators of this genocidal crime. However, the protests successfully forced the hand of the Federal government to abolish the SARS unit of the police force.

The END SARS protest is in response to the ongoing mismanagement of the country that has impoverished many and greatly affected the wellbeing of the country's youth. Initially it was directed against the brutality of the special forces of the police (SARS) who engaged in jungle justice around the country. It is disheartening that the peaceful protest march against these anomalies also ended badly on that ill-fated day in October 2020. Nonetheless, it achieved international awareness pressuring the Federal Government to abolish this special forces arm of the Nigerian Police. Some of the officers, as it was reported, were observed to indulge in unwarranted profiling of victims judging them by their hairdos, facial hairs and dress, etc. A few concrete examples received widespread attention, namely, the final year law student killed in a bar in Awka, Anambra State and a teenage girl killed by stray bullets from a drunken police officer shooting carelessly because of a commuter bus driver who refused to "grease his palms" (offer a bribe), among many others.³⁰ A new lease of hope is seen in the rise of a new star who has demonstrated a wealth of knowledge about the problems of Nigeria, offered possible solutions, and who has a competency tested in a previously held public office.

30. Chiamaka Ozulumba, "END SARS Protest 8 October – October 20, 2021," in, *Thisddayonline*.

THE RISE OF A NEW STAR

The new political movement is now energized by the rise of a younger presidential candidate, and his choice of running mate for the highest office of the land. This rise of a young vibrant politician buttresses the belief that change can also begin with one person. The new rising star is no other than the presidential candidate of a political party in the recent February 25, 2023 election in Nigeria, Mr. Peter Obi. Many Nigerians are beginning to relish new hope in this candidate to bring about desired change for the country. He was a governor of his home state, Anambra, and he completed his tenure with resounding accomplishments in 2014. In his presidential campaign trail, he has widely acclaimed maxims such as “go and verify” – referring to his claims regarding works accomplished as governor in the eight years of office, “we no dey give shishi” – we don’t offer/accept bribes for duties to be carried out, and others. These memes, if you like, are exceptional in addressing the corrupt ways of the political elite.

It is a kind of renewal by engineering a new leadership style of leading by example.

Impressively, Obi has contributed the values of good governance to the consciousness of many people and the need for an honest change in the system. It is a kind of renewal by engineering a new leadership style of leading by example.³¹ The mantra, “we give no shishi”, (we neither give nor accept bribes) has taken root in many young minds of the country. Indeed, the impact of the no shishi philosophy has upended the vote-buying of corrupt politicians. Its impact was keenly felt in the last elections. In a good number of cases, the well-established politicians lost the elections to those considered in the latter’s estimation, considered as ordinary or low-key opposition. For example, there were cases of electoral victory scored against some of the political elite by those with less clout such as the poor transporter (“Okada” – bike driver) in Kano State who won a seat in the National Assembly. Again, for the first time, history is made when a budding political party, derided by the political elite as having “no structure,” succeeded in winning, as many as forty Senatorial seats and thirty-four House of Representatives seats in the National Assembly.³²

No doubt many other people are yet to buy into this new movement of change, which sheds light on the rascality flaunted in the last national and state elections. Nevertheless, the struggle for change has truly taken off. Similarly, it is also true that the effect of this new political movement has been unambiguous in the ongoing electoral process now pending at

31. George Ehusani, “The Imperative of a New Pedagogy of Desire: Toward Ethically Sound Conduct of Leadership in Africa,” in, Ilo, Stan Chu, Nora K. Nonterah, & Ikenna U. Okafor, et al., eds., *Faith in Action Vol. III: Reimagining the Mission of the Church in Education, Politics, and Servant Leadership in Africa*. Abuja, Nigeria: Paulines Publication Africa, 2020, 380-401.

32. Thisdaylive <https://www.thisdaylive.com> accessed on 01/04/2023.

The consciousness which is now making a home run with regard to the qualities of character, competence, and zeal for the common good that are required for appropriate leadership.

the electoral tribunals and courts. Of outstanding significance is the consciousness which is now making a home run with regard to the qualities of character, competence, and zeal for the common good that are required for appropriate leadership. Hence the message has been vibrant for those disposed to a leadership of service for the needs of the people. Anyone can relate to the sensible comment of the new rising star in one the widely circulating clips that an individual “who volunteers to serve in a political office has no business with a personal enterprise.”³³ In other words, a majority in public office have misconstrued public service as a means of personal enrichment – of cornering state/national contracts for their privately-owned firms. This attitude is enabled by a society that has deformed itself by not paying attention to the source of an individual’s wealth, but instead, celebrates public fund looters as entitled to take their own share of the ‘national cake’.³⁴

The peak of abnormalities in Nigeria is the recently conducted elections on February 25, 2023, and March 18, 2023. This electioneering process has been widely denounced as a sham and two of the opposition party leaders are proceeding to the election tribunals and to the courts. Again, Obi, on referring to the electioneering process wisely stated, “It is my belief that if you must answer ‘his excellency’, the process through which you arrive at the office must be excellent.”³⁵ Apparently, the rising star of the new political movement has identified with the sensibilities of the masses regarding the unpatriotic political class and their lack of interest in the common good of the citizens of Nigeria. Unlike this trending unruly class of state actors, the new rising star has demonstrated a vision and a passion for a better Nigeria where present and future generations will be protected.³⁶

CONCLUSION

Individualism has become an ideological trend and the world of the 21st century is riddled with a crisis of connection. The unbridled desire for economic growth has undermined responsibility for sustainable interaction between humankind and its environment. The interrelationships of the

33. See widely circulating WhatsApp video clip.

34. Austin Echema, “The Church and Fight Against Corruption in Nigeria,” in, Ijezie, Luke E., Stephen Audu, & Agnes I. Acha, eds., *The Christian, Elections and Faithful Citizenship*, 491-492.

35. Peter Obi addressing the Journalists – hosted by Channels Television on March 3, 2023 www.channelstv.com accessed on 01/04/2023

36. Isidore Okwudili Igwegbe, “Politics as Caring, Nation-building and Imitation of Divine Activity. A Critique of the Nigerian Experience,” in, Ijezie, Luke E., et al., *The Christian, Elections and Faithful Citizenship*, 354-368.

Earth's biosphere are saddled with neglect and depreciation. In the midst of this crisis, Pope Francis, has not only called for respect for the intrinsic value of nature but also for humanity to undertake the responsibility of a moral relationship with all God's creatures. Pope Francis in his previous Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, insisted on this moral relationship as the necessary tool for evangelization. Francis tells us that the preaching of the good news must aim at the renewal of human dignity through interconnectedness.³⁷ Furthermore, it is clear that the focus of environmental ethics is to comprehend the normative principles which ought to guide human interactions and their effect on the natural environment.

The Spiritan initiative in mission and the initiative of a new political movement in Nigeria are creative responses to promote the intrinsic value of nature and humanity. Both initiatives have identical objectives in tandem with the concerns of *Laudato Si'*. The uniting objective is to work for the sustainability of creation recognizing the value of interdependence in the earth's biosphere. In addition, both initiatives focus on integral liberation and responsibility for the dignity of humanity, especially the most vulnerable.

With regard to the initiative of the new political movement in Nigeria, the decisive outcome of the desire for change is in limbo, as Bishop Kukah of Sokoto Catholic diocese suggested in a recent Easter message pending the decisions of the courts. He reminded judges of their moral responsibility to work independently following their consciences to deliver justice and freedom for all citizens.³⁸ With regard to the Spiritan mission initiative, the XXI general chapter of the Spiritan Congregation, Bagamoyo II, has renewed the Spiritan commitment to finding new ways for the advancement of the dignity of the human person. A commitment that works for "justice, peace, and integrity of creation in mission," "interreligious dialogue," and "development" remains at the heart of Spiritan mission.³⁹ Similarly, the new political movement endeavors to bring about reform in Nigerian society that restores human dignity and economic growth in every aspect of life which also takes account of future generations.

Dr. Chike Anyigbo CSSp,
Spiritana International School of Theology (SIST)
Attakwu, Enugu, Nigeria.

37. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium: The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2014, 75.

38. Matthew H. Kukah, "Nigeria: Reconciliation Postpone?" *Sokoto Catholic Diocese Easter Message*, April 9, 2023, in, Niche www.thenicheng.com accessed on 10/04/2023.

39. *Bagamoyo II*, 12-17.

Bishop
Kukah ...
reminded
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their moral
responsibility
to work
independently
following
their
consciences
to deliver
justice and
freedom
for all
citizens.