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BUILDING A NEW MODEL OF CHURCH-STATE COLLABORATION IN THE CARE OF
THE ENVIRONMENT IN GHANA BASED ON CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING AND
AFRICAN THEOLOGICAL TRADITIONS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Emmanuel Abbey-Quaye

November 2021

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BUILDING A NEW MODEL OF CHURCH-STATE COLLABORATION IN THE CARE OF
THE ENVIRONMENT IN GHANA BASED ON CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING AND
AFRICAN THEOLOGICAL TRADITIONS

By

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ABSTRACT

BUILDING A NEW MODEL OF CHURCH-STATE COLLABORATION IN THE CARE OF THE ENVIRONMENT IN GHANA BASED ON CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING AND AFRICAN THEOLOGICAL TRADITIONS

By

Emmanuel Abbey-Quaye

November 2021

Dissertation supervised by Daniel P. Scheid, Ph.D.

The care of the environment has always been considered by the Ghana Catholic Church as an important aspect of her pastoral care and evangelizing mission in Ghana. Hence, in their various teachings in communiqués and other pastoral documents from 1965 till now, the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference has consistently addressed the major environmental challenges confronting Ghana such as deforestation, mining, pollution, etc., applying the principles of stewardship and care of creation, intergenerational solidarity, integral ecology, etc., to ground these teachings.

Besides, in acknowledging that neither the Catholic Church nor the Ghanaian Government alone can resolve the various ecological crises confronting Ghana, the Bishops' Conference had sought on three occasions in the past to collaborate with and complement the efforts of Government in

tackling Ghana's ecological challenges albeit without much success. In arguing that the Conference's past unsuccessful attempts at collaborating with the Government on environmental care in Ghana is due to the lack of a properly articulated theoretical and practical framework to guide this collaboration, I propose a new model of Church-State collaboration on the care of the environment in Ghana based on Catholic social teaching and African theological traditions. I argue that in addition to applying the principles of Catholic social teaching to ground their ecological teachings, the Ghana Episcopal Conference should also use the African concepts of God as creator, the close interconnection between human and non-human creation, cosmic harmony and cosmic common good as well as the Akan practices of taboos, sacred groves, sacred days and totems. I also propose the celebrations of *Africa Environment Day*, *Arbor Week*, *National Sanitation Day* (NSD) and *World Day of Prayer for Creation* as four main contents for this new model of Church and State collaboration, arguing that these will offer the most viable option for both the Church and the State to work together to resolve Ghana's current and future ecological challenges.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the greater glory of God. It is also dedicated to Madam Dorothy Dora Archison, my sweetest mother, to my siblings, Araba, Efia, Bernard and Irene, and to Most Rev. John Bonaventure Kwofie, CSSp., Metropolitan Archbishop of the Catholic Archdiocese of Accra, who facilitated my admission and schooling at the Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit, Pittsburgh, Pa., USA. I dedicate this dissertation also to the priests and parishioners of St. Thomas the Apostle Parish (formerly St. Theresé Parish), Munhall, Homestead, Pa. You welcomed me with wide open arms and accepted me as a priest in residence in your parish. Your prayerful support, acts of love and words of encouragement have made my schooling an exciting and pleasurable experience. God bless you.

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To you, Most Rev. John Bonaventure Kwofie, CSSp., Catholic Archbishop of Accra, Ghana, I remain eternally grateful. You personally facilitated my admission to Duquesne University to pursue my Ph.D. studies in Systematic Theology and you supported me throughout my stay with your words of prayer, encouragement and wise counselling.

I am equally grateful to you, Most Rev. Matthias K. Nketsiah, Emeritus Archbishop of Cape Coast, Most Rev. Gabriel C. Palmer-Buckle, my current Local Ordinary, and indeed, the entire Archdiocese of Cape Coast, for giving me the opportunity to do further studies abroad. The beginning and completion of my Ph.D. studies bears ample testimony to the high premium you put on the development of the needed human resource base for the growth and mission of the Archdiocese and the Catholic Church in Ghana as a whole. I pray that the fruits of my future priestly ministry and apostolate will be the reward of the investment made in my higher education.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AD – *Amici delecti*

AG – *Ad gentes*

AM – *Africae munus*

ATR – African Traditional Religion (also Akan Traditional Religion)

CA – *Centesimus annus*

CCC – *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

CFI – Civic Forum Initiative

CHAG – Christian Health Association of Ghana

CHRAJ – Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice

CPLO – Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Office

CSOs – Civil Society Organisations

CST - Catholic Social Teaching

CV – *Caritas in veritate*

EA – *Ecclesia in America (Africa, Asia)*

EAP – Environmental Action Plan

EO – *Ecclesia in Oceania*

EPA – Environmental Protection Agency

EV – *Evangelium vitae*

FBOs – Faith-Based Organisations

FR – *Fides et ratio*

GBM – Green Belt Movement

GCBC – Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference

GES – Ghana Education Service

GS – *Gaudium et spes*

HTIs – Health Training Institutions

IDEG – Institute for Democratic Governance

ISD – Information Services Department

IM – *Incarnationis mysterium*

JM – *Justitia in mundo*

LE – *Laborem exercens*

LG – *Lumen gentium*

LS – *Laudato si’*

MM – *Mater et magistra*

MDF – Mineral Development Fund

MOH – Ministry of Health

NCCE – National Commission for Civic Education

NCHS – National Catholic Health Service

NCS – National Catholic Secretariat

NEPA – National Environmental Protection Action (Plan)

NGOs – Non-Governmental Organisations

NHIA – National Health Insurance Authority

NHIS – National Health Insurance Scheme

NMI – *Novo millennio inuente*

NSD – National Sanitation Day

OA – *Octogesima adveniens*

PAS – Pontifical Academy of Sciences

PP – *Populorum progressio*

RH – *Redemptoris humanis*

RME – Religious and Moral Education

RN – *Rerum Novarum*

SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals

SRS – *Sollicitudo rei socialis*

TMA – *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*

UNO – United Nations Organisation

USCCB – United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

WDP – World Day of Peace

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Background and Purpose

Faced with the current global ecological crisis characterized by massive pollution of air, water bodies and soils, melting snowcaps, rising sea levels, climate change and loss of biodiversity, etc., the current global concerns and discussions on the state of the Earth, our common home, could not have occurred at a more opportune time than today. Addressing the global ecological crisis in his landmark ecological encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis stated that as a result of the damage that humanity is currently inflicting on the earth, our world today “is becoming more and more like an immense pile of filth” (LS 21). Consequently, the pope invited all people living on earth to dialogue and seek common solutions to remedy the current global ecological crisis (LS 3, 14, 64).

It is significant that in his call for global dialogue and action on saving the Earth, which he calls “our common home,” Pope Francis cites in an unprecedented manner, quotations from twenty-one Episcopal Conferences across the world, in addition to quoting from the Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew and a Sufi mystic. While scholars like Kevin Irwin, Sean McDonagh and others have argued that this action of the pope is an example of collegiality in episcopal teaching in practice and that Pope Francis is seeking to elevate the voices of the Church in the “periphery” with regard to issues of global concern, in this instance, the care of the environment, I argue further that Pope Francis is inviting Episcopal Conferences across the globe not only to join him and other global leaders in the worldwide campaign to save the Earth, but also to lead the efforts in their various localities, countries and regions geared towards addressing the current global ecological crisis.

In Ghana, the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference (GCBC) has over the years collaborated with the Ghanaian Government in the areas of healthcare, education and good governance to promote

the common good of the citizens of Ghana and to ensure their integral development. However, as of today, there is no collaboration yet between the Church and the Government of Ghana in the care of the environment even though both the Ghanaian Church and the State consider the care of the environment as a very significant aspect of the lives of the Ghanaian people.¹ In the light of this missing link within the existing collaborations between the Church and the State, this dissertation argues that the time is ripe for the building of a new model of Church and State collaboration in the care of the environment so that these two entities can contribute even more comprehensively towards the common good and integral development of all Ghanaians.

In pursuit of the goal of building a Church and State collaboration in the care of the environment in Ghana, this dissertation evaluates Catholic social teaching on the care of the environment as well as African theological and Akan ecological traditions and practices and uses them as theological grounding for the proposed Church and State collaboration in the care of the environment in Ghana. In regard to practical policy initiatives within this collaboration, the dissertation proposes that the Church and State collaboration in care of the environment would cover four policy initiatives, namely, the celebration of *Africa Environment Day*, monthly *National Sanitation Day*, *Arbor Week* celebration and *World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation*. The dissertation posits that if these policy initiatives are legislated into law and implemented as national policies through a close Church and State collaboration, they will offer the most viable options for addressing the issue of the care of the environment in Ghana both today and in the future.

¹ The Catholic Church in Ghana considers the care of the environment as an essential aspect of her mission of evangelization. Subsequently, she has addressed this topic in several communiques and pastoral documents issued by the Bishops' Conference since 1965. More information in *Ghana Bishops Speak*. Takoradi: St. Francis Press, 1998, *Ghana Bishops Speak Volume II*. Takoradi: St. Francis Press, 2006 and *Ghana Catholic Bishops Speak, Volume III*. Accra: St. Kizito Press, 2018. The Ghana Government also works to protect the environment through its Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Established in 1994, the EPA is responsible for managing, protecting and safeguarding the environment of Ghana in accordance with its mandate. See Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology, *Environmental Protection Agency Strategic Plan 2011-2015*. Accra: Assembly Press, 2011.

Scope of the Research

The dissertation will be in six Chapters: Chapter one will offer a historical and theological overview of Catholic social teaching on the environment as found in papal and other ecclesial documents, beginning from the era of *Rerum Novarum*, the first modern social encyclical issued by Leo XIII in 1891, and ending with the encyclical, *Laudato Si'* issued by Pope Francis in 2015. While this evaluation is intended to argue that Catholic social teaching offers a rich storehouse for both current and future discussions on the ecological question, attention will also be focused on important theological and ecological themes, such as stewardship and care of creation, integral ecology, etc., that have been expounded in these papal and ecclesial teachings on the environment.

Chapter two will continue with the examination of Catholic social teaching on the environment, but this time around, the focus will be on the ecological teachings given by the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference (GCBC) in their communiqués and other pastoral documents and statements from 1965 to 2020. The chapter will also evaluate two recent practical ecological policy initiatives of the Bishops' Conference, namely, a 2016 case study on land grabbing in Ghana and the ongoing Bishops' Conference's project on electronic waste management. The objective here is to discern the theological principles grounding these teachings and policies as well as their impact in Ghana.

In Chapter three, I shall focus attention on African theological ecological traditions as well as Akan traditional ecological wisdom and ethical practices. I shall argue that African theological teachings and Akan indigenous ecological traditions should not be dismissed as unimportant to the current global discussions on the care of the environment. On the contrary, they should be considered as offering important resources to the worldwide discourse and efforts aimed at addressing the current global ecological crisis. Consequently, I shall propose to the Ghana Bishops' Conference the need to incorporate some of these resources in their ecological teachings and practical policy initiatives.

In Chapter four, I shall examine three existing historical collaborations between the Ghanaian Catholic Church and the State of Ghana, namely, education, healthcare and good governance. Important focus will be placed on the theological principles undergirding these partnerships such as subsidiarity, the common good, the option for the poor, etc. I shall also discuss the lessons that have been learnt from these collaborations and show how these can guide the new model of Church and State collaboration in the care of the environment in Ghana which I am proposing.

In Chapter five, I shall offer a full elaboration on the proposal I am making in this dissertation for a new model of collaboration between the Church and the State in the care of the environment. I shall discuss in some considerable detail four practical ecological policy initiatives that I am proposing as the contents of this new model of Church and State collaboration in Ghana. Following this, I shall offer some recommendations on how the proposed Church and State collaboration in the care of the environment in Ghana could obtain legislation in law to become national policies, and what publicity is needed to get the necessary support and acceptance of the Ghanaian public.

In Chapter six, the last and final chapter of this dissertation containing the general conclusion of this work, I shall summarize the entire dissertation and postulate that my new proposed Church and State collaboration in the care of the environment in Ghana will work effectively if it obtains the needed legislation in law and learns useful lessons from the three already existing models of collaboration between the Catholic Church and the State of Ghana. In addition, I shall argue that since the subject of the care of the environment is at the core of humanity's very survival and existence, most Ghanaians would be motivated and or encouraged to support this new model of Church and State collaboration in Ghana to work effectively if its theoretical framework is correctly laid out, properly articulated and carefully implemented through a close collaboration between the Ghanaian Catholic Church and the Government of Ghana.

CHAPTER ONE

ENVIRONMENTAL CARE IN CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING: OVERVIEW OF CATHOLIC ECOLOGICAL TRADITION FROM *RERUM NOVARUM* (1891) TO *LAUDATO SI'* (2015)

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) designates the Catholic Church's doctrinal corpus concerning issues relevant to society. Through Catholic Social Teaching, the Church shows interest in and addresses herself to the social, economic, political and cultural affairs of society as she accompanies the human society to find solutions to the challenges that confront her.² Most scholars trace the beginning of modern Catholic Social Teaching to the publication of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* ("On the Conditions of Workers") in 1891. Yet, according to Kenneth Himes, the Church's concern with social issues goes further back into history, with its beginnings in Sacred Scriptures, especially the Gospels and Apostolic Writings.³

Beginning from the encyclical letter, *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo XIII (1891) to the encyclical *Laudato Si'* of Pope Francis (2015), the Church's doctrinal corpus on social and other issues has developed in the Church through official teachings of the popes and the bishops with them (the *Magisterium* or teaching office of the Church). Over these years, the Church's social teaching has addressed a myriad of issues including work and workers' rights, justice and peace, family life and marriage and economic development, among others.⁴ Within the scope of the various scholarly

² Kenneth Himes (Ed.). *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries & Interpretations* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 9. For Thomas Massaro, Catholic Social Teaching is an authentic faith-based response to changing political, social and economic conditions of the world. Massaro lists the sources of Catholic social teaching as papal encyclicals and apostolic letters, statements of Vatican offices and commissions and worldwide Church councils and synods as well as pastoral letters from individual bishops, regional groupings of bishops and entire episcopal conferences. According to him, there are other unofficial sources including teachings of Church experts, among others. See Thomas Massaro. *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 41-42.

³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴ Massaro, *Living Justice*, 36-39. Massaro states that there are 14 social encyclicals, from Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* issued in 1891 to *Laudato Si'* of Pope Francis issued in 2015.

analyses of these teachings, one of the criticisms that has often been leveled against the Church's social teaching is its seeming "silence" on ecological and environmental issues. Scholars like Thomas Massaro, Walter Grazer and Christiana Zenner, among others, who level this accusation against the seeming silence in the Church's social teaching on ecological issues point to the fact that prior to the publication of Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'* in 2015, only a few sections in the previous thirteen social encyclicals of the Church had been devoted to environmental concerns. Besides, not even one of those encyclicals addressed exclusively issues of environmental care. Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*, therefore, is the first papal encyclical that deals exclusively with the issues of the environment and ecological justice.⁵ Since its publication in 2015, *Laudato Si'* has been commended by many as one of the most important documents emerging from Rome over the past century owing to the fact that it puts the issue of the environment on the front burner of the Church's social concerns. This explains why Christiana Zenner postulates that as a document, "*Laudato Si'* has moved the Catholic Church from the periphery of global engagement with ecology right to the very heart of the debate."⁶

In this chapter, I shall undertake a historical and theological review of the social encyclicals of the Church, beginning from the first modern encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, issued by Pope Leo XIII in 1891, and ending with the first ecological encyclical, *Laudato Si'* issued by Pope Francis in 2015.

⁵ Ibid., 174. Thomas Massaro argues that although care of the earth easily fits within Catholic Social Teaching, ecological concerns were seldom mentioned in the encyclicals before *Laudato Si'*, and that there were only few sections in the previous 13 encyclicals that offered extended treatment of ecological issues. Similarly, Christiana Zenner also postulates that despite the Church's strong record on social advocacy since 1891, the Church's statements and teachings on the environment have been relatively few until in the 1990s and beyond when ecological issues occasionally emerged in formal, magisterial teaching. See Christiana Zenner, "Commentary on *Laudato Si'*: On Care for our Common Home" in Kenneth Himes (Ed.). *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries & Interpretations* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 519. See also Walter Grazer, "*Laudato Si'*: Continuity, Change, and Challenge" in Daniel di Leo (Ed.). *All Creation is Connected: Voices in Response to Pope Francis' Encyclical on Ecology* (Winona, Minnesota: Anselm Academic, 2018), 32.

⁶ Christiana Zenner, "Commentary on *Laudato Si'*," 519-523. Zenner emphasizes the point that it is significant that a social encyclical has finally made ecology its main subject.

This historical and theological review shall specifically trace in brief the development and evolution of the Catholic Church's teaching on ecological care in the Church's social encyclicals from 1891 to 2015. The review is aimed at shedding important light on how the global Church has in the course of her history dealt with the topic of the care of the environment from the late 19th century till very recent times. Of significant interest to this review shall also be an examination of the theological principles grounding the various ecological teachings contained in these encyclicals. These principles shall include the stewardship and care of creation, intergenerational justice, solidarity, the common good and integral ecology. The objective or goal for examining these theological principles is to discern how these principles have also been articulated and applied by the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference (GCBC) in their teachings on the care of the environment in Ghana from 1965 till date and how these principles among others can be applied in tackling the challenge of environmental damage in Ghana today and in the future.⁷

1.1 Environmental Care in Social Encyclicals: From *Rerum Novarum* (1891) to *Gaudium et Spes* of Vatican Council II (1962-1965)

Several theologians and some other scholars argue that modern Catholic Social Teaching begins with the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903) issued in 1891.⁸ While *Rerum Novarum* focused mainly on the conditions and rights of workers, Cardinal Peter Appiah Turkson argues that it also contained some seeds of current ideas about the natural environment. According

⁷ The subject matter of Chapter 2 of this work is the historical and theological review of the ecological teachings of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference (GCBC) from 1965 till 2020. The Catholic Bishops' Conference, constituting the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Ghana and currently made up of 20 active bishops and six retired bishops, has addressed the subject of the care of the environment in Ghana in their communiques and other official statements since 1965 till now in an effort to contribute to safeguarding and protecting the environment in Ghana.

⁸ Himes, *Modern Catholic Social Teaching*, 9. Edward P. DeBerri et al also argue that the Church's Social Teaching in the modern period dates from 1891 when Pope Leo XIII issued his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* ("On the Condition of Labour") to address the inhuman conditions of working people in industrial societies. See Edward P. DeBerri et al. *Catholic Social Teaching: Our Best Kept Secret* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 6.

to Turkson, the encyclical stated that “those who receive God’s bounty in the form of natural resources or property, should exercise their responsibility “as stewards of God’s providence for the benefit of others” (RN 22).”⁹ Based on this teaching, Turkson posits that the seeds of the modern discussions on the care of creation were already imbedded in the social teachings of Pope Leo XIII as far back as the late 19th century.¹⁰ Unfortunately, for the next seventy years, that is, in the period between 1891 and 1960, Catholic Social Teaching in papal encyclicals and other ecclesial documents did not take up the ecological question again in any significant way. Thus, even though several papal encyclicals and other Church documents were issued within the above-mentioned period, the discussion of ecology as a subject was virtually non-existent in those documents.¹¹ Despite this lacuna, I agree with Connie Lasher and Charles Murphy who have argued that the Church cannot be blamed solely for this tardiness in addressing the global ecological question and that the wider human society in general shares in this blame. According to Lasher and Murphy, contemporary environmentalism came to the fore as a moment of renewed social engagement with the environment around the same time when the Second Vatican Council was taking place in which the care of the environment first featured as an important subject.¹² Based on this reality, both in the Church and the wider society, it would only be from the early

⁹ Peter Cardinal Appiah Turkson, Lecture on *The Integral Ecology of Pope Francis for the Safeguarding of our Common Home: An Integral Ecology for an Integral Society, The Great Challenge of our Time*, given at Notre Dame Center, Jerusalem on 12/03/2018, page 3. Peter Turkson, the Ghanaian cardinal from Cape Coast in Ghana, was the President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace whose outfit was responsible for the drafting of *Laudato Si’*. Currently, Turkson is in the Prefect of the Dicastery for Integral Human Development at the Vatican.

¹⁰ Turkson, Lecture on “*The Integral Ecology of Pope Francis*”, page 3.

¹¹ In 1931, Pope Pius XI issued the encyclical *Quadregesimo Anno* (“On the Reconstruction of the Social Order”) to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. The document did not speak about ecological issues. Between 1939 and 1945 also, Pope Pius XII used his Christmas Addresses to speak about Church and global issues but did not touch on the care of environment. From 1945 till 1958 when Pius XII died, papal efforts were geared more towards world peace following the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. Thus, ecological issues were not given any consideration within this time period by the popes and the Church as a whole.

¹² Connie Lasher & Charles M. Murphy, *With Generous Courage* in Jame Schaefer, *Confronting the Climate Crisis: Catholic Theological Perspectives* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 2011), 366-367.

1960s when the environmental question would be taken up in a much more forceful and prominent way in global discussions.

In his 1961 encyclical letter, *Mater et Magistra* (“On Christianity and Social Progress”), Pope John XXIII introduced the idea of “integral development of the person”, teaching that Christian education should be “integral”, that is, encompassing every kind of duty: at work, in the family, and in the fields of economics, politics, environment and so on.”¹³ The Second Vatican Council which began in 1962, that is, a year after the publication of *Mater et Magistra*, and ended in 1965, further inspired a committed study of the relation between humans and their environment.

In the Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council, titled *Gaudium et Spes* (“On the Church in the Modern World”) published in 1965, the document spoke of an “integral vocation of man”, “the integral perfection of the human person” and an “integral culture” (GS 12, 14-15, 53).¹⁴ In addition, the Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, titled *Lumen Gentium*, made biblical references to human redemption and that of all creation (LG 3).¹⁵ Among others, the document stated that all creation had value and the human person was to order creation to the praise of God through work, and to ensure that the goods of the world were used rationally and evenly distributed (LG 31, 35).¹⁶ Also, *Lumen Gentium* taught that created things had their own values and laws and the human person must learn from them. According to the teachings of *Lumen Gentium*, all persons bear the responsibility of completing the work of creation, that God destined the goods of the earth for all, and that they must be distributed in a way regulated by justice and

¹³ Turkson, *Lecture on “Integral Ecology of Pope Francis,”* 3. See also Pope John XIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra* (“On Christianity and Social Progress”) issued on May 15, 1961, MM # 195.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3. See also Austin Flannery. *Vatican Council II, Volume I: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents, New Revised Edition* (Dublin, Ireland: Dominican Publications, 1996), 913-914, 958.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3. Also, Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, 351.

¹⁶ Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, 388, 391-392.

accompanied by charity and that the human person must love the goods of God's creation, using them in a spirit of poverty and freedom.¹⁷

From the above papal and ecclesial teachings, I posit that these early teachings about creation and the environment constitute a solid theological framework upon which the Church started more gradually and progressively to address the growing global concerns on the environment in a more consistent manner. I posit further that in these teachings, we have the tentative beginnings of the use of the theological principles of stewardship and care of environment, the earth as a common good, intergenerational solidarity, etc., in the Church's teachings to shed light on the issues of the environment and to invite the human person to assume a rightful role in the care of God's creation as intended by the Creator. These early ecological teachings were to be deepened later in successive papal and ecclesial teachings which I shall review below, beginning with Pope Paul VI.

1.2 Environmental Care in the Social Encyclicals and Other Teachings of Pope Paul VI (1963-1978)

Right from his election as pope in 1963 till the end of his papacy in 1978, Pope Paul VI continued the Church's ecological teachings in several of his writings and addresses.¹⁸ As Marjorie Keenan rightly argues, Pope Paul VI addressed the ecological question in some of his encyclicals and Apostolic Letters right from the beginning of his papacy as part of his early teachings as pope.¹⁹

In 1967, Paul VI issued the encyclical, *Populorum Progressio* ("On the Development of Peoples"). According to Turkson, in this encyclical, the pope addressed the question of human development

¹⁷ Ibid., 393. Also, LG # 36.

¹⁸ Massaro, *Living Justice*, 37. Also, DeBerri, *Catholic Social Teaching*, 68-80. The major teachings of Pope Paul VI are *Populorum Progressio* (1967), *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) and *Humanae Vitae* (1968).

¹⁹ Marjorie Keenan. *From Stockholm to Johannesburg: An Historical Overview of the Concern of the Holy See for the Environment, 1972-2002* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002), 16-17.

and the role of human persons in creation by teaching that “authentic development must foster the development of each man and of the whole man”.²⁰ The pope further taught that human beings were given the responsibility through their intelligence and work ““to complete and perfect” creation by their own efforts and to their own advantage”.²¹ He also emphasised the right of all peoples to the goods of the earth.²² This principle which is known today as “the universal destination of goods,” teaches that God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members and that since man is the destination of created goods, no human being should be deprived of the bare necessities of life. For the Church, the principle of the universal destination of goods can only be guaranteed when the resources of the earth are distributed equitably.²³ In the same encyclical, Pope Paul VI also posited that we need some effective world authority to cope with the scale of challenge in the environmental and financial realms.²⁴

In 1970, the first *Earth Day* was celebrated to raise global awareness about environmental care.²⁵ In November the following year, Pope Paul VI convoked the 1971 Synod of Bishops to address the question of justice in the world and related matters. The Synod’s document, titled, *Justitia in Mundo* (“Justice in the World”), had something to teach about the care of the environment. Among others, the document noted that “people were now beginning to grasp a new and more radical dimension of unity,” namely, that of their shared environment.²⁶ The document further taught that

²⁰ Turkson, *Lecture on Integral Ecology of Pope Francis*, 4. Also, Pope Paul VI, Encyclical Letter, *Populorum Progressio* (“On the Development of Peoples”), issued on 26 March 1967, PP # 14, 42.

²¹ Keenan, *From Stockholm to Johannesburg*, 16. Also, PP # 22.

²² *Ibid.*, 16. Also, PP # 9, 22.

²³ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2004), para. 481, page 259.

²⁴ Turkson, 4. Also, PP # 76-78.

²⁵ The *First Earth Day* was celebrated in 1970 to provide a voice to the emerging environmental consciousness about the state of the planet and to put environmental concerns on the front burner of global discussions. Accessed online at <https://www.earthday.org> on April 21, 2021. Today, *Earth Day* is celebrated on April 22 every year.

²⁶ Keenan, *From Stockholm to Johannesburg*, 15. Synod of Bishops 1971, *Justitia in Mundo* (“Justice in the World”), Final Document issued on 30 November 1971, JM Chap. 1, para. 2. Since there are no paragraph numbers in the text, references are made to the chapter and number of the paragraph within the chapter.

“the resources of the earth are not infinite but must be conserved as patrimony of all humanity”.²⁷ It also stated that “richer nations made such demands on resources and energy supplies and that irreparable damage would be done if their high rates of consumption and pollution were extended to the whole of humanity”.²⁸ Besides these teachings, *Justitia in Mundo* further stressed that “those who are already rich should accept a different lifestyle so as not to destroy that heritage they share with others. The awareness of the unequal distribution of goods leads to the awareness that new modes of understanding human dignity are arising”.²⁹ According to Keenan, “this statement shows significant links between human dignity, care for the environment and sustainable development.”³⁰ Keenan’s position is shared by Cardinal Turkson who also postulates that the teaching of the 1971 Synod of Bishops as contained in the synodal document, *Justitia in Mundo*, was the first of such teachings to give prominence to the link between justice and ecology. According to Turkson, “the document’s line of thought suggested a close link between concern for the poor and concern for the earth, the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth.”³¹

Within the same year of 1971, Pope Paul VI published the encyclical, *Octogesima Adveniens* (“The Eightieth Year”) to commemorate the eightieth anniversary of Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*.³² In *Octogesima Adveniens*, Paul VI addressed the inseparable link between human life and the natural environment. According to the pope, because of uncontrolled industrial development in the richer nations, the environment was becoming a perpetual menace while

²⁷ Ibid., 15. Also, JM Chap. 1, para. 2.

²⁸ Ibid. Also, JM. Chap. 1, para. 4.

²⁹ Ibid. Also, JM Chap. 1, para. 5.

³⁰ Ibid., 15-16.

³¹ Turkson, *Lecture on “Integral Ecology,”* 4. Also, in the *Introduction* to JM, para. 5.

³² Encyclical Letter of Pope Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens* (“The Eightieth Year”), issued on May 14, 1971. For detailed commentary on this encyclical, see Christine E. Gudorf, “Commentary on *Octogesima adveniens* (A Call to Action on the Eightieth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*)” in Kenneth Himes (Ed.). *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries & Interpretations* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 315-332.

nations grappled with the problems of pollution, refuse, new illnesses, etc.³³ For Paul VI, “Man was turning back against the results of his conquest; in trying to control nature, he is becoming a slave to his conquest”.³⁴ The pope further taught that, “Man is suddenly becoming aware that by an ill-considered exploitation of nature, he risks destroying it and becoming in his turn, the victim of this degradation”.³⁵ According to him, “Not only is the material environment becoming a permanent menace – pollution and refuse, new illnesses and absolute destructive capacity – but the human framework is no longer under man’s control, thus creating an environment for tomorrow which may well be intolerable.”³⁶ I argue that by teaching in this way, Pope Paul VI emphasized that awareness of the ecological situation was not enough but should be complemented by concrete practical actions. Thus, according to him, “With others, Christians must assume responsibility for a destiny that is now shared by all”, namely, the future of the environment.³⁷

Between 1971 and 1978, Paul VI addressed further the ecological question in some of his major addresses to individuals, groups and organizations. Keenan mentions that in major addresses to various groups just before the 1972 Stockholm *Conference on Human Environment*, Paul VI used biblical references to remind all States that “if the Bible presents creation as the work of the Creator, it has been given over to the work of the creature who is to exploit it intelligently, humanize it and enjoy its fruit as a gift of God. Through their work, people should perfect and transform all of creation, and to do so according to God’s plan, they must respect the earth. They must admire, explore and know it.”³⁸ According to Keenan, Pope Paul VI also taught that “the

³³ Turkson, *Lecture on “Integral Ecology,”* 4. Also, Encyclical of Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, (OA) # 21.

³⁴ Ibid. Also, OA # 9.

³⁵ Ibid. Also OA # 21.

³⁶ Ibid. Also OA # 21.

³⁷ Keenan, *From Stockholm to Johannesburg*, 16-17. Also, OA # 21.

³⁸ Ibid.

human person is called to love the earth, seeing in it the image of the Creator.”³⁹ Thus, for Keenan, Paul VI stressed that, “Nature actually speaks: - “nothing is without a voice, without language.”⁴⁰ In the same encyclical, the pope also quoted St. Ambrose’s teaching on animals and how they manifest the wisdom and providence of the Creator as well as Teilhard de Chardin’s teaching concerning the “spiritual power of nature” in his ecological teachings to support his teaching that God can be found in His creation.⁴¹ In addition, Paul VI made it clear that to preserve the environment, a radical change of behaviour had become urgent. According to the pope, “Not only must the human person learn to dominate his domination of the earth, but environmental law and regulation were also important.”⁴² Based on these ecological teachings, Keenan posits that, “Paul VI wrote at a time when environmental issues were considered marginal. Yet, his teachings remain significant.”⁴³ According to her, the pope “deepened Catholic Social Teaching and applied them to the environment” and that “his vision remains clear and deeply rooted in Scriptures and in the principles of Catholic Social Teaching.”⁴⁴

A theological examination and review of Pope Paul VI’s teachings on the environment from 1964 to 1972 shows that Pope Paul VI used several theological and moral concepts in his teachings on the environment. I contend that the most important concepts he applied were three. The first one is that of stewardship and care of creation. Here, the pope teaches that all creation has value in its own right and that created things have their own laws and values that the human person must learn and respect. This same principle is also applied by the pope when he teaches that there is a delicate balance in the natural milieu that must be respected and that an irrational exploitation of the natural

³⁹ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 18.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

resources can have serious consequences. Secondly, Pope Paul VI applied the principle of the earth as a common good when he taught that the human person is responsible for completing the work of creation in view of the betterment of society and also that of the whole creation, Thirdly and finally, the pope made use of the principle of intergenerational solidarity by stating that there is an intimate relationship between care for the earth (environment) and sustainable development, and that the distribution of the earth's resources must be regulated by justice accompanied by love.⁴⁵

From the above evaluation, I contend that in using these theological principles to ground his ecological teachings, Pope Paul VI tried to draw the attention of all people to the practical consequences that result from their use of the earth's resources. These ethical implications include the following. One, when action is undertaken, it is important to consider the consequences of any intervention in the existing natural equilibrium. Two, the present high rate of consumption and pollution was not tolerable. Three, the richer nations must accept a different lifestyle in order to avoid destroying a heritage they are obliged by justice to share with all. Four, that there is an urgent need for environmental law and regulation.⁴⁶ These teachings clearly demonstrate that as pope, Paul VI acknowledged and addressed the care of the environment as a fundamental issue in need of a more global focus and attention.

From 1972 when the Stockholm Conference on the environment was held to the end of his pontificate in 1978, Pope Paul VI also spoke on the subject of the environment in several addresses and documents. For example, in his Message to the Stockholm Conference, Paul VI outlined the Church's concern for the environment. Teaching that the Church's approach to the environmental question was global, namely that there is one earth, the pope argued that "the nature of the

⁴⁵ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 19-20.

environmental problem is that abuses in one part of the world have repercussions in others and therefore, efforts to solve this problem require the cooperation of all.”⁴⁷ Keenan argues that by teaching in this way, Pope Paul VI gave a new and full expression to integral development of the human person, showing that people should be set within their environment since the latter conditions human life, and that this “shows the pope’s understanding of the mutuality in the relationship of the human person with the environment.”⁴⁸ Here, I contend that by including environmental concerns in his concept of integral development, Paul VI already set the stage for the full development of the concept of integral ecology, a principle which was to influence later papal and ecclesial teachings on integral human development that would include environmental care as an indispensable component.

In the same papal message to the Stockholm Conference, Pope Paul VI pointed out the positives as well as the ambivalence of the indiscriminate use of science and technology. Addressing the issue of industrialization, Paul VI stated that growing population from industry affects not only human health but also the well-being of animals and plants.⁴⁹ Following this teaching, the pope in applying the principle of intergenerational solidarity posited that human solidarity extended to the future, namely that the obligation to care for the earth includes that of assuring that future generations will inherit a habitable earth. This requires a change in lifestyle and moderation in the use of food and other resources of the earth.⁵⁰

In a nutshell, I contend that the contributions that the Holy See made to the Stockholm Conference could be summarized as follows. One, in a technological civilization, it is only when the human

⁴⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 21-22.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

person determines “to be more” rather than “to have more” that harmony between man and nature will be restored. Two, if care for the environment is set within the context of real development, adequate policies will be more easily determined on both national and international levels. Three, the developing countries must set for themselves their own model of development by taking into consideration how such developments impact on their cultures and environment. Four, the State of Vatican City is concerned for the environment on its territory and jurisdiction.⁵¹

In the period from after the Stockholm Conference ended in 1972 to the end of his papacy in 1978, Pope Paul VI issued no papal encyclicals or Apostolic Letters dealing directly with the environment. Nonetheless, he continued to give significant addresses to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences (PAS) which dealt with many aspects of the environment. For example, in teaching on the desalination of water, the pope’s concern was on the relationship between the lack of fresh water and its hindrance to development, an activity of the human person and the good of all humanity, including future generations as a form of love with regard to the care of the environment.⁵² According to the pope, “knowledge can help establish new relations with nature but can also lead to destruction of surroundings.”⁵³ Thus, in these addresses, the pope stressed that human intelligence must discover the secret possibility of nature and apply them to a development that is according to God’s plan.⁵⁴

Beyond these teachings above, Pope Paul VI also made repeated calls for a new lifestyle that excluded excessive consumption and embraced a sense of solidarity and the common good.⁵⁵

According to Keenan, by teaching in this way, both Paul VI and representatives of the Holy See

⁵¹ Ibid., 22-23.

⁵² Ibid., 23.

⁵³ Ibid., 24.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

were not oblivious to the members of the Church whose religious beliefs and obligation to care for the earth was missing in their catechetical instructions and the fact that the radicality of certain ecological movements also did not help integration of belief and action. Thus, for Keenan, the pope's teachings made important attempts to place a lot of emphasis not only on what was happening to the environment, but more importantly, on the need for environmental action.⁵⁶

In the years following the end of Pope Paul VI's papacy, John Paul II, who succeeded Paul VI as well as Benedict XVI who would succeed John Paul II in 2005, continued to address the topic of the environment in their encyclicals and other documents and in some of their papal addresses to the Church and the world at large. In what follows below, I shall offer a historical and theological review of the ecological teachings of the popes who succeeded Paul VI, starting with John Paul II.

1.3 Environmental Care in the Social Encyclicals and Other Teachings of Pope John Paul II (1978-2005)

Following Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II (1978-2005) also addressed the issue of the environment in several of his papal addresses and documents. It is significant to note that very early on in his pontificate, John Paul II emphasized that care of the environment was a question that could no longer be ignored. Thus, in his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis* ("The Redeemer of Mankind"), issued just a year into his papacy in 1979, John Paul II addressed the care of the environment and related the doctrines of creation and redemption to present-day environmental problems. He stated that "the creation that God saw as "very good" has been "subjected to futility" through sin and is still waiting to be set free. The signs of this subjugation include the threat of pollution of the natural environment in areas of rapid industrialization and extraordinary conquests

⁵⁶ Ibid., 25.

in science and technology.”⁵⁷ Teaching that Jesus Christ is the Redeemer and center of the universe and of history, the pope also posited that redemption as a new creation reflects both the human and the universe, and that disordered relations lead to the exploitation of the earth while uncontrolled technology threatens the natural environment.⁵⁸ For John Paul II also, “it is the Creator’s will that the human person should communicate with nature as an intelligent “master” and “guardian”, not as an “exploiter” and “destroyer”.⁵⁹ Thus, according to him, “there is fundamental need for “solicitude by man for man, for his humanity and for the future of people on earth.”⁶⁰

In the encyclical, *Laborem Exercens* (“On the Conditions of Human Labour”) which he issued in 1981, John Paul II also addressed the question of the environment by teaching that a correct understanding of work is essential to a proper relationship of the human person to the rest of creation.⁶¹ In applying the principle of the common good to the use of the earth’s resources, the pope argued among others that, “If all are called to subdue the earth, work is part of the human person’s very existence. Through work, human beings reflect the action of the Creator of the universe, and the “subduing” of the earth becomes a participation in God’s activity”.⁶² I argue that as a document, *Laborem Exercens* addresses broadly the subject of human work. In it, John Paul II teaches that, “Work must be directed toward the good of the individual, family and society. For this reason, the human person must learn the deepest meaning and value of all creation, for

⁵⁷ Ibid., 27-28. Also, Encyclical of John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis* (“The Redeemer of Mankind”), issued on March 2, 1979. RH # 8.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 28, Also, RH # 11.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid. Also, RH # 15.

⁶¹ John Paul II issued the encyclical, *Laborem Exercens*, on September 14, 1981, to celebrate the ninetieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. According to Patricia A. Lamoreaux, this third encyclical of John Paul II’s pontificate offered the most comprehensive treatment of human work in the corpus of Catholic Social Teaching. See Patricia Lamoreaux, “Commentary on *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Work)” in Kenneth Himes (Ed.). *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries & Interpretations* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 389-390.

⁶² Encyclical of John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* (September 14, 1981). LE # 4.

respectful approach to nature will lead to greater harmony and equilibrium with nature.”⁶³ Here, the pope stresses that human work can be an avenue to enhance solidarity with God, neighbour and non-human creation, themes which later in Pope Francis’ ecological teachings, would be expressed through the principle now known as *integral ecology*.⁶⁴

In 1987, John Paul II also published the encyclical, *Sollicitudo rei Socialis* (“On Social Concerns”) which focused on the nature of authentic development and its moral character.⁶⁵ In this encyclical, the pope discussed the need for individuals and communities to have full respect for the nature of the human person whose origin and goal are found in God. In a specific way, the pope talked about the urgency of the need to care for the environment if the people of the earth are to enjoy true development.⁶⁶ According to him, “the positive signs of caring for the environment included a greater realization of the limits of available resources, the need to respect the integrity and the cycles of nature and to take these into account in development planning.”⁶⁷

Additionally, in *Sollicitudo rei Socialis*, John Paul II also taught that, “One cannot use with impunity the different categories of beings, whether living or inanimate – animals, plants, the natural elements – simply as one pleases but one must take into account the nature of each being and its mutual connection in an ordered system which is precisely the cosmos.”⁶⁸ Besides, the pope stated that, “Natural resources are limited, and some are non-renewable. Therefore, if we treat natural resources as inexhaustible and use them with absolute dominion, we seriously endanger

⁶³ LE # 25.

⁶⁴ The whole of the Chapter 4 of Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’* is devoted to a discussion on integral ecology. I will examine this subject matter further when I discuss *Laudato Si’* later in this chapter.

⁶⁵ Turkson, Lecture on *Integral Ecology*, 5. The encyclical *Sollicitudo rei Socialis* was issued by John Paul II on 30 December 1987 to mark the 20th anniversary of the encyclical, *Populorum Progressio* of Pope Paul VI published in 1967. For full commentary on this encyclical, see Kenneth Himes (Ed.). *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries & Interpretations* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 415-435.

⁶⁶ Turkson, 5. Keenan 28-29. Also, SRS # 29.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 5-6. Also, SRS # 26.

⁶⁸ Keenan, 29. Also, SRS # 34.

their availability in our own time and for future generations.”⁶⁹ It is worthy of note here that the pope combines instrumental use of the earth’s resources, that is, we use the resources of the earth for our work, while at the same time emphasizing their intrinsic value, that is, their nature and mutual connection in an ordered system. This implies that even though humans have the right to the use of the resources of the earth, they should always be mindful of the fact that nature has an intrinsic value that goes beyond their utility and therefore take care not to reduce nature solely to their utilitarian value. When this is done, it will lead to a greater stewardship and care of creation. Furthermore, the pope drew attention to the effects of the sort of development that causes pollution of the environment with serious consequences for the health of populations. Here, the pope stressed that “development and industrialization must respect limits in the use of the natural world and impact on the environment,” for “when man refuses to submit to the rule of God, nature rebels against him, and no longer recognizes him as its “master.””⁷⁰ I contend that in the above ecological teaching of John Paul II, the pope made use of the principle of intergenerational solidarity by emphasising the need for due consideration to be given to future generations of people in the use of the earth’s resources by the current generation.

In 1991, John Paul II published the encyclical, *Centesimus Annus* (“On the Hundredth Year”) to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of Pope Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum*.⁷¹ In this encyclical, John Paul II addressed social and economic questions mainly, but he also offered significant teachings on the care of the environment. The pope taught in this encyclical that “when man makes

⁶⁹ Ibid, 37. Also, SRS # 34.

⁷⁰ Turkson, 6. Also, SRS 30. Cardinal Peter Turkson argues that in *Sollicitudo rei Socialis*, there is a clear message from John Paul II that the demand of morality is a sine qua non for the well-being of both the environment and humanity.

⁷¹ For full commentary on this encyclical, see Daniel Finn, “Commentary on *Centesimus annus* (On the Hundredth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*)” in Kenneth Himes (Ed.). *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries & Interpretations* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 436-466.

arbitrary use of the earth and subject it without restraint to his will, man sets himself up in place of God. When this happens, the outcome is a rebellion on the part of nature which is more tyrannized than properly governed by him.”⁷² In addition, John Paul II noted that “the emergence of consumerism in advanced economies is damaging the environment. Because of the desire “to have” and “to enjoy” rather than “to be” and “to grow,” persons are actually consuming the resources of the earth in a disordered and excessive way.”⁷³ Thus, according to the pope, the root cause of consumerism in the West which was leading to environmental damage is an anthropological error because humans instead of carrying their role as cooperators with God in the work of creation, set themselves up in place of God, and by so doing, they end up provoking a rebellion by nature.⁷⁴ Based on this understanding, John Paul II stressed that lifestyle changes have to be made so as to limit waste of human and natural resources so that all people may have sufficient share of them.⁷⁵

In addition to these four above-mentioned social encyclicals in which Pope John Paul II addressed the topic of the environment in major teachings, the pope also examined the ecological question in many addresses he gave and documents he issued between the year 1984 and 2005. For example, in his Apostolic Letter, *Amici Delecti*, issued in 1985 to the youth of the world to mark the occasion of the United Nations’ proclamation of the *International Year of the Youth*, John Paul II exhorted the world’s youth to learn to read the “book of nature.”⁷⁶ He said, “Today, the human person is the exploiter of nature. Yet, nature was given for admiration and contemplation. It is a mirror reflecting

⁷² Turkson, 7. Also, Encyclical, *Centesimus Annus* of Pope John Paul II (May 1, 1991), CA # 37.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 7. Also, CA # 37.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* Also, CA # 37.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* Also CA # 52. Here, Turkson teaches that the things that God has created are for us and our use. However, these created things must be used in a responsible way for mankind is not the master but steward of creation.

⁷⁶ Keenan, 30. Also, Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II, *Amici Delecti* (31 March 1985). AD # 4.

the covenant of all of creation, centered in the human person, with the Creator.”⁷⁷ Here, Keenan posits that for Pope John Paul II, the urgency of the ecological message was that “the human person bore a moral responsibility for the environment and that this responsibility for the environment implied that the human person should learn and accept the will of God for the earth and do all he can to play their part in realizing this will of God.”⁷⁸ According to Keenan also, John Paul II explained God’s plan for the world in two ways, namely, that God does not will evil nor disorder nor the destruction of nature; He created the world to be habitable, to be good, beautiful, and harmonious; and that God is love and He intends the world to bear a reflection of His love.⁷⁹

In 1990 also, John Paul II once again addressed the topic of the care of the environment in his World Day of Peace Message, titled, *Peace with God, Peace with All Creation*. It is significant to note that even though papal Messages had been given by his predecessor on January 1 every year since 1968 to celebrate the World Day of Peace, John Paul II was the first to use his Message to address specifically the subject of the care of the environment.⁸⁰ In this Message, John Paul II postulated that peace is a question of harmony, namely, relations with God, with others and with creation. According to him, “In our day, there is a growing awareness that world peace is threatened not only by the arms race, regional conflicts and continued injustices among peoples and nations, but also by lack of *due respect for nature*, by the plundering of natural resources and by a progressive decline in the quality of life.”⁸¹ For the pope, “Faced with the widespread destruction of the environment, people everywhere are coming to understand that we cannot

⁷⁷ Ibid., 30. Also, AD 14.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 30-31.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 31.

⁸⁰ Keenan, *Modern Catholic Social Teaching*, 39-40. John Paul II, Message for World Day of Peace (1 January 1990), titled, *Peace with God, Peace with all Creation*, accessed online at http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html, on April 21, 2021.

⁸¹ Ibid., 40. Also, 1990 WDP # 1.

continue to use the goods of the earth as we have in the past. The new ecological awareness emerging should not be downplayed but encouraged into concrete programmes and initiatives ... There is the need for carefully coordinated solutions based on a morally coherent worldview.”⁸² Here, John Paul II teaches about respect for creation arguing that adopting such an attitude towards creation is one way of safeguarding the environment from harm as well as living in peace and right relations with God and with others. Pope Francis will later define this teaching broadly as integral ecology in his encyclical *Laudato Si*.⁸³

In the same Message, John Paul II addressed the link between the destruction of the earth and the restoration brought by the resurrection of Christ by teaching that “after creating a good world, God entrusted the whole of creation to the man and woman, and only then could he rest “from all his work” (*Gen. 2:3*). After the sin of Adam and Eve led to the destruction of existing harmony between God, men and women, creation is restored by the death and resurrection of Christ who accomplished the work of reconciliation.”⁸⁴ Besides, John Paul II also linked the increasing devastation of the earth to the callous disregard for the requirements of the laws of order and harmony that govern nature, emphasizing that the destruction of the environment is but one troubling aspect of the profound moral crisis which afflicts humanity.”⁸⁵

Pope John Paul II also addressed the subject of the use of land in this Message, applying the principle of intergenerational solidarity to teach that “the land is a gift of God and also the work of the human person. The gift must be used for the good of all and not the advantage of a few.”⁸⁶

Besides addressing the use of the land in this teaching, John Paul II also addressed the issue of

⁸² 1990 WDP # 1-2.

⁸³ Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si*’ (May 2015), LS # 66.

⁸⁴ 1990 WDP # 3-4.

⁸⁵ 1990 WDP # 5.

⁸⁶ 1990 WDP # 8, 14.

modern scientific and technological development and its relation to the environment. According to him, the advancement of science and technology is good but is a cause of increasing fragility. Therefore, ethics must take priority over science, an ethics that takes into consideration all parts of the planet. Similarly, a technology that aims only at profit is not respectful of the environment.⁸⁷

In offering some solutions to the environmental crisis in the world, the pope called for a respectful attitude towards nature by emphasising that “respect for nature favours peace and that peace can only be achieved when human beings are reconciled with each other and with the natural universe.”⁸⁸ According to him, “Peace in society also applies to the promotion of sound and healthy environment and so the need for carefully coordinated solutions based on a morally coherent worldview.”⁸⁹ In applying the principle of stewardship and care of creation, the pope also argued that, “Care for the environment is not an option; it forms an integral part of personal life and of life in society. Not to care for the environment is to ignore the Creator’s plan for all of creation and results in the alienation of the human person”.⁹⁰ In all, for John Paul II, the ecological challenges in the world, including climate change, depletion of ozone layer, deforestation, desertification and toxic waste, can be corrected through education to a new and respectful attitude towards the environment and rational use of the earth’s resources.⁹¹

In summary, I contend that John Paul II’s teachings on the environment in his Message to mark the 1990 *World Day of Peace* stressed the theological principle defined today as integral ecology when the pope taught that care for the environment is a moral obligation closely related to a person’s relationship both to God and to the natural world, and that the promotion of a sound

⁸⁷ 1990 WDP # 7. See also Keenan, 41.

⁸⁸ 1990 WDP # 7

⁸⁹ 1990 WDP # 9.

⁹⁰ 1990 WDP # 5.

⁹¹ 1990 WDP # 13. See also Keenan, 41.

environment for all should be a crucial factor in development programmes.⁹² Thus, for John Paul II, there was an important relationship between the Creator and creation, human beings and nature which is about the principle of integral ecology even though Pope Francis expands this to include the link between environmental and social problems, the cry of the earth and that of the poor.⁹³ Also, the pope used his message to address the proper use of science and technology so that the delicate balance of the ecosystems is not disturbed, the control of emissions that damage the ozone layer is followed, the need for rational use of natural resources as well as the need for great caution to be exercised regarding any form of genetic manipulation or the development of new forms of plant and animal life. According to Keenan, the pope taught that these ethical norms must be upheld to ensure integrity of creation.⁹⁴

Furthermore, Pope John Paul II talked about mutual interdependence and intergenerational solidarity by stressing that the few cannot destroy the environment or exhaust its resources for their own benefit while the masses lived in misery. According to him, since care of the environment and integral development of all peoples and societies were closely related, a new solidarity was called for that considered not only the needs of all peoples but also the protection of the environment in view of the good of all.⁹⁵ Thus, for John Paul II, “a consumer society of instant gratification weakens the moral fiber of persons and societies and leads to a type of social selfishness in which the needs of the other are ignored. Any education in ecological responsibility must include education to responsibility for others as well as the earth. In this regard, Churches, religious bodies, governments and NGOs have specific roles to play in this education”.⁹⁶

⁹² 1990 WDP # 7, 15. See also Keenan 40.

⁹³ LS # 49, 139.

⁹⁴ Keenan, 40.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 41.

⁹⁶ Ibid. Also, 1990 WDP # 13.

Also, Pope John Paul II was adamant that the promotion of healthy environment and that of peace were intimately linked. For him, wars and conflicts not only caused loss of lives but also brought about incalculable damage to the environment, that is, lands, crops, water sources, etc.⁹⁷ Reviewing John Paul II's 1990 *World Day of Peace Message*, Keenan avers that the pope highlighted two moral limits for the use of the goods of creation, namely, that no one may use nature against his own good or the good of others, including future generations; and that goods of the earth are entrusted to the human family and their use entails moral obligation.⁹⁸ According to Keenan also, John Paul II taught that God communicates himself through nature, winds, snowstorms, everything in nature, and that for the pope, the obligation to care for God's creation is all-embracing, for each person and all peoples.⁹⁹ Finally, in this Message, John Paul II taught that the ecological crisis was also a moral crisis that called for "ecological conversion" on the part of everyone.¹⁰⁰

Following the 1990 *World Day of Peace Message* in which John Paul II addressed the subject of the care of the environment, the next major teaching on the environment was the Vatican's Address at the United Nations' *Conference on Environment and Development*, held in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil in 1992, a meeting which also came to be known as the *Earth Summit* or the *Rio Conference*.¹⁰¹ The Holy See attended the Rio Conference led by Cardinal Angelo Sodano, then Secretary of State at the Vatican. Re-echoing the teachings of Paul VI and John Paul II, the

⁹⁷ Ibid., 43. Also, 1990 WDP # 11-12.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 52.

⁹⁹ Ibid.,

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 122. Also, 1990 WDP # 13.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 37. The United Nations *Conference on the Environment and Development* (UNCED) was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 3 to 14 June 1992. Known as the *Earth Summit*, the Summit agreed among others to develop a set of global sustainable development goals (SDGs) and to establish a high-level political forum on sustainable development. Information on Earth Summit accessed online at un.org/en/conferences/environment/rio/1992, on September 22, 2021.

Church's message at the Conference addressed the ethical aspects of development and care for the environment. Insisting on the centrality of the human person in relation to development and care of the environment, the Church taught about stewardship of creation by positing that,

the human person is the only creature in the world who is gifted with intelligence to explore, to utilize the earth's resources and is responsible for choices and its consequences ... Stewardship extends to all creation while the universal destination of goods includes not only natural resources but also those natural, spiritual, intellectual, and technological goods necessary for the integral development of all persons and peoples.¹⁰²

Besides the principle of stewardship of creation, another principle that the Church highlighted at the Rio *Earth Summit* was the option of the poor. Here, the Holy See emphasized the principle of preferential option for the poor by teaching that,

the world owes it a duty to respect the liberty and human dignity of all peoples as well as at their social, cultural and religious traditions. Accordingly, structural forms of poverty such as lack of employment, educational opportunities, adequate primary health care, must be addressed. The poor must not be singled out for population control because they are not the cause but victims of lack of development and ecological degradation.¹⁰³

In addition, the Holy See reiterated the teaching of John Paul II that the conservation of resources presupposes peace because wars are among the worst causes of environmental damage, lamenting the fact that "the environment is devastated and development thwarted by the outbreak of wars when internal conflicts destroy homes, fields and factories, when intolerable circumstances force millions of peoples desperately to seek refuge away from their lands ... when people's rights are abused. Peace is ultimately a question of the harmony of all creation."¹⁰⁴ According to the Holy See also, "the environmental question cut across almost all social problems and that care for all God's creation is a moral imperative, and the environmental issue is a component of every other

¹⁰² Ibid., 46.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 48.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 49.

social question.”¹⁰⁵ Again, the Holy See taught that “the human person remains the one responsible for the conscious care of creation, the goods of which are for all. Not only has God given the earth to man who must use it with respect for the original good purpose for which it was given to him, but man too is God’s gift to man. He must therefore respect the natural and moral structure with which he has been endowed.”¹⁰⁶

Following the Rio Conference, Pope John Paul II offered important teachings concerning the obligation on the part of humans to care for the earth in some of his other major papal encyclicals and Apostolic Exhortations he issued between 1995 and 2005, the pope. For example, in *Evangelium Vitae* (“The Gospel of Life”) which he issued in 1995, John Paul II focused on life in all its dimensions, including the care of the environment.¹⁰⁷ In this document, while the pope welcomed the growing global attention to ecology and quality of life, he also taught that the responsibility to defend and promote life, to show reverence and love for it includes the preservation of natural habitats of animals to “human ecology”.¹⁰⁸ Besides this, the pope also taught that, “As one called to till and look after the garden of the world (cf. Gn. 2:15), man has a specific responsibility towards *the environment in which he lives*, towards the creation which God has put at the service of his personal dignity, of his life, not only for the present but also for future generations.”¹⁰⁹

Additionally, John Paul II examined the ecological question in many of his Apostolic Exhortations. For example, in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in America*, issued in 1999, the pope spoke

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 50.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 53. Also, John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae* (25 March 1995). EV # 27, 35, 42.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 53-54. Also, EV # 27. John Paul II uses the term “human ecology” to stand for the inclusion of humans and their communities, institutions and civilisations when considering ecological, environmental and sustainability issues.

¹⁰⁹ EV # 42.

about the effects of globalization such as greater efficiency, increased productivity, economic links with different countries, but also, the laws of the market that bring negative results, including the destruction of the environment and natural resources.¹¹⁰ On environmental concern, Keenan postulates that John Paul II said the focus should be on responsibility and obligations and an openness to spiritual and ethical perspective capable of overcoming selfish attitudes and lifestyles which lead to the depletion of natural resources.¹¹¹ According to her, the pope taught that ecological abuse in the Americas, including emission of harmful gases and forest fires, can lead to desertification, hunger and misery and that the preservation of Amazon forest was vital because its biodiversity keeps the environmental balance of the whole planet.¹¹²

In *Ecclesia in Asia* published in 1998,¹¹³ John Paul II also taught that lack of concern for the balance of the ecosystem and disrespect for the environment will continue due to the earth being seen as an object for use and profit. As a remedy for this, the pope taught that Christians, together with all other people, must help restore a sense of reverence for the whole of God's creation.¹¹⁴ In his 2001 post-synodal Apostolic exhortation, *Ecclesia in Oceania*,¹¹⁵ the pope praised the region's great natural beauty and the fact that indigenous people still lived in harmony with nature and one another.¹¹⁶ The pope stated that the Aborigines are struggling to survive, almost losing their

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 55. Also, John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in America* (22 January 1999). EA # 20. The Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in America*, was issued on 22 January 1999 following the Synod of the Church in America which linked both North and South America. According to Keenan, this Synod was significant as it brought together peoples of different cultures, languages and historical political and economic contexts.

¹¹¹ Keenan, 55.

¹¹² Ibid., 55-56.

¹¹³ John Paul II published the post-synodal Apostolic Letter, *Ecclesia in Asia* on 6 November 1999, following the conclusion of the Special Asian Synod held in Rome from April 18 to May 14, 1998. Full text accessed online at http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_06111999_ecclesia-in-asia.html, on April 23, 2021.

¹¹⁴ Keenan, 56. Also, EA # 41.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. The Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Oceania*, was issued by John Paul II on November 22, 2001, following the Synod on the Church in Oceania.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

identity and culture and assured that the Church will support the cause of all indigenous peoples.¹¹⁷ In the same document, the pope listed various environmental problems, including deforestation, pollution of rivers through mining and overfishing, and fouling of fishing grounds with industrial and nuclear waste. According to the pope, these posed grave dangers for human health, arguing that, “Industry can also bring benefits if it respects the rights and cultures of the peoples and the integrity of the environment.”¹¹⁸ Thus, in all these diverse documents, John Paul II showed the importance of the environment within the corpus of Catholic social teaching, emphasising the centrality of the human person and the universal destination of goods, including those created by human activity.¹¹⁹

Additionally, John Paul II addressed the ecological question in some of his Apostolic Letters and in the Papal Bull, *Novo Millenio Inuente* issued after the celebration of the Great Jubilee in 2000.¹²⁰ In the 1994 Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millenio Adveniente*, John Paul II also mentioned that social questions regarding the poor and the vulnerable would feature in the Jubilee celebrations.¹²¹ According to Keenan, the attitude of the pope in this document was one of hope that gives meaning and value to life. For her, the signs of hope the pope offered included the mention of the immense progress in scientific, technological and medical fields; a greater awareness of human responsibility for the environment and efforts to restore peace and justice wherever they are

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. Also, EO # 31.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 57.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 58. Apostolic Letter of John Paul II, *Novo Millenio Inuente* (“At the Close of the Great Jubilee”) was issued on January 6, 2001. NMI # 51.

¹²¹ Ibid., 67. The Apostolic Letter, *Tertio Millenio Adveniente*, was issued by Pope John Paul II on November 10, 1994. TMA # 13.

violated.¹²² The pope also mentioned that care for the environment continues to be seen as essential element in the establishment of justice and peace in the world.¹²³

In his *Incarnationis Mysterium* announcing the Jubilee Year 2000 celebrations, John Paul II stressed that all must accept responsibility for the development of an economic model that serves the good of all.¹²⁴ Describing extreme poverty as a source of violence, bitterness and scandal, the pope explained that the Jubilee calls for a conversion of heart through change of life and he reminded all that the earth belongs to God and Him alone.¹²⁵ Then in *Novo Millenio Inuente*, issued after the Jubilee Year celebrations in 2001,¹²⁶ the pope explained that “the Jubilee must become an integral part of Christian life and that people should not remain indifferent to the ecological crisis making vast areas of the planet uninhabitable and hostile to humanity. The Christian heart must remain sensitive.”¹²⁷ Here, I contend that in calling for the human heart to be sensitive to the ecological crisis in the world, the pope was referencing his earlier calls for “ecological conversion” of Christians in order to help protect and safeguard creation.

In 2002, that is, exactly ten years after the *Earth Summit* was held in Rio, Pope John Paul II continued with his teachings on the environment by collaborating with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of the Orthodox Church of Constantinople to issue a joint statement on the environment. Titled, *Common Declaration of John Paul II and Patriarch Bartholomew on Environmental Ethics*, this document was signed at Venice in Italy by these two global religious

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid. John Paul II, *Incarnationis Mysterium*, Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, IM # 12.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 68. Also, IM 12.

¹²⁶ Ibid. *Novo Millenio Inuente*, NMI # 50-51.

¹²⁷ Ibid. Also, NMI # 13.

leaders on June 10, 2002, to bring the attention of the world to ecological issues and to promote the care of the environment across the globe.¹²⁸

In the *Introduction* to the document, John Paul II and Patriarch Bartholomew looked at the role of human persons in cooperating with God to realize the divine purpose for creation. Among others, the two global religious leaders posited that, “We are also concerned about the negative consequences for humanity and for all creation resulting from the degradation of some basic natural resources such as water, air and land, brought about by an economic and technological progress which does not recognize and take into account its limits.”¹²⁹ According to them,

Human beings have been placed by God in the world in order to cooperate with Him in realizing more and more fully the divine purpose for creation. Through sin, we have betrayed and still betraying the mandate God has given us: to be stewards called to collaborate with God in watching over creation in holiness and wisdom. What is required is an act of repentance on our part and a renewed attempt to view ourselves, one another, and the world around us within the perspective of the divine design for creation ...¹³⁰

Thus, the ecological problem is not simply economic and technological; it is also a moral and spiritual crisis which called for the conversion of the human heart. While teaching that human sin had led to the current ecological crisis, the two global religious leaders nevertheless remained optimistic that humans were capable of resolving the global ecological crisis. They postulated that even though human beings have thus far failed to be faithful stewards of creation as intended by God, the growth in “ecological awareness” was encouraging. This is because many people are now beginning to acknowledge that they have a responsibility towards self, others and creation.¹³¹ Thus,

¹²⁸ Ibid., 149-152. Full text of the *Venice Declaration* accessed online at <http://www.vatican.va-speeches-june-documents>, on April 20, 2021. According to Keenan, the *Declaration* was to be offered for consideration to the participants at the Johannesburg Conference on environment later that year. Keenan posits that on the whole, the document was a teaching about responsibility towards self, others and creation. See Keenan, 73.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 149. Also, *Common Declaration* 2002, para. 1.

¹³⁰ Ibid. Also, *Common Declaration* 2002, para. 2.

¹³¹ Ibid. Also, *Common Declaration* 2002, para. 4.

for the two leaders, the growing ecological awareness needed to be deepened in order to deal with the world's ecological crisis. They also emphasized another solution to the environmental crisis in the world, namely, a radical change of heart that will lead to changes in lifestyle and unsustainable patterns of consumption and production in the world.¹³²

The importance of the 2002 *Venice Declaration* to the Church's ecological teachings are to be found in the *Conclusion* of the document where Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Bartholomew offered six *Ethical Goals and Principles* for the care of the earth. These are: 1. the invitation of all people across the globe to think of the world's children when considering their options for ecological action; 2. The need to be open to study the true values that sustain every human culture; 3. The need to use science and technology constructively, evaluating it in the light of the centrality of the human person, the common good and the inner purpose of creation; 4. The need to be humble regarding ownership and open to the demands of solidarity; 5. The need to acknowledge the diversity of situations and responsibilities in working for a better world environment; 6. The need to promote a peaceful approach to disagreements on how to live on this earth and about how to share and use its resources.¹³³

In summary, I contend that if the ecological teachings contained in the *Venice Common Declaration* are taken seriously by all Christians and all other people of this world, it could represent a solid basis or foundation for an environmental code of ethics that will be acceptable to a broad range of people across the world, and subsequently, contribute to the care of the environment.

¹³² Ibid. Also, *Common Declaration* 2002, para. 6.

¹³³ Ibid., 151-152.

Apart from addressing the ecological question broadly in his encyclicals, Apostolic Exhortations and some major addresses, John Paul II also spent some time examining various specific questions relating to the environment. For example, reflecting on the question of population and how population growth relates to the environment, John Paul II taught that “population is not the primary cause of environmental degradation but rather the consumption of the North and related abuse of the environment.”¹³⁴ “While some countries show massive population increase, others show dwindling ageing population. The latter, with their high level of consumption, are most responsible for the pollution of the environment.”¹³⁵ On the same population question, the pope further posited that the Church’s position was for responsible parenthood, including the right and responsibility of spouses to decide family size and spacing of births, without external pressures.¹³⁶ Teaching in this way, the pope thus affirmed that the ecological crisis is not simply the consequence of population growth but rather consumerism, particularly on the part of Western countries, an attitude which needed to change in view of the care of the earth and its resources.

Addressing the question of food production, John Paul II taught that even though there is a sufficient production capacity, people were dying from hunger across the world, sometimes because their peace and security are not guaranteed, but at other times because the goods of the earth are not shared in a rational way. He explained that sound food production requires access to land and the protection of the rights of the agricultural worker to guarantee sufficient food for all¹³⁷ Pope John Paul II also addressed the issue of the supply of fresh water across the world in his visit

¹³⁴ Keenan, *From Stockholm to Johannesburg*, 47.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.

to the Sahel and also in his 1993 Lenten Message where he made references to Jesus' teachings on water and thirst."¹³⁸ Here, the pope taught that,

Water is essential to life. Desertification and pollution of water cause lack of water. Rain patterns seem to be changing because of uncontrolled industrial development. Solutions will include cooperation and generous support of agencies in the water sector. Oceania people should take stewardship of the Pacific Ocean that contains over half of the earth's total supply of water seriously. There is the obvious link between adequate water supply and development.¹³⁹

Additionally, John Paul II addressed the challenges caused by chemical hazards, by teaching that the danger of pollution from the production and use of chemicals is a problem which mostly affects developing countries that do not have the necessary regulations and infrastructure in place to assure safety in this field.¹⁴⁰ For the pope, it is a serious abuse and an offence against human solidarity when industrial enterprises in the richer countries profit from the economic and legislative weaknesses of poorer countries to locate production plants or accumulate waste which will have a degrading effect on the environment and on people's health.¹⁴¹ According to him, the solution is not to deny developing countries imports and technology they need, and which often have to do with food production, but for the West to always consider the ethical and moral character of development.¹⁴²

Beside the issue of chemical hazards, John Paul II also examined the relation between war and the environment. Here, he taught that violence, war and internal conflicts affect the environment, especially the land. For the pope, "Wars are among the worst causes of environmental damage ..."

This is because when wars break out, the environment is devastated and no longer suitable for food

¹³⁸ Ibid., 60.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 61.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

production. Also, development is thwarted by the outbreak of wars when internal conflicts destroy homes, fields and factories and when intolerable circumstances force millions of people desperately to seek refuge away from their lands.¹⁴³ Thus, for the pope, there is certain co-relation between wars and ecological damage and therefore, to protect the environment, peace was to be considered a prerequisite.

In 1985, when John Paul II paid a visit to the UN Offices in Nairobi, Kenya, he affirmed that care of the environment is a serious question for the Church because of its link to God's command to have dominion over all things.¹⁴⁴ During this occasion, John Paul II taught that, "Man ought to exercise this dominion in a way that serves the human family, not only immediate needs but also those of future generations must be taken into account in using the resources of the earth ... Science and technology as well as material and economic development should not determine the future, but the human person, communities and nations coming together should."¹⁴⁵ Applying the principle of solidarity in relation to the ecological question, John Paul II encouraged transfer of appropriate technology and training of local people in the use of it."¹⁴⁶ Here, I argue that the teaching of John Paul II his 1985 visit to Nairobi underscored the importance of global approach to the environment because of the global nature of the environmental crisis.¹⁴⁷ For Pope John Paul II, "Any attempt that ignores the solidarity that binds the human person to the environment or the necessity of a universal concern for the needs of all peoples will lead to further imbalances. Development cannot take place independently of human's relationship to the environment."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ Ibid., 48-49.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 31.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 31-32.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 32.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

In summary, it must be emphasised that in Pope John Paul II's ecological teachings, the principles of stewardship and care of creation, intergenerational solidarity, common good and integral ecology were important theological principles. John Paul II emphasised that care for creation is an obligation for all because it was created for all. Thus, according to him, "We must encourage "ecological conversion" ... With this conversion, the original harmony would be rediscovered: the goods of the earth would be available to all, not just a privileged few. In caring for creation, all will live in dignity and in beauty: the beauty of the harmony of a creation that is finally at peace."¹⁴⁹

From all these ecological teachings above, I contend that there is sufficient evidence to show that as pope, Pope John Paul II considered the issue of the environment as one of his primary concerns. As such, he devoted much time and energy not only to discussing the various aspects of the ecological question in several of his encyclicals, exhortations and major addresses, but also in encouraging the world to embrace the renewed works of caring for the environment. In a very practical demonstration of his care and concern for the environment, he established the *John Paul II Foundation for the Sahel* which continues today to promote the care of the environment in the areas where it operates.¹⁵⁰ Based on these major teachings on the environment in various documents and at various times, I postulate that Pope John Paul II greatly expanded the Church's Social Thought on the ecological question. I argue further that his teachings plus those of his

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 75.

¹⁵⁰ According to McKibben, John Paul II set up the *John Paul II Foundation for the Sahel* following his visit to Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso in his first tour to Africa as part of his tour of six nations of the western Sahel. The Foundation was the pope's response to the famine, suffering and desertification due to the encroaching Sahara Desert as well as his ecological vision. It was to help deal with the realities of the environmental degradation and climate change, poverty and hunger and suffering of the people there. Today, the Foundation awards grants awarded to Sahel-based community organizations, NGOs, institutions and government programs to undertake reforestation and training in sustainable agriculture, sharing of technical knowledge and engineering, the education of youth and women, installation of water pumps powered by solar panels, native tree planting for biodiversity, fruits, oil, soil erosion prevention, community schools for girls, etc. See Marybeth Lorbiecki, *Following St. Francis: John Paul II's Call for Ecological Action* (New York, NY: Rizzoli ex libris, 2014), 91-92

immediate predecessor served as the catalyst that led to the Church's broad and expansive teachings about the environment in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* which was published in 2004 under John Paul II's guidance and patronage.¹⁵¹

1.4 Ecological Teachings in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004)

In the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, the ecological question was addressed comprehensively in Chapter Ten of the document, under the title, *Safeguarding the Environment*. Teaching from the biblical perspectives, the *Compendium* articulates that “the living presence of the divine presence in history is the foundation of the faith of Israel, the people of God (Deut. 6:21, 26:5, Jos. 24:3). This faith of Israel is lived out in the space and time of this world perceived as gift which He entrusts to the responsible management and activity of man. Nature is the work of God's creative action. It is God who made all things which He saw to be good (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25).¹⁵² According to the *Compendium*,

At the summit of creation, He (God) placed man and entrusted all of creation to his responsibility, charging the to care for it. Thus, the relationship of man with the world is a constitutive part of his human identity which is the result of his relationship with God. God has entrusted the “garden” of the earth to man to till and keep (Gen. 2:15). This duty is wounded by sin and is redeemed by the coming of Jesus Christ who speaks of nature in parables (Matt. 6: 28; Lk. 12:6, 22), dominates it and puts it at the service of his plan of redemption. Nature which was created in the Word is by the same Word made flesh, reconciled to God and given new peace (Col. 1:15-20).¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ According to Lawrence A. Honny, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, which was published in 2004, presents details of the Catholic Social Doctrine. Bringing together the great contributions of the encyclicals and other writings, the document sets out the Church's concepts of God, man and creation, and within that context, addresses man's relationship with God, his purpose, rights, responsibilities and social nature. It condenses the knowledge and teachings of the papal and social encyclicals, the Catechism and the *Magisterium* (the teaching authority of the Church) into an authoritative discourse of social doctrine. Within these teachings, the *Compendium* gives the Catholic Church's broad and comprehensive perspectives and traditions on the care of the environment. For more, see Lawrence A. Honny, *Catholic Social Doctrine at a Glance: Principles, Message and Impact on Development* (Legon, Accra: Adwinsa Publications, 2016), 28-31.

¹⁵² Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2005), page 244.

¹⁵³ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, page 244.

From the above teaching, the *Compendium* affirms that creation was given into the hands of humans for their stewardship and care, “to till and keep” the “garden” of the earth (Gen. 2:15) but the failure to undertake this duty responsibly has resulted in ecological crisis. As a result of this, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has come to redeem and restore “all creation.” Thus, for the *Compendium*, “The whole of creation participates in the renewal flowing from the Lord’s Paschal Mystery as it awaits full liberation from corruption (Rom. 8:19-23), in expectation of giving birth to a “new heaven and earth” (Rev. 21:1).”¹⁵⁴ I argue that this teaching re-echoes previous teachings of Pope John Paul II in his 1979 encyclical letter, *Redemptor Hominis*, in which the pope spoke about the fact that Jesus’ redemption includes all of creation and not only human beings.¹⁵⁵ Teaching further on the relationship between man and the universe, the *Compendium* posited that,

the biblical teaching inspires Christian relationship with the use of the earth and with regard to advances in science and technology. With the aid of the intellect, science and technology, man continues to exercise mastery over creation. This exercise of mastery is a sign of God’s grace and the flowering of the mysterious design. Yet, the greater his mastery becomes, the greater his responsibility which he must exercise in accordance with God’s will.¹⁵⁶

Additionally, the *Compendium* spoke about the use or application of science and technology in harnessing the resources of the creation. It articulated that “the Church appreciates the advantages that result from science and technology – tools for solving hunger, diseases, the production of valuable medicines. Yet, proper application is important so that they remain in service of humanity in respect of the dignity of man and woman accompanied by a necessary attitude of respect for the living creatures.”¹⁵⁷ Accordingly, the document maintained that,

biological research that leads to indiscriminate manipulation needs to be guarded against as harmful effects affect the ecosystem and well-being of future generations. Man must therefore never forget that “his capacity to transform and in

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., page 244-245.

¹⁵⁵ John Paul II, RH # 11, 57.

¹⁵⁶ *Compendium*, page 246.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., para. 457, page 247.

a certain sense create the world through his own work ... is always based on God's prior gift of the things that are. He must not make arbitrary use of the earth but always cooperate with God in the work of creation with the full force of his intelligence.¹⁵⁸

Examining the crisis in the relationship between man and the environment, the *Compendium* also taught that, "The desire for conquest and exploitation of resources is threatening to turn the environment as a home to an environment as a resource. Nature is reduced to just an instrument in man's hands that he must constantly manipulate by means of technology. This reductionist conception sees the natural world in mechanistic terms and development as consumerism. Instead of being, the focus is doing and technocratic ideologies of the day."¹⁵⁹ Thus, in the teachings of the *Compendium*, a correct understanding of the environment is one that prevents the utilitarian reduction of nature and not absolutize nature and place it above the human person.¹⁶⁰ It teaches that it is the relationship that man has with God which determines his relationship with his fellow men and with his environment. Thus, the document postulates that because of God, there is an intimate connection between environmental ecology and human ecology. Man has responsibility for the preservation of a sound and healthy environment for all.¹⁶¹

Furthermore, the *Compendium* taught that the environment is a common good. Here, it noted that forests such as the Amazon help maintain essential natural *balance* necessary for life while their destruction also through the inconsiderate and deliberate setting of fires accelerates the processes of deforestation and desertification with risky consequences for water reserves and compromises the lives of indigenous peoples and future generations.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., para. 459-460, pages 248-249.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., para. 461-462, pages 249-250.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., para 463, page 250

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.,

In addition to the principle of the earth as a common good, the *Compendium* further taught about stewardship and care of creation by postulating that men and women of the world owe to creation a common responsibility of care. According to the document, “care for the environment is a matter of common and universal duty, that of respecting a common good, preventing anyone from using it with impunity, simply as one wishes according to one’s own economic needs. The global dimension of the ecological crisis must necessitate a global action to address it.”¹⁶³ Teaching that the world is one big cosmos in the shape of an ecosystem, it further emphasized that all individuals and institutional subjects must feel commitment to protect and promote adequate programs of reforestation, for “Responsibility for the environment is an exercise of intergenerational solidarity.”¹⁶⁴ For the *Compendium*, the principle of intergenerational solidarity is important in humanity’s care for the environment because we inherit from past generations what we have, and we have a responsibility to use what we inherit to meet present needs and those of the future generations who will come after us.

In order to encourage the care of the environment as a collective good, the *Compendium* taught further that, “Responsibility for the environment should find adequate expression on a juridical level. It is important that the international community draws up uniform rules that will allow States to enact laws that protect the environment and ecosystems and prevent destruction of the atmosphere and biosphere ... The juridical content should be one that promotes “the right to a safe and healthy environment”.¹⁶⁵ Similarly, the document emphasized that “when the environmental evaluations are uncertain, the *precautionary principle* which aims at applying rules by setting guidelines to manage the uncertain situation must applied. The precautionary principle

¹⁶³ Ibid., para 466, page 252.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., para. 466, page 252.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., para. 468, page 253.

acknowledges the need to obtain more knowledge and information.”¹⁶⁶ In addition, the document taught that,

programmes of economic development must carefully consider the need to respect the integrity and the cycles of nature because natural resources are limited, and some are not renewable. Solutions to the ecological crisis require that economic activity respects the environment. Every economic activity making use of natural resources must also be concerned with safeguarding the environment while foreseeing the costs involved. An economic activity respectful of the environment will not have the maximization of profits as its only objective because the environment is a good that cannot be safeguarded and or promoted by market forces. Countries should seek innovative ways to reduce the environmental impact of production and consumption of goods.¹⁶⁷

In applying the principle of solidarity to the use of biotechnology, the document called for the promotion of equitable exchange of biotechnology, especially to promote development of poor peoples in the spirit of solidarity. It stated that, “Solidarity also means appealing to the responsibility of developing countries and in particular, their political leaders, to promote trade policies that are favourable to their peoples and exchange of technology that can improve the conditions of their food supply and health.”¹⁶⁸ It also encouraged scientists and technicians in the field of biotechnology “to work intelligently and with perseverance in seeking the best solutions to the serious and urgent problems of food supply and health care. It is hoped that scientists would employ their energies and abilities in research characterized by enthusiasm and guided by clear and honest conscience.”¹⁶⁹

The document also taught that the environment is a common good. While articulating the teaching of the Social Doctrine of the Church that the goods of the earth are created by God to be used by all, the *Compendium* emphasized that the resources of the earth must be shared equitably, in

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., para. 469, page 253.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., para. 470, page 254.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., para. 476, page 257.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., para. 477, page 258.

accordance with justice and charity. For the *Compendium*, the modern ecological problems are of a planetary dimension and can only be resolved through international cooperation capable of guaranteeing greater coordination in the use of the earth's resources.¹⁷⁰

The *Compendium* also taught about the principle of the universal destination of goods by arguing that "today's environmental crisis and poverty are resolved by the principle of universal destination of goods."¹⁷¹ According to the document, the principle of the universal destination of goods also applies naturally to water, a symbol of purification (Ps. 51:4; Jn 13:8) and of life (Jn. 3:5; Gal. 3:27). Reiterating the earlier teachings of *Lumen Gentium* and Pope John Paul II on the principle of the universal destination of goods, the document emphasized that "the goods of the earth were created by God to be used by all in accordance with justice and charity."¹⁷²

Finally, the *Compendium* taught about the need to view the earth with awe, wonder and respect and to adopt new lifestyles in order to address the global ecological crisis. To this end, the document explained that the global ecological crisis calls for effective change in mentality and the adoption of new lifestyles where our consumer choices, savings and investments are shaped by the quest for truth, beauty, goodness, communion with others and the common good.¹⁷³ Accordingly, it postulated that,

Our lifestyle should be inspired by sobriety, temperance and self-discipline. We should break with the logic of mere consumption and promote agriculture and industrial production that respects the order of creation ... The attitude that must characterize the way man acts in relation to creation is essentially one of gratitude and appreciation; the world in fact reveals the mystery of God who created it and sustains it.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., para. 481-482, page 259.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., para 481-482, page 259.

¹⁷² Ibid., para 481-484, pages 259-260. See LG # 36. Also, CA #37, 52.

¹⁷³ Ibid., para 481-484, pages 259-260.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., para. 486-487, pages 261-262.

In summary, from the examination of the ecological teachings of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, I argue that the main theological principles articulated by the document to ground its ecological teachings are the earth as a common good, stewardship and care of creation, solidarity, intergenerational solidarity and the universal destination of goods. I argue further that these ecological teachings of the document on the relationship between God, man and nature and the issues of justice and charity in this relationship, in many ways mirrored the theological understanding we have today of the relationship between the degradation of the earth and that of the poor, that the cry of the earth and that of the poor are related. This is because according to the teachings of the *Compendium*, how we use the goods of the earth also show how we treat one another. Thus, if we use the goods of the earth as God intended, we do so in accord with the demands of justice and solidarity. Similarly, when we fail to use these earthly goods as God intended them to be used, we fail to fulfil the demands of justice and solidarity towards one another and towards the earth itself. In a very particular way, I contend that this link between “human ecology” and “natural ecology” found in the ecological teachings of Pope John Paul II and the 2004 *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* and in the earlier ecological teachings of the popes were to be given a greater boost and tremendous impetus in the teachings on the environment by Pope Benedict XVI who succeeded John Paul II as pope in April 2005.

1.5 Environmental Care in the Social Encyclicals and Other Teachings of Pope Benedict XVI (2005-2013)

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI who became pope in April 2005 and retired in February 2013, also addressed the issue of the environment in several of his papal documents and addresses. First and foremost, in his 2007 *Message for the World Day of Peace*, Benedict XVI drew attention to the beauty of the natural environment created by God, noting however that the beauty of the natural

environment bears scars too such as erosion, deforestation and effects of devastating drought.¹⁷⁵ According to Cardinal Peter Turkson, “in his Message for the (2007) World Day of Peace, the pope described four variants of *ecology*: the *ecology of nature*, and alongside it, a *human ecology* which in turn, demands a *social ecology*, and, finally, the *ecology of peace*.”¹⁷⁶ For Benedict XVI, *ecology of nature* refers to all non-human creation, including the natural environment received from God as a gift. For him, *ecology of nature* means that nature is not to be viewed simply as a place of recreation or a resource, but rather, a place where humans live and interact with God, with one another and with creation itself. In regard to *human ecology*, Benedict XVI explains it to refer to not only human beings living in an environment but also life, sexuality, marriage, family and social relations. In effect, it is everything that relates to humans and their interactions with one another in the natural environment. With regard to *social ecology*, Benedict XVI emphasises that human life must exist with the environment in which it occurs. It is a relationship with other beings present in the environment since the book of nature is one and indivisible. *Ecology of peace* refers to the right harmonious relationship that exists between humans and humans and between humans and the natural environment which leads to peace. With these concepts in mind, Turkson explains that for Pope Benedict XVI, “for peace to be effected in the world, we must be conscious of the relationship between *natural ecology* and *human ecology*,” since “the *ecology of peace* is comprised of peace with creation and peace among men, which presupposes peace with God.”¹⁷⁷

It is significant to note that Pope Benedict XVI reiterated this same message during his visit to Australia in 2008 by drawing attention to the beauty of the *natural environment* created by God.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, *Message for World Day of Peace 2007* (1 January 2007). 2007 WDP # 1. Find also in Pope Benedict XVI, *The Garden of God: Toward Human Ecology* (Washington DC: The Catholic University Press, 2014), 13.

¹⁷⁶ Turkson, 9. Also, 2007 WDP # 8

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 9. Also, 2007 WDP # 9-11.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

According to Cardinal Turkson, the pope observed that “this natural environment now bears scars as well, including erosion, deforestation and the effects of devastating drought. At the same time, the world’s mineral and ocean resources are being squandered and water levels are rising.”¹⁷⁹ Turkson argues further that “the pope also drew attention to the *human environment*, the highpoint of God’s creation, and the genius of human achievement such as advances in medical sciences, the wise application of technology, and creativity reflected in the arts. But the *human* or *social environment* also has its scars, such as alcohol and drug abuse, the exaltation of violence, sexual degradation and depravity, and the false notion that there are no absolute truths to guide our lives.”¹⁸⁰ Besides, according to Turkson, by teaching in this way, the pope affirmed “the true nature of human life that entails a search for the truth, the good and the beautiful, emphasising that “we (must) make our choices and exercise our freedom, knowing that there we find happiness and joy.”¹⁸¹

In June 2009, Pope Benedict XVI issued his first social encyclical letter, titled *Caritas in Veritate* (“Charity in Truth”).¹⁸² In this encyclical, the pope dedicated the entire Chapter 4 to the subject of the environment and human existence, explaining that “the way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself and vice versa.”¹⁸³ I posit that this teaching is a clear reference to the principle we know today as integral ecology, that is, the close relationship humanity has with God, with other human beings and with the non-human creation. Thus, for Benedict XVI, “there

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 9-10.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 10

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter, *Caritas in Veritate* (“On Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth”), issued on June 29, 2009. Full text can be found in Benedict XVI, *The Encyclicals of Benedict XVI* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2013), 105-197. Also accessed online at http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html, on April 23, 2021.

¹⁸³ Benedict XVI, CV # 51.

is an inseparable relationship between human beings and the environment which should mirror the creative love of God from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying.”¹⁸⁴

In the following year, 2010, Pope Benedict XVI dedicated his message for the celebration of the 2010 World Day of Peace to the subject of the environment. Titled, “*If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation*”. Without a doubt, this document is by far the most extensive teaching on the environment given by the now retired pope. In this Message, Benedict XVI taught among others that,

Respect for creation is of immense consequence; and its preservation has now become essential for the pacific coexistence of mankind. It is imperative that mankind renew and strengthen that covenant between human beings and the environment. The environment must be seen as God’s gift to all people, and the use we make of it entails a shared responsibility for all humanity, especially the poor and future generations. Human beings cannot remain indifferent to the ecological problems including climate change, desertification, the loss of biodiversity, the increase of natural catastrophes and the deforestation of equatorial and tropical regions, etc.¹⁸⁵

According to the pope also, “The ecological crisis cannot be viewed in isolation from other related questions, since it is closely linked to the notion of development itself and our understanding of man in his relationship to others and to the rest of creation.”¹⁸⁶ Thus, for Benedict XVI, the ecological problem must be dealt with not only because of the chilling prospects of environmental degradation of the world, “but the real motivation must be the quest for authentic worldwide solidarity inspired by the values of charity, justice and the common good.”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. CV # 50

¹⁸⁵ Benedict XVI, 2010 World Day of Peace Message, # 1. Also in Benedict XVI, *Garden of God: Toward a Human Ecology*, 38-39.

¹⁸⁶ 2010 WDP # 5.

¹⁸⁷ 2010 WDP # 10.

In the same Message, Pope Benedict XVI emphasised that, “*A greater sense of intergenerational solidarity is urgently needed*” and that “future generations cannot be saddled with the cost of our use of common environmental resources.”¹⁸⁸ According to the pope,

We have inherited from past generations, and we have benefited from the work of our contemporaries; for this reason, we have obligations towards all, and we cannot refuse to interest ourselves in those who will come after us, to enlarge the human family. Universal solidarity represents a benefit as well as a duty. *This is a responsibility that present generations have towards those of the future, a responsibility that also concerns individual States and the international community.*¹⁸⁹

Furthermore, the pope stressed that, “Natural resources should be used in such a way that immediate benefits do not have a negative impact on living creatures, human and non-human, present and future; that the protection of private property does not conflict with the universal destination of goods; that human activity does not compromise the fruitfulness of the earth, for the benefit of people now and in the future.”¹⁹⁰ According to him,

In addition to a fairer sense of intergenerational solidarity, there is also an urgent moral need for a renewed sense of *intragenerational solidarity*, especially in relationships between developing countries and highly industrialized countries: “the international community has an urgent duty to find institutional means of regulating the exploitation of non-renewable resources, involving poor countries in the process, in order to plan together for the future ... *The ecological crisis shows the urgency of a solidarity which embraces time and space.* It is important to acknowledge that among the causes of the present ecological crisis is the historical responsibility of the industrialized countries. Yet, the less developed countries, and emerging countries in particular, are not exempt from their own responsibilities with regard to creation, for the duty of gradually adopting effective environmental measures and policies is incumbent upon all. This would be accomplished more easily if self-interest played a lesser role in the granting of aid and the sharing of knowledge and cleaner technologies.”¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ 2010 WDP # 8.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. From these ecological teachings, Peter Turkson argues that Benedict XVI emphasized that human duties towards the environment should flow from our duties towards others (CV 51). This is because for Benedict XVI, there is an inseparable relationship between man and his world, human and natural ecology, and the redemption of man leads to the redemption of the earth (CV 51).

In their article, *With Generous Courage: Promise & Poignance in the Legacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI*, Connie Lasher and Charles M. Murphy reviewed the teachings of both Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI on the care of the environment.¹⁹² While commending the efforts of these two popes in addressing the ecological question in their teachings in various papal encyclicals and other documents, Lasher and Murphy postulated that, “In the face of the global ecological crisis, what is needed now is a moral narrative that will give moral critique of materialism ... It is this moral narrative that the Social Magisterium of the Catholic Church promotes, and especially championed by John Paul II and Benedict XVI.”¹⁹³ According to Lasher and Murphy, both popes approached the issue of environmental concern in a manner that reflects explicit commitment to and interpretation of the Second Vatican Council. “Each has fully engaged the task of “reading the signs of the times,” doing so in a spirit of openness to ecclesial self-examination and reform.”¹⁹⁴ Thus, for the two scholars, both Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI have offered a renewed vision of the meaning of human in terms of the deposit of faith: belief in Christ.¹⁹⁵ According to them, “Each of the two popes is cognizant of the environmentalist critique of Christian anthropocentrism and each seeks to correct the anthropological “error” of absolute dominion not by decentering the human but by re-affirming human distinctiveness within a renewed relational theological anthropology.”¹⁹⁶ Concluding their evaluation of the ecological teachings of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, Lasher and Murphy postulated that, “By their continued references to the environmental crisis, both John Paul II and Benedict XVI have made

¹⁹² Connie Lasher & Charles Murphy, “With Generous Courage: Promise & Poignance in the Legacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI” in Jame Schaefer, *Confronting the Climate Crisis: Catholic Theological Perspectives* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 2011), 365-388.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 365-366.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 367

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 368.

the Church part of the world-wide conversation around the issue of environmental care which is now beginning to take place with new urgency.”¹⁹⁷

In support of the above position of both Lasher and Murphy, I posit that the respective ecological teachings of both John Paul II and Benedict XVI have greatly expanded the Catholic Church’s teachings on the ecological question. I argue further that the teachings of these two popes in no small way served as a catalyst that paved the way for the extensive examination and discussion of the ecological question by the current pontiff, Pope Francis, in his 2015 social encyclical, *Laudato Si’*,¹⁹⁸ which since its publication, *Laudato Si’* been described by various scholars and commentators as refreshing, innovative and groundbreaking. The encyclical *Laudato Si’* is the Church’s first social encyclical to address exclusively the subject of the environment and ecology, and with its publication, I contend that the encyclical has fully answered the criticisms long leveled against the Catholic social teaching regarding its seeming “silence” on the subject of the environment. I contend further that with its publication, Catholic social teaching has now reached an important milestone and a decisive turn where the Church’s articulation of the ecological question in the years to come can only become broader and much more comprehensive. Having said this, I shall now proceed to examine in detail the encyclical *Laudato Si’* of Pope Francis below.

1.6 Pope Francis’ Encyclical, *Laudato Si’*: A Decisive Turn in Catholic Ecological Tradition

Issued on May 24, 2015, and launched publicly on June 18 the same year, *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*, is the Church’s first social encyclical to address more comprehensively and exclusively the subject of environmental care. In this encyclical, Pope Francis teaches that the

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 383.

¹⁹⁸ Kevin Irwin posits Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, the two immediate predecessors of Pope Francis, left him (and us) an important legacy on teaching on the environment that laid the groundwork for him to build on their teachings and advance them. See Kevin Irwin, *A Commentary on Laudato Si’*, 75.

earth is our common home, but at the same time, he laments that in many places of this global village, the earth is often mistreated and abused leading to the current global ecological crisis.¹⁹⁹ The pope mentions the current ecological crisis as including pollution, climate change, scarcity of water and loss of biodiversity, among others.²⁰⁰ According to him, the teachings offered by the biblical accounts of creation, especially those in Genesis 1 and 2, do not support complete human domination and reckless exploitation of the earth. Rather, they call on human beings to responsible stewardship, “to till and keep” the garden of the earth (Gen. 2:15).²⁰¹ Examining the causes of the global ecological crisis, the pope further teaches that the current ecological crisis is anthropogenic, meaning that it is caused by human beings as a result of “technocratic paradigm,” globalization, tyrannical anthropocentrism and practical relativism.²⁰² Giving some possible solutions to help humanity to deal with these challenges and save the earth from its current crisis, Pope Francis teaches that human beings must practice *integral ecology*, that is, seeing ourselves as related to everything around us, analyse the current crisis situation of the earth and suggest concrete proposals for dialogue, action and consensus building.²⁰³ On the individual level, the pope also encouraged all people on earth to aim for “a new lifestyle”, one which is characterised by simplicity, sobriety and moderation.²⁰⁴

Since its publication in May 2015 and being the Church’s first social encyclical to address exclusively the topic of the environment, *Laudato Si’* has been received generally favourably across the world. According to Christiana Zenner, as an ecological encyclical, *Laudato Si’* “has moved the Catholic Church from the periphery of global engagement with ecology right to the

¹⁹⁹ Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si’: On Care for our Common Home* of Pope Francis (24 May 2015). LS # 1-2.

²⁰⁰ LS # 20-22, 32-34.

²⁰¹ LS # 66-69.

²⁰² LS # 102-126.

²⁰³ LS # 14-15, 66.

²⁰⁴ LS # 211.

very heart of the debate.”²⁰⁵ For Zenner also, the encyclical’s teachings on creation are not only anthropocentric but also theocentric “whereby care of the earth as a gift of God is a moral responsibility as a reflection on how to appreciate nature as such because it is created and redeemed by God.”²⁰⁶ Commending the depth of the encyclical, Zenner postulates that many people had assumed before its publication that the encyclical *Laudato Si’* was going to address the issue of climate change as its main subject. However, *Laudato Si’* is not oriented exclusively towards the subject of climate change but addresses many more themes beyond climate change, including creation, economic development, politics and good governance, etc. Thus, instead of being a document solely devoted to addressing global climate change, *Laudato Si’* “is a commentary on the environment beyond theological circles, blending theology, natural and social sciences, philosophy, Catholic Social Teaching and prayer.”²⁰⁷

On his part, Sean McDonagh, one of the first scholars to write a significant commentary on *Laudato Si’*, posits that “*Laudato Si’* is one of the most important documents to come from Rome since the beginning of modern Catholic Social Teaching at the end of the 19th century.”²⁰⁸ According to McDonagh, in terms of importance, *Laudato Si’* is comparable only to three other previous social encyclicals, namely, *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo (1891), *Pacem in Terris* of Pope John XXIII (1963) and *Populorum Progressio* of Paul VI (1967).²⁰⁹ In the aftermath of *Laudato Si’*’s publication, McDonagh further noted in his commentary on the encyclical that one of the features that makes *Laudato Si’* distinct and new in the genre of Catholic social teaching is that it reflects “a more collegial vision of the Church” with the inclusion of quotations from 21 episcopal

²⁰⁵ Zenner, 523.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 521.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Sean McDonagh, *On Care for Our Common Home, Laudato Si’: The Encyclical of Pope Francis on the Environment* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2016), 3-4.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 3.

conferences from across the world as well as insights from Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on ecological sin and responsibility.²¹⁰ Other distinctive features of *Laudato Si'* which McDonagh highlights in his commentary on the encyclical include the linkage the encyclical makes between the poor and the earth,²¹¹ the encyclical's criticism of excessive anthropocentrism,²¹² its teachings on human responsibility for climate change²¹³ and biodiversity,²¹⁴ the need for ecological education,²¹⁵ among others. At the end of his commentary on the encyclical, McDonagh suggests that a synod on ecology lasting for a period of three years should be held to deal practically with the issues raised in the encyclical to lead to ecological thinking and action around the world.²¹⁶

Beyond Christiana Zenner and Sean McDonagh, there have also been several other positive responses and reactions to *Laudato Si'* across the world.²¹⁷ These responses include those of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference and other Bishops' Conferences across the globe, such as the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference.²¹⁸ Christiana Zenner has grouped the responses and

²¹⁰ Zenner, 525. Also, LS # 40. On the inclusion of quotations from Bishops' Conferences, Kevin Irwin opines that the inclusion of insights from many Episcopal Conferences across the globe in *Laudato Si'* indicates a broad variety of ideas from the vast expanse of the global Church and is an example of collegiality in episcopal teaching in practice. See Kevin Irwin, *A Commentary on Laudato Si'*, 75.

²¹¹ McDonagh, 17. Also, LS # 139, 48. For McDonagh, Pope Francis reminds us in *Laudato Si'* that "everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest" (LS 48), and that throughout the encyclical, the pope attempts to listen to both the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth (LS 49).

²¹² *Ibid.*, 18-19. Also, LS # 41, 116.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, Also, LS # 23-26.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Also, LS # 53-61, 32-42.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Also, LS #124, 202, 205, 210.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 128-129. McDonagh proposed that the synod on ecology should take at least three years. According to him, the first year should be devoted to discussions on the various aspects of *Laudato Si'* like climate change, global warming, energy, water, farming, etc. This should be at the level of each parish and diocese. In the second year, the discussions should be at the national level on the same issues discussed in the first year, while in the third year, the synod will take place at the international level. According to him, doing this would be a huge boost to ecological thinking and action around the world.

²¹⁷ Kevin Irwin, *A Commentary on Laudato Si': Examining the Background, Contributions, Implementation, and the Future of Pope Francis's Encyclical* (New York: Paulist Press, 2016), 76. In his commentary, Kevin Irwin postulates that *Laudato Si'* lays out clearly Catholic theology of creation, Catholic practices about education and formation, lifestyle issues and how the ecology impacts the poor.

²¹⁸ The Irish response to *Laudato Si'* is contained in the book, *An Irish Response: Essays on the Pope's Letter on the Environment*. Dublin, Ireland: Veritas Publications, 2017, edited by Sean McDonagh. Since 2016 till date, all the

reactions to the encyclical into three different categories, namely, theological scholarly responses, engagement from environmental policy makers, economists, cultural criticism and broad-based public responses.²¹⁹ According to her, the theological scholarly responses include the book, *For Our Common Home: Process-Relational Responses to Laudato Si'*, which was the first publication to offer commentary on *Laudato Si'*. This work was published in 2015 by several scholars of diverse backgrounds and it gave a positive review of the encyclical.²²⁰ Also in this category are the commentaries of Sean McDonagh published in 2016 and alluded to above as well as the work of Kevin Irwin and commentary on the encyclical in the *Theological Review* published in 2016 which contained several articles on ecological conversion, integral ecology, and natural sciences, among others. Zenner mentions that since its publication, *Laudato Si'* has received analyses, tributes and debates in books and magazines, including the *New York Review of Books* and other news magazines. Also, Zenner mentions that in the US, for example, even though few Catholics seem to have been impacted by the reception of the document, a poll by a leading US University showed that about 35 percent of US Catholics said *Laudato Si'* has impacted their ways of life in terms of their responses to social justice, defence of life and environmental integrity.²²¹

As the first social encyclical of the Church which is exclusively devoted to the examination of the ecological question, I posit that the most significant and remarkable aspect of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* is not only that it reiterates many of the principal ecological themes found

communiqués of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference have made references to *Laudato Si'* in addressing the environmental concerns in Ghana. I shall discuss this in much more detail in Chapter two of this work.

²¹⁹ Zenner, 543-545.

²²⁰ Ibid., 543. John B. Cobb & Ignacio Castuera (Eds.). *For Our Common Home: Process-Relational Responses to Laudato Si'*. Anoka, Minnesota: Process Century Press, 2015, is a volume was published two months after the release of *Laudato Si'*. It consists of various essays that respond to, critique and further develop teachings in *Laudato Si'* within a broader theological discourse. Zenner describes this book is an important resource for scholars who are considering various positions and issues in relation to *Laudato Si'* from Catholic as well as Ecumenical, feminist and other stances.

²²¹ Ibid., 543-545.

in previous ecological teachings of the Church and the popes, but more importantly, it greatly expands those theological themes in applying them to the context of the contemporary world. This being the case, I argue that such ecological themes have become even more meaningful and insightful today within the context of the current global discussions and quest for environmental sustainability. Based on this, I contend that it is important to examine the major principal themes that the encyclical *Laudato Si'* discusses. These themes include dominion, domination, stewardship, technology, globalization, the common good, intergenerational solidarity and integral ecology. I posit that the examination of these ecological principles is important because they will help me to discern first and foremost, how Pope Francis has expanded these principles in his ecological teachings, and secondly, they will assist me in evaluating how the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference has applied some of these principles and themes both in their past and current teachings on environmental care in Ghana.

1.7 Significant Ecological Themes in Pope Francis' Encyclical, *Laudato Si'*

The encyclical *Laudato Si'* of Pope Francis refers to many of the ecological themes mentioned in previous ecological teachings of the Church and the previous popes over the years, but at the same time, I argue that it expands and gives much needed fresh impetus to those themes. Among the most significant ecological themes that *Laudato Si'* examines in its broad teachings on the environment include dominion, domination, stewardship, care of creation, modern anthropocentrism, preferential option for the poor, the common good, intergenerational solidarity and integral ecology, among others.

Within the significant themes which Pope Francis examines in *Laudato Si'*, I argue that *integral ecology* is the most paramount. In a Lenten lecture he gave in Maynooth, Ireland, in March 2015, that is, two months before *Laudato Si'* was issued by Pope Francis, Cardinal Peter Appiah Turkson

stated that *integral ecology* was the most dominant theme of the encyclical *Laudato Si'*.²²² Integral ecology stresses that human beings have intrinsic worth and owe responsibility to God the Creator, fellow human beings and non-human creation. During the Maynooth lecture, Turkson postulated that with the upcoming publication of *Laudato Si'*, “Pope Francis was promoting integral ecology as the key to addressing the inter-related issues of human ecology, development and the natural environment.”²²³ Turkson further explained that the integral ecology of the upcoming encyclical was underpinned by four principles, namely, the call to be protectors of both creation and the human person was integral; the care for creation as a virtue in its own right because it served as the basis for authentic development; that we (humans) must care for what we cherish, in the sense that regulations, policies and targets are necessary tools for addressing poverty and climate change but they also required change of heart; and finally, integral ecology serves as a basis for justice and development in the world which requires a new global solidarity, one in which everyone has a part to play and every action no matter how small, can make a difference.²²⁴

In her commentary on *Laudato Si'*, Christiana Zenner also alluded to Cardinal Turkson’s teaching on the centrality of “integral ecology” in Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si'* during the Maynooth lecture, and like Turkson, Zenner explained that “*integral ecology* weds notions of integral development to broad-based understanding of ecology and informed by integral liberation as developed by Liberation theologians.”²²⁵ The above teaching on integral ecology as the major theme of *Laudato*

²²² Peter K. A. Turkson, Trocaire 2015 Lenten Lecture on *Integral Ecology, and the Horizon of Hope: Concern for the Poor and for Creation in the Ministry of Pope Francis*. Given at St. Patrick’s Pontifical University, Maynooth, Ireland, March 5, 2015, pages 2-3.

²²³ Turkson, Lenten Lecture on *Integral Ecology*, 2-3.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3-11.

²²⁵ Zenner, *Commentary on Laudato Si'*, 537. Zenner opines that Chapter Four of *Laudato Si'* fully explores the concept of integral ecology even though the grounding for the idea as well as normative implications remain vague throughout the document.

Si' is further supported by Kevin Irwin who also postulates that integral ecology is the most important insight about ecology in the encyclical *Laudato Si.*”²²⁶

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis teaches that an integral ecology is one which clearly respects its human and social dimensions, namely, environmental, economic, and social ecology, as well as cultural ecology and the ecology of daily life.²²⁷ For the pope, each of these parts is essential for integral ecology. In line with this teaching, Pope Francis then defines “ecology” broadly by stating that, “Ecology studies the relationship between organism and the environment in which they develop” and “this entails conditions required for their survival and growth”²²⁸ According to Turkson, the encyclical proposes “an approach to ecology which respects our unique place as human beings in this world and our relationship to our surroundings.”²²⁹ Turkson explains further that “the paradigm of integral ecology is an inclusive, dynamic proposal which articulates the fundamental relationships of each person with God, with other human beings, and with creation:

When we speak of the “environment”, what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it. 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... It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions that consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems (LS 139).²³⁰

Expanding this theme further, Turkson posits that,

Integration is the opposite of fragmentation and isolation: “nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live” (LS 139). Rather than think of our relationship with the natural environment as separate from other spheres of human interest and activity, let us see nature as

²²⁶ Irwin, 102. According to Irwin, Chapter Four under the title, *Integral Ecology*, is the most distinctive contribution of the encyclical. Irwin argues further that part of the pope’s integral vision is to connect issues and fields of expertise not often understood together: morality, economics, science, spirituality, theology, liturgy and sacraments.

²²⁷ LS # 137.

²²⁸ LS # 138.

²²⁹ LS # 15. Peter Turkson, Paper on “*The Key Concept of Integral Ecology and Its Evolution in the Church’s Social Teaching*,” in a Colloquium on *LAUDATO SI’: THE CARE OF OUR COMMON HOME*, given at UNESCO, Paris on 9 November 2016, page 12.

²³⁰ Turkson, 12.

an integral part of a greater whole which includes the social, political and spiritual, material goods, the economic sphere and so on.²³¹

From the above discussion, I reiterate my position that it is evident that integral ecology is the major theme of Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. But beyond the theme of integral ecology, *Laudato Si'* also examined many other important theological themes. Below, I shall discuss five of the most significant themes of the encyclical besides integral ecology. These are the themes of anthropocentrism vis-à-vis the “technocratic” paradigm, *dominion* and *domination*, the common good and solidarity, the intrinsic worth of creation, and stewardship and care of creation.²³²

In the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis also addresses the theme of anthropocentrism and links it with what he terms as “technocratic paradigm”.²³³ The pope teaches that the current environmental problems in the world are due to exploitative economic patterns that are related to modern anthropocentrism and “technocratic paradigm” as well as human interventions often in the service of business interests and consumerism.²³⁴ Pope Francis explains “technocratic paradigm” to mean an excessive over-reliance on technology to resolve all problems including ecological ones without looking at the harm that such technology brings on both humans and the environment.²³⁵ While explaining that “scientific and technological progress cannot be equal with progress of humanity and history”, the pope argued that these are not ends in themselves but means to an end.²³⁶ Thus, whereas “technocratic paradigm” suggests that human beings have scientific development and economic growth as ends in themselves without looking at the ethical

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² LS # 66-67.

²³³ The theory that technology has answers to every problem of humanity without looking at the challenges posed its use. For more, see LS # 106-110.

²³⁴ LS # 34.

²³⁵ LS # 102-110. For more, see Chapter Three of *Laudato Si'*, under the title, *The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis*, Pope Francis teaches that human beings are responsible for the damage being done to the earth. He talks about “technocratic paradigm,” that is, the wrong use and over-reliance on technology, globalization, and practical relativism as some of the major causes of the global ecological crisis.

²³⁶ LS # 144.

implications, Pope Francis' teachings in *Laudato Si'* warn against the real dangers in an ill-considered technocratic prowess by stressing that technology can be used for good effects but an obsession with technical and economic solutions can forestall an awareness of interconnected social and environmental exclusions.²³⁷

Another significant theme addressed in *Laudato Si'* is that of "dominion" which in the past have been wrongly interpreted as "domination", that is, the license to exploit and use the earth for humanity's exclusive benefits without considering the negative consequences that such human activities have on the environment. Such attitudes account for much of the current ecological crisis in the world. To resolve the twin-problem of dominion and domination, Pope Francis teaches that human life is grounded in three interlinked relationships, namely, with God, neighbour and earth, and to rupture any of them is to sin.²³⁸ In addition, the pope contends that a correct interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 show that humans are stewards of creation, not masters. According to him, "If a Catholic *hermeneutic* encouraged domination in the past, it is wrong and distorted. The proper stance is respect and stewardship."²³⁹ The pope further teaches that, "We should recognize that we are not God, and the earth was here before us. The Bible has no place for tyrannical anthropocentrism, unconcerned for other creatures, and no place for "distorted anthropocentrism."²⁴⁰ Thus, instead of *dominion* interpreted as domination, Pope Francis proposes that the dominion of the universe should be understood properly as responsible stewardship, and that stewardship means responsibility for creation.²⁴¹

²³⁷ LS # 111.

²³⁸ LS # 66.

²³⁹ LS # 67.

²⁴⁰ LS # 68-69.

²⁴¹ LS # 66-67, 74-75, 116,

Additionally, the themes of the *common good*, *solidarity* and *preferential option for the poor* are also taken up and examined by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*. Christiana Zenner explains that the classical principles found in Catholic social teaching of solidarity and “preferential option for the poor” stand as ethical imperatives essential for effectively obtaining the common good even as the encyclical tries to answer the question of what kinds of interaction will enhance the quality of people’s lives.²⁴² According to Zenner, *Laudato Si'* teaches that the climate is a common good; it belongs to all of us.²⁴³ Thus, the pope preaches “the principle of the subordination of private property to the universal destination of goods, and thus the right of everyone to their use, is a golden rule of social conduct and the first principle of the whole ethical and social order.”²⁴⁴ Zenner states further that in the teachings of Pope Francis, the pursuit of common good is guided by solidarity and justice. In this way, modern anthropocentrism and “technocratic paradigm” are portrayed as harmful to the common good.²⁴⁵ In addition, Zenner avers that *Laudato Si'* upholds “solidarity” and “preferential option for the poor” as ethical imperatives essential for effectively obtaining the common good.²⁴⁶ According to her, the solidarity proposed by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* includes solidarity among people currently living on earth and solidarity for the good of future generations whose well-being depends on human actions in the present age. Thus, I posit that for Zenner, both intergenerational and intra-generational solidarity are upheld as essential in this encyclical.²⁴⁷

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis also teaches about the intrinsic worth of creation. According to the pope, “species have an intrinsic value independent of their usefulness. Each organism as a creature

²⁴² Zenner, 518.

²⁴³ Ibid., 515. Also, LS 23.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 532. Also, LS # 93.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 532-533.

²⁴⁶ Ibid. Also, LS # 158.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

of God is good and admirable in itself.”²⁴⁸ The pope insists that “the universe as a whole in all its manifold relationships shows forth the inexhaustible riches of God.”²⁴⁹ According to him, “We have no right to deprive species of giving glory to God by their very existence nor convey their message to us.”²⁵⁰ Thus, the encyclical *Laudato Si’* affirms and upholds both the teaching about human uniqueness and the intrinsic value of the natural world.

Finally, in *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis discusses the principle of stewardship and “care of creation,” using it to teach about the need for all humans to care for creation. According to Irwin, even though the pope explains the biblical understanding of “dominion” to mean “responsible stewardship”, nonetheless, the pope’s preferred word in *Laudato Si’* is “care” which he uses over 30 times in the document.²⁵¹ Irwin explains further that according to Pope Francis, the human vocation is to “care” for all created things and beings. This care includes care for the vulnerable (LS 10), healthcare (LS 28), care on behalf of biodiversity (LS 42), care for neighbour (LS 70), care for indigenous communities (LS 146), a “culture of care” (LS 213), among others.²⁵² Thus, for Pope Francis, because the human vocation is to care for creation, the Earth cannot be plundered or exploited if it is to continue to sustain and govern us.²⁵³

In summing up the above discussions on the encyclical *Laudato Si’*, I wish to reiterate my argument that even though *Laudato Si’* makes references to many of the significant ecological themes which the previous papal and ecclesial teachings had discussed and examined in previous

²⁴⁸ LS # 140.

²⁴⁹ LS # 86.

²⁵⁰ LS # 33, 55.

²⁵¹ Irwin, *Commentary on Laudato Si’*, 119-120. Irwin postulates that the pope uses “care” over 30 times in the encyclical to advise and remind us of our common responsibilities. According to him, when one’s vocation is to “care” for creation, one does not stand outside or apart from all that dwells on this good earth; one stands alongside them and works to protect them.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 120.

²⁵³ LS # 1.

times, the document also takes up these themes and expands them extensively in applying them to contemporary issues on the environment. Thus, as Zenner posits, by so doing, the encyclical *Laudato Si'* of Pope Francis has among others, “provided a bridge between religious traditions and various forms of social and environmental activism.”²⁵⁴ Today, as the world continues to grapple with the ecological crisis of our contemporary times, I argue that the content of the teachings of Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si'* will continue to be a subject that shapes the ecological discussions, proposals and actions of many individuals, experts, groups, Governments, Religious Bodies and other organizations in the years ahead. I argue further that as individuals and groups of people and the world at large continue to seek ways and means of addressing the current global ecological crisis, both the individual and collective responses to *Laudato Si'* in the years to come will become a poignant indicator of how well the Church’s first social encyclical to address the environmental question has been received in and around the world and what impact it has had on the discussions on the care of the Earth, our common home.

1.8 Conclusion

In concluding this chapter, I reiterate my stance that the historical-theological examination of the above historical touchstones show that the global Catholic Church has addressed herself severally to the subject of the care of the environment since the late 19th century with the publication of Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* till date. I argue further that since Pope Leo’s teaching in the late 19th century, the various succeeding popes have always built on the foundations laid by

²⁵⁴ Zenner, 544. According to Zenner, in August 2015, Islamic scholars and leaders from 20 countries released a statement on climate change in which they stated that it was in harmony with the papal encyclical. Several months later, the Global Buddhist Climate Change Collective under the leadership of Thich Nhat Hanh issued an environmental statement saying a similar thing.²⁵⁴ Politically, Zenner also mentions that President Barak Obama referenced *Laudato Si'* in some of his speeches while the United Nations approved the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015 while holding various hearings and sessions on *Laudato Si'*. Besides, *Laudato Si'* was also invoked at the CoP21 meetings in Paris, France, where an international climate treaty was reached in December 2015.

earlier ones as well as on contemporary perspectives on ecology. This therefore attests to the fact that Catholic social teaching offers a rich storehouse for further exploration on ecology today.

Besides, the above examination has also shown that in its exploration of the ecological question, Catholic social teaching has addressed many important ecological themes, including God as Creator, stewardship and care of creation, intergenerational solidarity, the common good and integral ecology, among others. I contend that these important themes relating to the care of the environment are also significant themes which the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference has addressed at various times in the past in their communiqués and pastoral statements, and which even now, the Episcopal Conference continues to examine and review in their official teachings on environmental care in Ghana. Significantly, in the more recent times, I contend that under the inspiration of Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*, many, if not all, of these above-mentioned themes, are being taken up again by the Bishops' Conference and much more forcefully in their communiqués and other official statements on the care of the environment.

In the next chapter, that is Chapter two of this dissertation, I shall review the ecological teachings of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference from 1965 to 2020 to evaluate how the Ghanaian Bishops' Conference has articulated the subject of the environment in their ecological teachings in various communiqués and other pastoral statements within the period under review and show how they have applied some of the above-mentioned principles in those teachings.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE TEACHINGS OF THE GHANA CATHOLIC BISHOPS’

CONFERENCE ON THE CARE OF THE ENVIRONMENT IN GHANA (1965-2020)

The Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference (GCBC) is the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Ghana. It was established in 1950 with five resident bishops heading five dioceses dotted across the length and breadth of the then Gold Coast, now Ghana.²⁵⁵ The formation of the Bishops’ Conference which was followed seven years later by the attainment of Ghana’s independence in 1957 as the first sub-Saharan country to make this experience created consciousness in most Ghanaian Christians that the Church must not only have an African face and voice but more so, a Ghanaian one.²⁵⁶ Inspired also by the theological renewal brought about by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) which called for the inculturation of the Gospel message in the various contexts of the Church across the world, the Catholic Church in Ghana led by the Bishops’ Conference began to translate the rite of the Mass and the administration of the Sacraments and Sacramentals from Latin into local Ghanaian languages and to address more specifically issues affecting the Ghanaian society.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁵ Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference. *Ecclesia in Ghana: On the Church in Ghana and Its Evangelizing Mission in the Third Millennium* (Takoradi: St. Francis Press, 1997), 21. Initially, when the Conference was formed, it was known as the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Ghana (CBCG). Then it became known as the Ghana Bishops’ Conference (GBC). Today, it is known as the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Ghana (GCBC).

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 21. The Second Vatican Council (also called Vatican Council II) encouraged the Church to read “the signs of the times” and to respond appropriately to changing socio-cultural and economic situations of the world in the light of the teachings of the Gospel. This call is found particularly in the document, *Gaudium et Spes* (“Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World”), numbers 1-4. Besides, the Council also encouraged the inculturation of the Gospel in the different local cultural contexts of the Church in the world. This is seen particularly in Chapter 2 of *Gaudium et Spes*. Full documents of the Second Vatican Council can be found in Austin Flannery (Ed.). *Vatican Council II, Volume 1: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents, New Revised Edition* (Dublin, Ireland: Dominican Publications, 1996).

According to *Christus Dominus*, the Second Vatican Council's Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops, one of the most important functions of bishops is to teach the flock that is entrusted to their care. Speaking about the role of bishops, the document stated that, "Christ commanded the Apostles and their successors and gave them power to teach all people, to sanctify them in truth and to give them spiritual nourishment."²⁵⁸ The document further taught that "the bishops succeed the college of Apostles in this role as teachers and pastors. In view of this, the Holy Spirit is given to them (the bishops) to constitute them as true and authentic teachers of the faith and the life of the Church."²⁵⁹ Accordingly, Bishops, either united in one college universally, regionally, nationally or individually with regard to those portions of the Lord's flock entrusted to them, provide instruction and direction to the Church as an expression of their great pastoral solicitude for the people of God.²⁶⁰

In fidelity to the above character and role of the bishops' office, the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference has over the years since its formation led and closely guarded over the pilgrimage of the Catholic Church in Ghana, sometimes with pastoral letters and statements and other times with communiques. Through these pastoral letters and communiques, the Ghanaian Catholic bishops have addressed various secular issues of national concern, and by so doing, sought to play their role as "seers" for both the Catholic Church in Ghana and the country as a whole. Thus, the Ghanaian bishops have endeavoured to direct, admonish, exhort, correct, encourage and commend

²⁵⁸ Austin Flannery (Ed.). *Vatican Council II, Volume 1: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (Dublin: Ireland: Dominican Publications, 1996). Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops, *Christus Dominus*, para. 2, pages 564-565.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, *Christus Dominus*, para. 4, pages 565-566.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, *Christus Dominus*, para 6, pages 566.

Ghanaians, and in particular, members of the local Ghanaian Church, in her quest to be faithful to their vocation and character as teachers.²⁶¹

Here in the Chapter two of this research, I offer a historical and theological review of the communiqués issued by the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference since its formation in 1950 till date. Specifically, I will examine those teachings of the Ghana Catholic bishops that touch on the care of the environment as found in their communiqués and other pastoral documents from 1965 when the Ghana Bishops' Conference began to publish their communiqués till the present time (2020).²⁶² The objective and goal of this historical and theological review is to offer the necessary relevant evidence to support my argument that the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference has been consistent in their teachings and advocacy on the care of the environment in Ghana for a long time now. Besides, this review is intended to argue that in their consistent teachings and advocacy on environmental care, the Catholic bishops of Ghana have grounded their teachings on the need for ecological care in Ghana on the following four theological principles, namely, stewardship and care of creation, intergenerational solidarity, the common good and integral ecology. These are important principles found in the Catholic social teaching as the previous chapter has shown.

In addition to examining the above-mentioned theological principles grounding the ecological teachings of the Bishops' Conference over the years, I shall also attempt to discern whether there have been any significant shifts in these theological principles in the bishops' ecological teachings over the years. For example, I will discern whether the Conference emphasized more or less on

²⁶¹ Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference. *Ghana Bishops Speak, Volume I* (Accra: National Catholic Secretariat, 1998), xiii.

²⁶² The ecological teachings of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference can be found in various documents published by the Bishops' Conference. These include *Ghana Bishops' Speak, Volume I*. Takoradi: St. Francis Press (1997), *Ghana Catholic Bishops Speak, Volume II*. Takoradi: St. Francis Press (2007), *Ghana Catholic Bishops Speak, Volume III*. Accra: St. Kizito Press (2017), *Ecclesia in Ghana*. Takoradi: St. Francis Press (1997) as well as in recent communiqués issued by the Bishops' Conference from 2017 to 2020.

one or the principle in the past and stressing on new ones in the present and so on. This will help me to understand both the past and current approaches of the Bishops' Conference to the ecological question in Ghana. Besides, I believe that a good understanding from this perspective will enable me to discern how the current approach of the Bishops' Conference to the subject of the environment can feed into the proposal I am making in this dissertation for a Church and State collaboration on the care of the environment in Ghana.

2.1 Review of the Catholic Bishops' Document, *Ghana Bishops Speak, Volume I (1965-1996)*

The Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference was formed in 1950 as already mentioned above but it began to issue official communiqués and pastoral statements on issues of both ecclesial and national importance from 1965 onwards. In the period between 1965 and 1979, the various pastoral statements and communiqués of the Bishops' Conference tended to center mostly on messages of peace, harmony, and reconciliation as well as appeals for Ghana to return to democracy. This is because these years were periods of frequent coup d'états or military takeovers in Ghana.²⁶³ Thus, within this time period, we had no mention or teachings on issues dealing specifically with the subject of the environment in the bishops' communiques. Beginning from 1980, however, the Conference started to address various issues relating to the care of the environment in Ghana.

In the bishops' communiqué of 1980, the Bishops' Conference stated that they had noted with great concern the indiscriminate burning of bush and forests in certain parts of the country,

²⁶³ Ghana suffered various coup d'états in the years 1966, 1972, 1979 and 1981. Full details of the military takeovers in Ghana accessed online at liu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:351303/FULLTEXT01.pdf, on April 15, 2021. I opine that the frequent coup d'états during the period between 1965 and 1979 may be one of the main reasons why the teachings of the Bishops' Conferences around this time centered mostly on civic responsibilities and giving encouragement for activities that will lead to peace, justice, elections, return to democracy, etc. For more information on the details of the bishops' teachings within this period, see *Catholic Bishops Speak, Volume I*, especially pages 1-4, 10-19, 30-35, 40-43.

especially in the Northern parts of Ghana. According to them, “this activity if not checked, can only hasten the processes of desertification.”²⁶⁴ Based on this conviction, the Conference appealed to the Government to use its powers to put a stop to all bush burning without supervision and the felling of trees without the corresponding afforestation.²⁶⁵

In the same communiqué, the bishops also addressed the issue of farming, noting with great concern that “in many instances, the powerful pay only a lip service to the importance of the voiceless farmer who in the last resort is the livewire of the economy of the country.”²⁶⁶ According to the bishops, “the wanton destruction of the poor farmers’ cocoa and crop farms by timber and road contractors is a crime against justice.”²⁶⁷ Lamenting that often there is no compensation for such blatant injustice or else the compensation is insultingly inadequate, the bishops posited that no matter what compensation was paid to the farmer as and when it was paid, no compensation could be adequate or enough to make up for the loss that a poor farmer feels at seeing his cherished farm demolished by people who are only seeking financial gains.²⁶⁸ With this argument, the Conference then appealed to the Government on the need to initiate and effect legislation to protect the rights of farmers and to also consider the policy of leasing lands for farmers to use.²⁶⁹

Theologically speaking, in the 1980 Bishops’ communiqué in which we have the first recorded public statement of the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference on the care of the environment in Ghana, I argue that the bishops of Ghana addressed three main ecological issues, namely, bush burning, the felling of trees and the rights of farmers to their farmlands. This first major statement

²⁶⁴ Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference. *Ghana Bishops Speak, Volume I* (Accra: National Catholic Secretariat, 1998), 44-45.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

of the Bishops' Conference on the environment in Ghana shows that the bishops acknowledged that the care of the environment was an important aspect of their pastoral care and solicitude and that they were willing to offer some teachings and guidance on how the country should manage its environment. In addition, I contend the statement shows that the bishops are applying three theological principles to ground their examination of the ecological situation at hand, namely, solidarity, the common good and justice, in ways that John Paul II had used them in his ecological teachings prior.²⁷⁰ Since solidarity is an acknowledgement of the fact that people are interdependent and so rely on one another to improve and develop themselves, the bishops expressed solidarity with the voiceless farmers who are unable to demand their rights in the face of big multinational companies taking over their farms without just compensation. The bishops also applied the principle of justice, a principle which demands that we give to each person what is due them and to live in fidelity to the demands of relationships. Here, the bishops called for justice for farmers so that they may be adequately compensated for the loss of their farms. Besides, the bishops in teaching that the environment is a common good, drew the attention of all to the need to protect the environment in Ghana from the devastation and destruction posed by bush burning and the indiscriminate felling of trees.

In the following year of 1981, the Bishops' Conference again addressed the issue of the environment in their communiqué. Here, the bishops repeated their previous teaching on the need to halt bush burning and indiscriminate felling of trees in Ghana, by stating that “the desecration

²⁷⁰ The principles of solidarity, common good and justice are among the major principles of Catholic social teaching. Catholic social teaching refers to the body of teachings that give guidance on important social, political and economic issues. It develops as new issues emerge and the Church explores them in the light of Scripture, Tradition, and findings from disciplines such as economics, psychology and political theory. The Teaching offers many concepts and principles central to understanding issues of justice. Some of its other principal themes are human dignity, stewardship, preferential option for the poor, etc. For more, see Elizabeth Collier and Charles R. Strain. *Global Migration: What's Happening, Why, And A Just Response* (Winona, Minnesota: Anselm Academic, 2017), 67-68. See also, Thomas Massaro. *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 81-124.

of our land and vegetation through indiscriminate and sometimes criminal burning and wanton cutting down of trees without corresponding replanting of trees, is unacceptable.”²⁷¹ Making references to their previous year’s communiqué, the bishops reminded all Ghanaians of “the frightful dangers of desertification that can ensue if measures are not put in place to deal with the activities of bush burning and indiscriminate logging of trees in the forests.”²⁷²

An important point of note in the bishops’ communiqué of 1981 is that the bishops mentioned that they would present a memorandum on the state of the environment in Ghana to the Government before the year ended.²⁷³ I contend that this earliest resolution of the bishops to seek audience with the Government and to present it with a memorandum on the way forward for the care of the environment in Ghana is not only a significant indication of the seriousness with which the Bishops’ Conference attached to the issue of the care of the environment in Ghana at the time, but also, the very earliest indication of the Bishops’ Conference’s preparedness to work together with the Ghanaian Government to seek ways and means of safeguarding the environment in Ghana. I contend further that with this move, the seeds of collaboration between the Church and State on environmental care were already beginning to be sown in Ghana by the Bishops’ Conference.

Unfortunately, the above proposed meeting to present a memorandum on the care of the environment to the Government which could have commenced some form of partnership between the Bishops’ Conference and the Government of Ghana on the care of the environment in Ghana did not materialize due to a coup d’état which overthrew the civilian Government of Ghana at the end of that year. The December 31, 1981 coup d’état in Ghana ushered in a period of military

²⁷¹ *Ghana Bishops Speak Volume I*, 57.

²⁷² *Ibid.*

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

governance which lasted till 1992 when Ghana returned to democratic governance once again.²⁷⁴ Thus, for a period of four years, namely, between 1982 and 1986, the attention of the Bishops' Conference in their pastoral statements and communiqués was focused more on the issues of peace, reconciliation and calls for return to civilian rule.²⁷⁵ It is therefore unsurprising to me that within those four years, the Bishops' Conference did not attend to the issue of environmental care in Ghana in their communiqués and other pastoral statements in any significant way, except to encourage all Christians in general and all Catholics in particular to “get involved in all the happenings at the national level, take active part in self-help projects, road maintenance work, rubbish clearing, cocoa evacuation and collective farming,” among others.²⁷⁶

Beginning from 1987, however, the bishops resumed their teachings on environmental issues in Ghana. In the communiqué they issued for that year, the bishops mentioned that their Justice and Peace Commission had published two leaflets on desertification “to draw the nation’s attention to the dangers in depleting our forests of their wood through deliberate cuttings or burnings.”²⁷⁷ According to them, environmental protection was one of the major concerns of the nations that have the future welfare of their citizens at heart.²⁷⁸ The bishops mentioned further that “some developed countries have millions of acres of forest whose sanctity they guard religiously and strictly and which must not be touched under pain of severe penalties.”²⁷⁹ Encouraging Ghana to

²⁷⁴ After the coup d'état on December 31, 1981, Ghana remained under military rule of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) till 1992 before the country returned to civilian rule again. Information accessed online at upi.com/Archives/1981/12/31/Coup-in-Ghana/4076378622800 on April 20, 2021.

²⁷⁵ Within this period, the communiqués of the Bishops' Conference centered mostly on moral conversion, peace, reconciliation and the need for national reconstruction. For more, see *Ghana Bishops Speak, Volume I*, 73 -117.

²⁷⁶ *Ghana Bishops Speak, Volume I*, 65.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

follow the example of these countries in respect to the conservation of forests, the bishops postulated among others that,

Some of the wood that is cut in Ghana has taken years to grow. We are fully aware of the economic value of timber of Ghana. However, the way it is being cut for export, we need no prophet to tell us the future of our forest situation is very bleak. The desert is slowly but surely descending upon us and unless something is done quickly, Ghana will be in for a very hard time, already in the first half of the next century.²⁸⁰

The bishops added that they would wish to see an intensification of efforts geared towards afforestation with the involvement of all citizens, but most especially the youth in it. According to the bishops, even though the timber industry in Ghana was a source of economic power for many Ghanaians, they were drawing attention the need to preserve the country's forests and to warn against the dangers of depleting them due to economic considerations because "our love for the country forces us to preach the gospel of salvation without compromise."²⁸¹

In the following year of 1988, the bishops continued their teachings on ecological care in the communiqué they issued for that year. Here, the bishops addressed the issue of the dumping of toxic waste and other used products in Ghana and the African continent as a whole by some industrialized nations. They posited that, "Looking beyond our own horizons, we join our leaders of Africa in denouncing and condemning the dumping of industrial toxic wastes by European, American and other nations anywhere on the African continent."²⁸² According to the bishops, the attempt by the rich nations to desecrate Ghana's environment must be considered a crime that cries to heaven for vengeance. This is because it turns African nations into incinerators where all sorts of garbage and waste are dumped and Africans into irrelevant beasts searching for "goods" in these

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 120.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Ibid., 132.

sites. The bishops condemned such incredible actions perpetuated by Western countries arguing that they are as a result of cruelty, racial arrogance and denial of the African's humanity.²⁸³

In the ensuing years between 1989 and 1991, the Bishops' Conference did not address the subject of the environment in their communiqués and pastoral statements. Nonetheless, they returned to the subject of the environment in their 1992 communiqué in obvious response to John Paul II's ecological Message to mark the 1990 *World Day of Peace*, to address several environmental issues plaguing Ghana at the time.²⁸⁴ In this communiqué, the bishops stated that, "Grave socio-economic problems exist which affect especially our rural communities, and which also have disastrous consequences on the environment. Many rural communities lack the basic places of convenience and the squalor in some parts of our cities is an eyesore."²⁸⁵ According to them also,

The serious lack of water supply in many rural communities, worsened sometimes by reckless exploitation of the environment, can be alarming. Many rivers and rivulets, which are the only sources of drinking water for people, are being polluted with frightening rapidity. In many places, large sections of our population are still exposed to such water-borne diseases as cholera, bilharzia, dysentery, guinea worm and river blindness. We cannot but repeat our insistent appeals to Ghanaians to safeguard the sanctity of our arable land and forests which are being destroyed in the quest for precious minerals and timber, to the detriment and impoverishment of many rural and urban communities. The short-term economic advantage of these activities can never be compared with the catastrophic consequences that await us in the future because of our heartless desecration of our environment.²⁸⁶

In the above statement, the bishops contend that the reckless exploitation of the environment leads to pollution of water bodies and inadequate water supply, a situation which in turn leads to the outbreak of water-borne diseases such as cholera, bilharzia, dysentery, etc. They also argue that

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ In his 1990 WDP Message, John Paul II stressed that peace is a question of harmony, relations with God, others and nature and that the global ecological crisis could be resolved through the restoration of proper relations with God, others and nature. See John Paul II, 1990 WDP Message # 1, 5, 7. See also Chapter one of this work for more details of this Message.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 222.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 222-223.

the destruction of arable lands and forests in search of precious minerals and timber leads to the impoverishment and destruction of both rural and urban communities. Consequently, I posit that in applying the principle of intergenerational solidarity to address the issue of ecological destruction, they argued that due to the need to safeguard the environment from possible catastrophic consequences in the future, Ghanaians should put a stop to their heartless destruction of the environment.

Also in this communiqué, the bishops revisited the subject of payment of compensation to farmers, something they had done previously in their 1980 communiqué. Here they taught once again that, “The refusal on the part of some people in the lumber industry to pay affected farmers adequate compensation for farms destroyed in their operation has reduced many of our rural farmers to disastrous penury. The injustice here is simply shameful.”²⁸⁷ Speaking also on the issue of deforestation, the bishops postulated that, “If we realise that at the beginning of the century, Ghana was said to be enjoying about 90,000 hectares of forest and that this has dwindled to about 20,000 hectares of forest, then we must realise that we are moving headlong into environmental disaster.”²⁸⁸ The bishops ended their ecological teaching in this communiqué by stating that, “There is no doubt that ecological pillage is our number one problem, much more alarming than political instability or what have you. With the destruction of the environment, our very survival is threatened.”²⁸⁹

The next communiqué of the Bishops’ Conference to deal with the topic of the environment was their 1994 communiqué. In this communiqué, the bishops made references to the First African

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 223.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

Synod held in 1994, which according to them, devoted a good deal of time to dealing with the need to preserve the environment.²⁹⁰ Thus, encouraged and inspired by the teachings of the 1994 African Synod, the bishops condemned the desecration of Africa’s ecology, especially by rich nations, and in reiterating their appeals for ecological care in Ghana, stated that, “The environment is our very life and we only cut our noses to spite our faces when we do not treat it with the delicate care it deserves.”²⁹¹ Following this teaching, the bishops repeated their previous calls on the need for all citizens to care for the environment in Ghana by saying that, “We would like to repeat here a concern previously expressed by us, namely, that if our economy should in part be based on the export of timber, laws on replanting of trees and on the prevention of bushfires and afforestation programmes should be enforced.”²⁹²

In the following year’s communiqué of 1995, the Bishops’ Conference addressed the issue of mining for the first time. Here, the bishops argued that “both surface mining and the technique of heap leaching not only destroy the fertility of the land – in the process gravely violating the environment – but more seriously, have catastrophic effects on life in whatever form where they take place.”²⁹³ They argued further that, “We are fully aware that Ghana depends heavily on the mining industry for its economy, but we are of the opinion that these methods of mining affecting the environment on which our very existence depends, do more harm than good. We hope that

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 241, 246. According to Peter Knox, the South African theologian, *Ecclesia in Africa*, the post-synodal exhortation of the First African Synod issued by Pope John Paul II in 1995, had only one single mention of the environment when the pope lauded the role of Catholic Universities, Higher institutes and cultural centers play in society. Nonetheless, Knox contends that the exhortation is more expansive in its teachings on the subject of resources, natural and human. According to him, the document observes how scarce resources of the continent are being tragically mismanaged and calls for a halt to this. See Peter Knox, “Theology, Ecology and Africa: No Longer Strange Bedfellows” in Agbonkhiamghe E. Orobator (Ed.). *Reconciliation, Justice and Peace: The Second African Synod* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2011), 161-162.

²⁹¹ *Catholic Bishops Speak, Volume I*, 246.

²⁹² Ibid., 246.

²⁹³ Ibid., 259.

effective action will be taken to minimize if not eliminate the damage involved.”²⁹⁴ Then repeating their previous calls for the care of the environment in Ghana, the bishops posited once again that,

We have had occasion in the past to remind ourselves of the need to keep our environment inviolate and we repeat the call here. The recent disastrous flooding of Accra and the filth it brought to the fore confirm our belief that environmental issues should be taken up seriously by the government and people of Ghana. In this key area of development as in others, we wish to continue to work closely with the State to bring about relief to our people.²⁹⁵

In their communiqué of 1995, the Bishops’ Conference did not only address the topic of mining in their teachings on the environment for the first time, but they also addressed themselves to the challenge of pollution in Ghana due mainly to indiscriminate dumping of waste, particularly in Ghana’s capital city of Accra, which often resulted in flooding. Hence, in this document, we see that the bishops again indicated their preparedness to work closely with the Government to seek solutions to the environmental problems in Ghana. Thus, once again, we have an indication of the readiness of the Bishops’ Conference to work in collaboration and solidarity with the State on the care of the environment in the country, an idea they had first mooted in their 1981 communiqué.²⁹⁶

Finally, in the 1996 communiqué of the Bishops’ Conference’s also, the Ghana bishops again spoke about the care of the environment in Ghana. Here, they addressed themselves to three major environmental issues facing Ghana, namely, the felling of trees, bush burning and mining. Warning against the long-term effects of these practices, the bishops postulated that,

For more than two decades, we have warned against the grave danger in the degradation of the environment. We wish to reiterate that the indiscriminate felling of trees for commercial purposes, the constant burning of the bush and some mining techniques are gradually spelling the doom of our nation. The short-term benefits we may derive from them are negated by the long-term disastrous consequences which need no prophets to foretell.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 259.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 259-260.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 280-281.

According to them, “Some mining techniques in particular destroy the land, cause disease and result in poverty. We wish once again to sound a warning note, let us respect the environment on which we depend.”²⁹⁸ Here also, in addition to talking about the negative consequences of bush burning and felling of trees in forest areas, the bishops repeated their previous warning on the dangers of mining, something they had first done in their 1995 communique. Besides, in applying the principle of intergenerational solidarity, the bishops called for the exercise of caution on illegal mining, noting that such practices can impact negatively on the future generations of people. Articulating what should be done practically to help safeguard the environment, the bishops said,

We appeal to our Catholics and all Ghanaians of goodwill to think of something practical and concrete to save our environment. In this regard, the re-introduction of “Arbor Days” when children are encouraged to plant a tree each could be an exercise in the right direction. We also appeal to those involved in illegal mining and those who indiscriminately burn bushes to desist from such practices.²⁹⁹

The Catholic bishops of Ghana adopted and re-introduced *Arbor Day* celebration in Ghana in the early 1980s when they began to address issues relating to the environment following its introduction in the mid-1920s by the then colonial Government of Sir Gordon Guggisberg (1919-1927).³⁰⁰ The introduction of the *Arbor Day* celebration was meant to instill in school children the values of environmental care through the planting of trees. Thus, on the first Friday of June each year, all school children in Catholic basic schools in Ghana were encouraged to plant a tree each after which they were to see to the growth of the trees through regular watering. In the early 1990’s, the Bishops’ Conference, realizing that the enthusiasm and publicity surrounding this exercise had waned considerably, decided to re-introduce the *Arbor Day/Week* celebration as the Catholic Church’s way of helping to inculcate in young school children the care of the environment, and by

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 281.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Information on the history of *Arbor Day* celebration in Ghana was accessed online at <https://www.modernghana.com/news/347969/bishop-calls-for-protection-of-environment.html>, on May 12, 2021.

so doing, contributing to improving and safeguarding the environment of Ghana. Although as at today, the *Arbor Day/Week* is still being practiced in Ghana by members of the Catholic Church, I contend that there is not much enthusiasm and involvement in the exercise by many Catholics. Thus, I argue that it is imperative for the Bishops' Conference to continue to encourage many more Catholics and all Ghanaians to get involved in the exercise as their contribution to the care of the environment in Ghana.

In conclusion, I posit that in the document, *Ghana Bishops Speak Volume I*, the Catholic bishops of Ghana dealt with five main environmental issues affecting the country, namely, bush burning, the indiscriminate felling of trees, mining, dumping of waste and desertification. I posit further that the bishops applied mainly the principles of solidarity, justice, common good and stewardship and care of creation to ground their teachings. In particular, they encouraged the Government, all Catholics and all Ghanaians to contribute their quota in helping to tackle the ecological issues facing the country.

2.2 Review of the Bishops' Conference Document, *Ecclesia in Ghana*, First National Catholic Pastoral Congress (1997)

The inspiration for the Catholic Church in Ghana to convoke a National Pastoral Congress came from the First Synod of Africa held in 1994 in Rome which set out an agenda for the Church in Africa regarding her mission of evangelization on the African continent and its adjoining islands at the onset of the third millennium.³⁰¹ Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator argues that, “a synod marks a pivotal event in the life of the church and represents a *kairos* for the Church, an opportune moment

³⁰¹ See details in John Paul II. *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Ecclesia in Africa: The Church in Africa and its Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995. In *Ecclesia in Africa*, John Paul II looks at the current situation of the African Church and examines the various aspects of her evangelizing mission such as evangelization, inculturation, dialogue, justice and peace, means of communication, among others.

to take stock of its history and experience, to assess its context and challenges and to rekindle its hopes and aspirations.”³⁰² True to these above sentiments of Orobator, I posit that this was the impact of the First African Synod on the Catholic Church in Ghana. This is because for the Church in Ghana, the 1994 First Synod of Africa offered a tremendous opportunity, a *kairos* moment of grace for the local Church to take stock of her mission of evangelization and to map out new strategies for its future mission of evangelisation.³⁰³ Thus, in their efforts to implement the recommendations and resolutions of the Post-Synodal Exhortation issued in 1995 by John Paul II, and titled *Ecclesia in Africa: On the Church in Africa and Its Evangelizing Mission in the Third Millennium*, the Catholic Bishops of Ghana organized the First National Catholic Pastoral Congress in Cape Coast, from April 7 to 14, 1997. This maiden National Catholic Pastoral Congress discussed the most significant aspects of the Church’s life and mission in Ghana, including renewal in the Church, family and Christian life, formation of priests, religious life, laity formation, Christian-Muslim relationships, justice and peace and social communications, among others.³⁰⁴

More significantly, during the 1997 National Pastoral Congress, the Ghanaian Catholic Church identified the care of the environment as one of the most important areas of the Church’s mission in the country. In the discussions on the environment, the Congress noted that there are good reasons why Christians should be concerned about the environment, arguing that, “In a very deep religious sense, the whole creation belongs together ... all the elements and all life-forms

³⁰² Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator (Ed.). *Reconciliation, Justice and Peace: The Second African Synod* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2011), 1-2. In his *Introduction* to the above-mentioned book on the topic, “The Synod as Ecclesial Conversation,” Orobator argues that a synod brings the past, present and future realities of the Church into a sharper focus. For him, a synod is but a conversation of the Church on these realities.

³⁰³ Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference. *Ecclesia in Ghana: The Church in Ghana and Its Evangelizing Mission in the Third Millennium* (Takoradi: St. Francis Press, 1997), 4.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 3. In 2014, the Conference held a Second Pastoral Congress following the 2009 Second Synod of Africa.

contribute to each other and make life possible as the Creator intends it to be”.³⁰⁵ The Congress noted further that since the mid-1980s, the Ghana Government has taken steady steps to tackle the environmental problems confronting the country even as the country is committed to the tenets of sustainable development while working out and updating the requisite framework to meet future challenges.³⁰⁶ Then turning to herself in a mission *ad intra*, the Congress resolved that the Catholic Church in Ghana needed to help tackle environmental care in the country while doing everything possible in her power to collaborate with and complement the efforts of the Government in the care of the environment in Ghana.³⁰⁷

The Pastoral Congress document, titled *Ecclesia in Ghana: On the Church in Ghana and Its Evangelizing Mission in the Third Millennium* published in 1997 by the Bishops’ Conference after the Congress, contained the deliberations and discussions of the Church in Ghana at the Congress. In the document, the entire Chapter 11 was devoted to discussions on the care of the environment, under the title, *The Church and the Environment*. Here, the various aspects of the ecological question in Ghana were discussed by the Ghanaian Catholic Church. In the discussion below, I offer the most significant ecological teachings in this document.

First and foremost, the bishops talked about what Pope Francis would later describe as *integral ecology*, that is, the interrelatedness of humans to God, other humans and the non-human creation, and the need for human beings to be concerned about and take good care of creation.³⁰⁸ Here, the bishops noted that there are good reasons why all Christians should be concerned about the environment. According to them,

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 155.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 160.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 160.

³⁰⁸ Pope Francis Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si’* (Vatican, 2015), LS # 66, 137-139.

In a very deep religious sense, the whole creation belongs together. All of its components are equally necessary to let everything else exist. The galaxy, the sun, the air, the land, all the elements and all life-forms contribute to each other and make life possible as the Creator intended it to be. We, as human beings are supported by and depend on this living whole for our continued existence and for self-expression.³⁰⁹

Secondly, the bishops addressed the theme of stewardship and care of creation. Here, they noted that God has entrusted the responsibility for the care of the environment to human beings. According to them, the entrustment of this responsibility to humans to care for the environment flows from the fact that human beings are the only creatures on earth who can consciously plan, improve, alter or destroy the earth.³¹⁰ Consequently, the bishops explained that God has charged human beings to care for the earth in two ways, namely, as *dominus/a* and caretaker. They explained that as *dominus/a*, the role of humans is that of housekeeper, that is, God has made humans in charge of His creation. Regarding the role of caretaker, they likewise postulated that God makes humans responsible on for all creatures and their habitats His behalf.³¹¹ Teaching in this way, the bishops evidently applied the principle of stewardship (*dominus/a*) and care of creation (caretaker) within Catholic social teaching to ground their ecological teachings here.

Thirdly and lastly, the bishops stated that the current ecological crisis in Ghana are anthropogenic, meaning that human beings (and in this case, Ghanaians) are largely responsible for the harm being caused to the environment in Ghana. According to them,

It is obvious to all of us by now that on the subject of environmental degradation, human beings exert the greatest impact. This is because in our attempt to exploit natural resources to meet socio-economic needs, adequate care is usually not taken to guard against the depletion of resources. Consequently, resource utilization has led to loss of biodiversity, depletion of soil fertility, climate change, significant

³⁰⁹ Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, *Ecclesia in Ghana*, 155.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

increase in waste generation, particularly in urban centers, misuse of chemicals, etc.³¹²

Today, it is fact that Ghana, as elsewhere in the world, continues to grapple with the problem of environmental degradation. In addressing the challenges posed by environmental degradation in *Ecclesia in Ghana*, the Bishops' Conference grouped the main environmental issues in Ghana into two categories, namely, resource-specific problems and location-specific problems. They defined resource-specific problems as issues affecting the land and water resources as well as the coastal zone while location-specific problems reflect issues commonly related to industrial and mining activities and human settlements.³¹³ The bishops also identified population growth, poverty and income generation as some of the major causes of the environmental degradation in Ghana.³¹⁴ Besides, in examining the issue of land tenure, the bishops lamented the fact that the traditional practice of communal ownership of lands was gradually disappearing while individuals were now largely acquiring land through several other means without recourse to the community.³¹⁵ According to them, this new practice results in unregulated hunting, over-exploitation of wildlife resources and the destruction of wildlife habitats.³¹⁶ Thus, for the bishops, the land as a common good was now being replaced by the land as personal resource, thereby leading to environmental destruction.

In examining the various reasons for the many environmental challenges in Ghana also, the Bishops' Conference identified the lack of adequate national or local land use planning policy as a problem, arguing that "it has become a commonplace to see rapid settlement and clearing of

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Ibid., 155-156.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 157-158.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 158.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 159.

remaining forested areas without regard for their sustainability for farming.”³¹⁷ According to the bishops also, there is lack of mechanisms to consider the spatial aspects of national or local development plans in a systematic way. For them, this absence of legal mechanisms leads to the situation where there is no means of ensuring that development is located in the least environmentally sensitive areas or that programmes to minimize environmental degradation can be geographically focused.³¹⁸ With this, they called on Government to consider putting in place such mechanisms that will ensure that developments do not negatively affect the environment.

Furthermore, the Bishops’ Conference blamed institutional weaknesses and limited public awareness of environmental issues as some of the underlying factors of environmental damage. They argued that “the lack of understanding of the adverse effects of production systems or consumption patterns limits the development of popular demand for environmental protection and benign technologies.”³¹⁹ Having said this, the bishops turned their attention to the Government to address what the latter can do to tackle the environmental situation in the country. The bishops articulated that, “Ghana has been taking steady steps since the mid-1980s to tackle the environmental problems confronting the country. The country is committed to the tenets of sustainable development and the requisite framework is being updated to meet future challenges.”³²⁰ After commending the Government’s role in taking steps to tackling the environmental problems in Ghana, the bishops turned attention in a *missio ad intra* to their own role and that of the Church as a whole in ecological care in Ghana and resolved that, “As a Church,

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ibid. 160

³²⁰ Ibid., 160.

we need to take environmental problems seriously and do all in our power to complement the efforts of Government.”³²¹

In my opinion, I contend that the ecological teachings of the Bishops’ Conference in their 1997 Pastoral Congress document, *Ecclesia in Ghana*, largely reflected the major environmental issues that the Conference had addressed in their previous communiqués issued between 1980 and 1997 wherein they had discussed the challenges posed by bush burning, logging of trees, mining, indiscriminate dumping of waste and the pollution of water bodies, among others. I contend further that in the bishops’ ecological teachings in this document, the bishops of Ghana applied the principles of integral ecology, stewardship, care of creation and intergenerational solidarity to teach and invite all Catholics in particular and all Ghanaians in general to contribute their quota to the care of the environment and in helping to safeguard Ghana’s environment from further damage.

In summary, I posit that the 1997 National Pastoral Congress document titled, *Ecclesia in Ghana*, is an important document for the Catholic Church in Ghana because it contains the aspirations and goals of the Ghanaian Catholic Church regarding its mission of evangelization in Ghana following the discussions that took place at the Church’s First National Pastoral Congress in 1997 in the aftermath of the 1994 First African Synod. As a document, *Ecclesia in Ghana* spells out the plans of the Church in Ghana as well as the appropriate strategies the Church hoped to implement for effective evangelisation in Ghana in the third millennium.³²² I contend that the fact that integral ecology features prominently in such an important document of the Ghanaian Church with an entire chapter dedicated to teachings on the environment bears ample testimony to the fact that the

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² *Ecclesia in Ghana*, 4. In his *Foreword to Ecclesia in Ghana*, the then President of the Bishops’ Conference, Rt. Rev. Francis Anani Lodonu, stated that the synod was a means through which the Bishops’ Conference hoped to undertake a careful planning of the Church in Ghana and to devise appropriate strategies for an effective evangelization in the country for the third millennium.

Catholic Church in Ghana does not consider the care of the environment as peripheral to her mission of evangelization. On the contrary, the Church views integral ecology as a very important aspect or component of her mission in Ghana.

Additionally, I argue that the Church's resolution to work in collaboration with the Government of Ghana on the care of the environment as spelt out in *Ecclesia in Ghana* gives ample indication to the seriousness with which the Catholic Church in Ghana considered the issue of the environment and her acknowledgment that there is the need for an all-hands on deck approach to environmental care in Ghana.³²³ From this standpoint, I posit that since the Church in Ghana considers the care of the environment such an important issue in her mission of evangelisation, one on which she seeks to play a major role in with the support of Government and other stakeholders, the Church should not only strengthen her efforts on environmental care in Ghana but she should also begin to put in place the necessary mechanisms that will enable her to collaborate closely with the Ghana Government to safeguard and protect the environment of Ghana.³²⁴ The idea of Church and State collaboration in Ghana on the care of the environment was first mooted by the bishops themselves in 1981, then repeated in their 1995 communiqué and revisited in their 1997 Pastoral Congress document.

In this dissertation, I postulate that the time has now come for the Catholic bishops of Ghana to move forward with their earlier proposals for collaboration with the State on environmental care in the country. I contend that what makes this proposed resolution for a Church and State

³²³ In his teaching on the care of the environment, Pope Francis has called for dialogue between all persons on earth in order to save the earth which he describes as our common home. This is evident in paragraphs 3, 14 and 15 and other paragraphs of the pope's encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. For more information on the contents of the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, see Pope Francis. *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015.

³²⁴ In Chapter four of this work, I shall elaborate more on the current existing collaborations between the Catholic Church and the Government of Ghana. Likewise, in Chapter five, I shall discuss the model of collaboration I am proposing should exist between the Church and the Government of Ghana in the care of the environment in Ghana.

collaboration on environmental care in Ghana even more pressing and urgent today is the teaching of Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, in which the pope invites all people living on earth to dialogue and work together to save the earth, our common home.³²⁵ I opine that a positive response to this call of Pope Francis will not only serve as a faithful response of the Church in Ghana to her global leader, but more importantly, it will also be a significant fulfilment of the long-cherished aspiration of the Ghanaian Catholic Church for a Church and State collaboration on the care of the environment in Ghana. I posit that when this collaboration becomes a reality and begins to be implemented, it would go a long way to facilitate the work of both the Catholic Church and the Government of Ghana towards the care of Ghana's environment, and thereby protecting the latter from both current and future damage.

2.3 Review of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference Document, *Ghana Bishops Speak, Volume II (1997-2007)*

In the year 2007, the Ghana Bishops' Conference published the second volume of the document, *Ghana Bishops Speak*, containing a collection of the communiqué, memoranda and pastoral letters of the Conference spanning the period from 1997 to 2007.³²⁶ As has been consistent with their practice in the past, the Bishops' Conference again offered several important teachings concerning the care of the environment in this document, titled *Catholic Bishops Speak Volume II*. In their 1997 communiqué bishops in reiterating their previous teachings on the environment posited that, "We cannot but revisit our preoccupation with the environment, which has been the subject of our communiques in the last few years."³²⁷ They added that, "By way of demonstrating our commitment to the regeneration and preservation of the environment, we hereby institute the first

³²⁵ Pope Francis. *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home* (2015). LS # 1, 14-15.

³²⁶ Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference. *Ghana Bishops Speak, Volume II*. Takoradi: St. Francis Press, 2007.

³²⁷ *Ghana Bishops Speak, Volume II*, 41-42.

full week of June of every year as *Arbor Week*, to be observed as the Church's sanitation and environment week. We are aware that there are many laws in place to protect our environment. We plead for their enforcement".³²⁸ Here, I postulate that by instituting the first full week of June each year as the Church's "Sanitation and Environment Week," the bishops once again showed their commitment to the care of the environment, seeing it as part and parcel of their pastoral duties as bishops. Besides, I argue that the bishops hoped that the expansion of the Church's previous celebration of the *Arbor Day* into an entire week filled with activities relating to the care of the environment would elicit a fuller and better participation of the lay faithful in ecological care and thereby help enhance the care of the environment in Ghana.

Following their 1997 communiqué, the Bishops' Conference addressed the issue of energy crisis for the first time in their teachings on the environment in their 1998 communiqué.³²⁹ In this communiqué, the bishops stated among others that "the Akosombo Dam crisis is also related to the environment in some way."³³⁰ This is because according to the bishops, "There is a kind of symbiotic relationship between water and trees. Trees depend on water to grow, and rain depends on trees to fall."³³¹ Based on this conviction, the bishops appealed for the planting of trees around the banks of the dam, saying, "We would appeal to people with the means to embark on afforestation on the banks of the Volta River and Lake."³³² Thus, for the bishops, the supply of electricity and energy could be enhanced through the exercise of tree planting and preservation of water resources.

³²⁸ Ibid., 42.

³²⁹ This teaching of the bishops of Ghana was occasioned by the frequent electricity outages experienced in Ghana that year due mostly to lack of sufficient water in the Akosombo Hydro-Electric Dam which supplies electricity to most parts of southern Ghana.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Ibid.

In the following year of 1999, the Bishops' Conference did not specifically address the topic of the environment but made very general references to the mission of the Church in Ghana, stating that this mission included concern for the environment. Thus, in teaching that their service to the nation was in furtherance of the mission of Jesus, "who came not to be served but to serve" (*Matt. 20:18*),³³³ the bishops articulated that,

the Church since its inception in Ghana, has been at the service of the nation. Through her educational establishments, health and sanitation facilities, agricultural projects, social amenities, concern for the environment, etc., the Church has touched the lives of many in the country, especially people in deprived situations and communities. All these efforts have contributed to improving the quality of life of our people.³³⁴

It is significant to note that while the Catholic Church in Ghana has often been commended by the State, other bodies and individuals for her contributions to education, healthcare and other socio-economic development,³³⁵ not much has been said about the Church's contributions to the care of the environment in Ghana. I argue that there are two main reasons that account for this situation.

Firstly, I think that in terms of the Church's contribution to healthcare and education, for example, the healthcare and educational facilities run by the Church are found across the country and are easily visible and so people can see these infrastructures and commend the Church for them. On the contrary, we do not have many physical or visible evidence of how the Church has contributed to the care of the environment in Ghana apart from the bishops' occasional statements on the environment in their communiqués. This therefore makes it difficult for most Ghanaians to appreciate the Church's great contributions to the care of the environment in Ghana all these years.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

³³⁴ *Ibid.* 61.

³³⁵ In their visit to Ghana's Parliament on July 3, 2017, the Speaker of Ghana's Parliament, Rt. Hon. Mike Aaron Oquaye, was full of praises for the Catholic church's role in education, health care and socio-economic development in Ghana. Information accessed online at <https://www.parliament.gh-news>, on April 20, 2021. In Chapter four, I shall examine the Church's contributions to education, healthcare and good governance in more details.

Secondly, I argue that while there are already existing historical partnerships between the Church and the State on education, healthcare and more recently, on good governance in Ghana, there is no such partnership yet between the Church and the State as far as the care of the environment is concerned. Consequently, while the Church and State collaboration in the areas of education, health and good governance, for instance, enables Ghanaian citizens to be conversant with and informed about the contributions that the Church is making towards the common good of the people of Ghana, the same cannot be said of the Church's contribution to ecological care owing precisely to this lack of partnership between the Church and the State even though I contend that the Church is contributing a lot in this area too. The lack of appreciation among citizens regarding the Church's contributions to environmental care in Ghana is one of the reasons why I am arguing in this dissertation for a Church and State partnership on environmental care in Ghana. Through this new model of collaboration, I posit that not only will the Church's contribution to ecological care in Ghana be highlighted just as those of education and healthcare, but more importantly, the Church will also be able to contribute even more to ecological care in Ghana today as she has done in the past. Consequently, I argue that a Church and State collaboration on the care of the environment in Ghana will serve similar important purposes as the Church's contributions to Ghana's education, healthcare and good governance.³³⁶

At the turn of the century in the year 2000, the Bishops' Conference continued with their teachings on the environment. In the communiqué they issued for that year, the bishops posited, "Our environment is being desecrated at a frightening rate as we have had cause to point out in many previous communiqués. It was recently reported that in a few years' time, as much as about 35%

³³⁶ The Catholic Church collaborates with the Ghana Government in education, healthcare and good governance for the common good of the people of Ghana. There are policy documents guiding these existing partnerships. In Chapter 4, I shall elaborate more on this topic to argue on the need for ecological collaboration with the State.

of the surface area of Ghana could become a desert; and yet, we look on powerlessly when our wood is cut for short-term economic gain without it being replaced.”³³⁷ The bishops then called for strict enforcement of environmental laws by asking the Government to enforce rigorously laws that govern re-planting of trees which are cut by timber contractors in the country as well as those that concern surface mining and bush burning to protect the nation’s environment. They warned that if this was not done, Ghana as a nation was heading for a sure ecological catastrophe.³³⁸

From the above ecological teachings, I contend that it is evident that in their 2000 communique, the Bishops’ Conference once again dealt mainly with the major environmental issues affecting Ghana, namely, bush burning, logging and mining that the bishops had dealt with in various ways in their previous communiques. Besides, I also posit that just as they had done in the past, the bishops made yet another appeal for the strict implementation of the laws regulating mining and afforestation to be implemented since according to them, Ghana was fast becoming a desert by losing its forest cover at a very alarming rate.

The ecological teachings contained in the 2000 communiqué of the Bishops’ Conference were carried over to the bishops’ communique of 2001. In the communiqué the bishops issued in 2001, while addressing the role that agriculture plays in the economy of the country, the bishops stated,

Mention of agriculture reminds us of the warning we have given in the past on many occasions regarding the need for us Ghanaians to preserve our environment. We have in the past bemoaned the catastrophic effect of surface mining and wanton destruction of our forest. We have been very much touched by the reality that the environmental degradation due to bushfires has taken on a disastrous dimension.³³⁹

The bishops taught further that the destruction of the environment leads to problems such as poverty, scarcity of rain, depletion of water bodies and mass migration and appealed to all

³³⁷ *Ghana Bishops Speak, Volume II*, 72-73.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 72-73.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

Ghanaians, but in particular, those who appear to be suffering from the worst effects of the change in environment, to desist from bush burning, indiscriminate felling of trees, especially economic trees, and certain traditional farming methods. They noted that if such precautions are not taken, “we should not be surprised that the Sahara Desert consumes a great part of the upper regions of Ghana in the foreseeable future.”³⁴⁰ With this, they renewed their repeated appeals for the enforcement of laws governing surface mining and bush burning in Ghana.

In the bishops’ 2001 communiqué, I contend that the bishops addressed the issues of mining, bush burning and indiscriminate felling of trees in Ghana. The bishops posited that these practices lead to the destruction of forests, lack of rainfall, scarcity of water, desertification and migration. To help forestall these challenges, the bishops appealed to the Government in particular for the enforcement of laws in order to regulate mining, logging of trees in forests and bush burning in the country.

In the next two years, that is, 2002 and 2003, there was no mention of environmental issues in the communiqués of the Bishops’ Conference. I find the lack of mention of environmental issues in the 2003 Bishops’ communiqué in particular to be very curious and surprising in view of the fact that the Bishops’ Conference meeting took place in Obuasi, a mining town which holds the largest mining concessions in Ghana and where the various mining activities, both deep and surface mining over the years, have devastated the land and water bodies of the township and depriving the town and its surrounding communities of access to lands for farming and other agricultural activities.³⁴¹ In their article titled, *Impact of Mining in Obuasi Municipality in Ashanti Region of*

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 84-94. See full details in Opoku, MP et al. *Impact of Mining in Obuasi Municipality in Ashanti Region of Ghana: An Assessment of Human Rights Concerns in Mining Communities* in *Scholars Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* (December 2015; 3 (9A): 1407-1415. I consider it strange that the bishops’ communique of 2003 did not address such environmental concerns but instead talked about issues of poverty in Ghana, the silver

Ghana: An Assessment of Human Rights Concerns in Mining Communities, Opoku Maxwell et al articulate that mining activities in Obuasi township and its surrounding villages come with many negative environmental consequences such as deforestation, pollution of water bodies, destruction of fertile agricultural lands as well as resulting in human rights violations such as denial of the right to work, education and health.³⁴² Hence, for me, the lack of mention of environmental issues in this particular communiqué of the bishops in 2003 is surprising and mindboggling.

In 2004, the Bishops' Conference resumed their teachings on environmental concerns consistent with their preoccupation on the care of the environment in Ghana. Here in their 2004 communique, the Episcopal Conference appealed for the preservation of all the natural parks in Ghana, but particularly those in the northern parts of the country where desert conditions are very much prevalent. Among others, the bishops postulated that,

During the short space of time that we have spent here, we were apprised of another very important aspect of the locality. The area is endowed with the biggest Game Reserve in West Africa. It also has one of the biggest waterfalls in Ghana. We suggest that these great assets be further developed and preserved in a better condition. They have the potential to become comparable to any tourist attractions in Ghana that are patronized. They should not remain unrecognized. The Park, with many attractions, economically stands in good stead both for the nation as a whole and for the Gonja Districts in particular, if they are well attended to. We draw attention to the urgent need for Wildlife Conservation in general to be seriously looked at all over Ghana.³⁴³

Following their appeal to the Wildlife Conservation, the bishops also called on traditional leaders, regarded in Ghana as custodians of traditional lands, to contribute their quota to the protection of natural parks by saying that, "Traditional rulers when appealed to should readily make available

Jubilee celebration of Pope John Paul II, the choice of Archbishop Peter K. Appiah Turkson of Cape Coast as the first Ghanaian cardinal as well as issues of bribery and corruption in Ghana, among others.

³⁴² Opoku, MP et al. *Impact of Mining in Obuasi Municipality in Ashanti Region*, 1411.

³⁴³ *Ghana Bishops Speak, Volume II*, 104-105.

to the Forestry Commission pieces of land that can be turned into Parks.”³⁴⁴ As custodians of the lands, traditional leaders in Ghana are often the first port of call when it comes to ensuring that the environment under their jurisdiction is protected and safeguarded from degradation. Therefore, the Government and other bodies often cooperate with them to ensure environmental care and protection in their jurisdictions. Following after their appeals to traditional authorities, the bishops further appealed to hunters, saying, “We appeal to hunters to desist from hunting game indiscriminately and without genuine permits.”³⁴⁵ The bishops did not end this communiqué without making yet another appeal to Ghanaians to take environmental issues in Ghana seriously as they had done consistently in the past, by stating again that, “We would like to repeat here what we have said in many a communiqué in the past. We are worried about the rapidity with which we are destroying our forests, lands and water bodies. We need to go in massively for afforestation. The environment is us.”³⁴⁶ The bishops then repeated their calls to all Catholics in Ghana to give their faithful response and commitment to the Church’s *Arbor Day* celebrations, by stating once again that, “We would like to remind our faithful of the institution of *Arbor Days* in June when each child in our schools is expected to plant a tree.”³⁴⁷ In addressing the issue of indiscriminate logging of trees, the bishops asked timber contractors “to respect the laws governing logging and the replacement of the trees that they fell as we have said many times in the past.”³⁴⁸ Within the following two years of 2005 and 2006, the Bishops’ Conference did not address themselves to environmental issues, and therefore, we have no mention of environmental issues by the Bishops’ Conference in the communiqués they issued in those two years.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 105.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

In summary, I posit that the contents of the Bishops' Conference's teachings on the environment in the period between 1997 and 2006 as contained in the document, *Ghana Bishops Speak Volume II*, are not markedly different from the previous teachings of the Bishops' Conference on the environment found in *Ghana Bishops' Speak Volume I* and also in the 1997 Pastoral Congress document, *Ecclesia in Ghana*. In *Ghana Bishops Speak Volume II* just as in the bishops' previous documents and statements, the Ghanaian Catholic bishops also dealt similarly with the most critical environmental challenges facing Ghana, namely, mining, bush burning, indiscriminate felling of trees, improper waste disposal and pollution of water bodies. In these teachings also, the bishops applied the principles of stewardship and care of the environment in their communiqués issued during the period in urging all Ghanaians to be involved in the care of the environment. Similarly, the bishops applied the principles of solidarity and integral ecology in these ecological teachings. We see this for example, in their 2004 communique in which the bishops stated that “the environment is us,” and argued that the lack of care for the environment can result in poverty and migration as well as other negative repercussions on human conditions.³⁴⁹

What I also find very significant in the ecological teachings of the Bishops' Conference in *Ghana Bishops' Speak Volume II* is the fact that there is an increasing call by the bishops on the Government to apply the relevant and necessary environmental laws to help save the environment in Ghana from further degradation. For example, in their 2000, 2001 and 2005 communiqués, the bishops called for strict enforcement of the environmental laws of Ghana to protect and safeguard the environment of Ghana from further destruction. But in addition to asking that environmental laws be applied to help protect Ghana's environment, the bishops also frequently encouraged all Ghanaians, but especially all members of the Church in particular to get more actively involved in

³⁴⁹ *Ghana Bishops Speak, Volume II*, 105.

the Church's practical initiatives on the care of the environment, particularly the Church's *Arbor Day/Week* celebrations.

In conclusion, I argue that in *Ghana Bishops' Speak Volume II*, the ecological teachings of the Bishops' Conference show that the bishops acknowledge that both the Church and the State have important roles to play in the care of the environment in Ghana. I posit that this recognition is something which should further encourage and motivate the Bishops' Conference today to continue to seek new and innovative ways and means of working within the Conference as one body, and also collectively with the Government, on the care of the environment in Ghana.

2.4 Review of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference Document, *Ghana Catholic Bishops Speak, Volume III (2007-2016)*

In 2017, the Bishops' Conference published the third edition of its document, titled *Ghana Catholic Bishops' Speak Volume III*, containing the collection of their communiqués, memoranda, and pastoral statements from 2007 to 2016. I opine that a theological review of the contents of this document equally shows that in this document, the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference continued with their teachings on the care of the environment in Ghana. Similarly, I posit that just as they had done in all their previous communiques and other statements and documents, in this document too, the Bishops' Conference addressed themselves to the most critical ecological issues in Ghana, namely, mining, the indiscriminate felling of trees, bush burning and pollution. In addition, I contend that the bishops grounded their ecological teachings in this document on the principles of stewardship and care of the earth, intergenerational solidarity, common good and integral ecology just as they had done previously.

In their 2007 communiqué, the bishops in continuing with their ecological teachings reiterated their previous calls for the protection of the environment in Ghana, by noting that,

The destruction of the ecology has already had disastrous effects on our life and yet, our forest continues to be depleted. The recent flood disaster in the three Northern Regions of Ghana and elsewhere indicates that the irresponsible and unrestrained human activities can have disastrous effects on our environment, human life and property.³⁵⁰

The bishops explained that environmental catastrophes come about due to environmental degradation caused by activities such as bush burning, indiscriminate felling of trees, sand winning and surface mining and therefore, these activities needed to be checked to forestall such occurrences. While sympathizing with all flood and other disaster victims, they also commended the Government, Churches, organisations and individuals for having speedily reacted to alleviate the situation of the victims and encouraged all those who are responsible for administering funds and goods donated to alleviate the hardship of the affected persons to do so conscientiously.³⁵¹

In reviewing the above statement, I argue that the bishops addressed the situation of flooding in the northern parts of Ghana as well as bush burning, indiscriminate felling of trees, and sand winning and mining, and called on all Ghanaians to desist from all practices that harmed the environment. According to the bishops, if citizens do not begin to put a stop to these negative practices, their irresponsible and unrestrained human activities would continue to have disastrous impact on the environment, human life and property.

In the bishops' communiqué for 2008, there was no mention of environmental issues. This is because focus of the communiqué was on the impending elections in Ghana at the end of that year and so the Conference spent the time discussing how the various stakeholders, including political

³⁵⁰ Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference. *Ghana Catholic Bishops Speak, Volume III* (Accra: National Catholic Secretariat, 2017), 12-13.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

parties, the Electoral Commission, security agencies, national and international observers, Religious Bodies, among others, could contribute their quota to ensuring free and fair elections in Ghana.³⁵² The Conference took up the ecological question in their communique the following year.

In their 2009 communiqué, the subject of mining was the main environmental issue addressed by the Bishops' Conference. Here, the bishops stated that they had listened to three experts in the mining industry on the negative and positive aspects of the industry, and therefore, "plead that this sector of our economy should be looked at carefully by all stakeholders so as to achieve its intended purpose - economic advantage for Ghanaians and peace for Ghana and not an increase in poverty and denial of human rights."³⁵³ They then mentioned that they would return to the subject of mining and the oil find in their future communiqués.³⁵⁴ True to their word, the Bishops' Conference addressed the issue of mining among other environmental concerns in their 2010 communiqué.

Without a doubt, the 2010 communiqué of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference is by far, the most comprehensive teaching given by the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference on the topic of the environment and environmental care in Ghana from 1965 till date. In fact, one would be right to call the 2010 communiqué of the Bishops' Conference an "*ecological communique*" since the entire communiqué was devoted to a discussion on the state of the environment in Ghana. The communiqué itself was titled, *If you want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation*, adopting the same title of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's 2010 *World Day of Peace Message*³⁵⁵ and giving strong

³⁵² The theme of the bishops' communiqué for 2008 was on peace and the role of various stakeholders in peaceful elections in Ghana. As a result, the bishops did not make mention of ecological issues in this communique. See *Catholic Bishops Speak, Volume III*, 16-23.

³⁵³ *Ghana Catholic Bishops Speak Volume III*, 27.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁵ Benedict XVI, *World Day of Peace Message* (January 1, 2010). Full text accessed online at <http://www.vaticana.va-messages-peace-documents>, on April 20, 2021.

indications that the bishops were going to address the issue of integral ecology and its links to peace as found in the pope's message given at the beginning of the year 2010.

In the opening preamble of this document, the Bishops Conference acknowledged that the theme of their communiqué, namely, “*If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation*”, was one that they had borrowed from the message of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, for the 2010 World Day of Peace.³⁵⁶ They then stated that, “During our meeting, we have turned our pastoral attention to an issue that we have addressed time and again in previous communiqués, namely, the management of our God-given environment, the exploitation of our mineral and natural resources as well as the impending oil and gas production, which seems to hold promise for all Ghanaians, if well managed.”³⁵⁷ Having set the agenda for their ecological teaching in the preamble, the bishops then moved on to address the various aspects of the ecological question, beginning with the theme of respect for creation.

On respect for creation, the bishops taught that, “God is the Creator of all that exists. In creating man and woman in His image, he also charged them to work and cultivate the soil and care for creation (Gen. 2:5-6, 15).”³⁵⁸ According to the bishops, “Since creation is a gift from God, humankind has an obligation and indeed a duty to use resources judiciously and so preserve and conserve enough resources in our world for the benefit of future generations.”³⁵⁹ On this same theme of respect for creation, the bishops made a remarkable and significant reference to traditional Ghanaian practices concerning the care of the environment.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁶ *Catholic Bishops Speak, Volume III*, 30.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

In Ghana, there are several traditional indigenous ecological practices among the indigenous people, especially among the Akan, that are intended to safeguard and protect the environment. These practices include the observance of sacred days on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, where no fishing or farming takes place, the practice of sacred groves where certain trees are not to be cut down and certain portions of forests are not to be cultivated as well as the observance of taboos and totems, where certain animal species are not to be hunted or eaten by the people, among other practices. All these practices are traditional ways by which indigenous Ghanaians in the past and even in the present, sought or seek to protect the environment.³⁶¹ While making references to these practices, the bishops argued that,

Respect for creation has always been upheld in the culture of all peoples. For example, for all peoples in Ghana, there were and still are certain prohibitions which ensure the preservation and responsible use of natural resources. These include prohibitions against cutting trees from certain forests, farming on certain days of the week and fishing in some water bodies that were considered sacred; for people living along the coast, fishing on certain days was and is still prohibited.³⁶²

For the bishops, “Such prohibitions underscore not only the ingenuity of our forebears but also their insight and intelligence, as these were cultural ways of preserving the ecosystem.”³⁶³ Following this statement, the bishops then lamented that, “Currently, the over-exploitation and unbridled use of nature is threatening to disrupt the ecosystem as designed by the Creator and is undermining our survival, security and peace.”³⁶⁴ Thus, I posit that for the bishops, a return to and or adoption of some of these indigenous practices could offer useful ways of protecting and safeguarding the environment of Ghana from its current and future damage. I shall elaborate more on these indigenous ecological wisdom and practices later in Chapter three of this dissertation.

³⁶¹ In Chapter three of this work, I will discuss these indigenous and traditional ecological practices in much more detail.

³⁶² Ibid., 30-31.

³⁶³ Ibid, 31.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

Turning their attention to the issue of mining in fulfilment of their intention to do so in their 2009 communique, the bishops spoke about the negative impact of mining on the environment, arguing among others that,

Mining as an activity has been going on in the country for a long time, but regrettably, we cannot affirm that the advantages derived from the mining activities are in any way commensurate with their disastrous impact on the natural environment. As pastors, we also want to single out for attention the worrying development of mining in forest reserves. It is gradually becoming the trend for the government and some traditional rulers to grant foreign mining companies the concession to mine in forest reserves.³⁶⁵

For the bishops, the clearing of forest reserves which serve as natural habitats for mining, especially surface mining, oil and gas exploration and exploitation has led to the unprecedented loss of biodiversity in the ecosystem, threatening a sizable number of plant and animal species. Accordingly, they advocated that there must be an immediate abolition of surface mining in the country because of its obvious harmful social and environmental consequences while commending traditional rulers who are making great efforts to protect the environment.³⁶⁶

Away from the subject of mining, the next issue the bishops addressed was that of pollution. Here, the bishops posited that, “Pollution is something that stares us in the face every day. Air, water and noise pollution is increasing at an alarming rate today, so much so that it appears to have been taken for granted. However, its harmful effects are as alarming as they are subtle. Air pollution, for example, occurs with the addition of harmful chemicals to the earth’s atmosphere.”³⁶⁷ They continued by saying that “we also deplore the ever-increasing pollution in the air, the making of

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 31-32.

excessive noise that can be injurious to our health and the indiscriminate littering with plastics and refuse.”³⁶⁸

After addressing the issue of pollution, the bishops then discussed the use of biotechnology in farming practices in Ghana, postulating that,

We are also very concerned about the recent introduction and widespread use of agro-chemicals and harmful weedicides and pesticides in view of the negative effects on the soil, plants, animals, human beings, lakes, underground water and rivers. For example, it is very sad to note that many of our rivers, for instance, the Ankobra, Birim, the Pra, etc., are no longer potable due to excessive pollution.³⁶⁹

Following this, the bishops then examined once again the issue of logging of trees in Ghana’s forests which according to them leads to deforestation. Here, the bishops posited that,

Deforestation in Ghana has taken an enormous toll through the ages in environmental damage, economic deterioration and human misery. For example, the escalation of prices of food items in the country is often due to shortages in agricultural production as a result of poor soil fertility and erratic rainfall patterns. The world market prices of oil and gas continue to rise, thereby forcing people to switch demand to charcoal and firewood as sources of domestic energy which leads to the depletion of our forests.³⁷⁰

The bishops added that they were alarmed at the rapid rate of deforestation in Ghana as a result of excessive lumbering of timber. It is estimated that when one mature tree is felled and conveyed out of the forest, a good number of non-economic trees die in the process. They stated that at present, according to reliable sources, the forest cover of the country is only 1.2 million hectares, down from 8.2 million hectares in 1957.³⁷¹ The annual deforestation rate is 65,000 hectares per year and yet there are numerous officially licensed timber companies in addition to the illegal “chain saw” operators still at work in our forests.³⁷²

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 32.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Ibid.

Having examined the major environmental challenges confronting the country, the bishops proceeded to discuss the problems that these environmental challenges were posing to the survival of the State, and its citizens and the environment and what role the Church, the Government and other stakeholders could play in addressing these challenges. Here, the bishops were convinced that the ecological crises in Ghana were undermining the country's peace and security. They opined that the greatest challenge facing humanity and Ghanaians for that matter, was that of safeguarding the environment.³⁷³ According to them,

Scripture is emphatic: "*God saw everything that He had made, and indeed, it was very good*" (Gen. 1:31). There was a balance and harmony in the ecosystem. Nature, which was destined to be a home to humans, was peaceful, good and hospitable. It is this peace, harmony and balance that is being undermined and for which reason the planet earth, for example, is becoming very inhospitable. In Ghana, for instance, excessive lumbering is affecting our weather systems in such a way that they are no longer predictable. Rising sea levels result in excessive flooding which jeopardizes our security and peace. In short, once our use of nature goes unrestrained, we compromise our own peace and security on earth.³⁷⁴

In furtherance of the above statement on the need for harmony in the ecosystem in Ghana, the bishops then applied the principle of the common good in their examination of the recent oil and gas find in Ghana, by examining in detail how the oil and gas discovery in the country could help advance the common good of the people. Here, the bishops posited that,

God has blessed Ghana with many resources ... Furthermore, our country is now blessed with the discovery of oil and gas in commercial quantities. We would like to commend the government for allowing debate on the oil find and how best Ghana as a country can maximize its share. We further urge the government to factor the real concerns of the people into the contracts with the oil companies and the management of the oil revenues for the benefit of all. To ensure transparency and accountability, we the bishops urge oil companies and the government "to develop the culture of publishing regularly all information regarding contracts, exploration and planned production activities as well as annual audited accounts by reputable audit firms of their fiscal activities."³⁷⁵

³⁷³ Ibid., 33.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

At the same time also, the Bishops' Conference called attention to the fact that the Church has a special concern in the matter of the proper management of Ghana's gas and oil resources since according to them, the proper use of the oil revenue was a basic right of the citizens. Quoting from *Ecclesia in Africa* of Pope John Paul II to justify their teachings here, the bishops recommended that the Government should

pursue sound economic policies, adopting the right priorities for the exploration and distribution of often scarce national resources in such a way as to provide for people's basic needs, and to ensure an honest and equitable sharing of benefits and burdens. In particular, governments have the binding duty to protect the common patrimony against all forms of waste and embezzlement by citizens lacking public spirit or by unscrupulous foreigners (*Ecclesia in Africa*, # 113).³⁷⁶

Following the above appeal to Government, the bishops made further appeals to other stakeholders, including Faith-Based and Civil Society Organizations, urging them to play their respective roles in ensuring that the oil and gas resources are managed properly by Government for the benefit of all citizens. In this regard, the bishops said,

As shepherds, we are calling on and encouraging Faith-Based and Civil Society Organizations and all well-meaning Ghanaians to see it as an obligation to ensure good practices and just operation in this new petroleum industry. Christians and especially Catholics in leadership and responsible positions have a major duty to influence government policies in respect of equitable, transparent and responsible management and utilization of petroleum wealth in Ghana in the interest of the common good.³⁷⁷

Next, the bishops called on the International Community and Donor Agencies to assist Ghana to make good use of her oil and gas discovery. Here, they said that,

It is surprising and painful that sections of the International Community enforce best practices elsewhere but relax or even ignore these requirements when dealing with African countries, and instead connive with unscrupulous elements to defraud unsuspecting countries. We urge the International Community to insist on transparent, fair and accountable processes in the exploration and production of the oil as well as the management of revenues for the creation of wealth to enhance the quality of life of all people in the country. The International Community will do well

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 34.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

to deal not only with our government but also with all stakeholders, including the communities in the affected areas.³⁷⁸

It is significant to mention here that in these calls to the major stakeholders in Ghana to help preserve and safeguard the environment of Ghana, the Bishops' Conference grounded their ecological teachings in this communiqué on the principles of the common good and integral ecology. Arguing that these two principles must not be sacrificed in the exploitation of the country's natural resources, the bishops taught that "the protection of creation cannot be complete if the human person is not accorded the protection and dignity that he or she deserves. The human person is the centre of creation and indeed the protector of creation. The rights of the human person must therefore be upheld ... if this dignity was not preserved as it should, there would not be peace and justice in the country."³⁷⁹ At the end the communiqué, the bishops urged all Ghanaians to always "bear it in mind that God has made us stewards of creation for creation to serve us and our needs. However, if we destroy creation, we destroy ourselves. Let us endeavour, in all that we do, to protect creation and thereby safeguard our own future."³⁸⁰

In analysing the bishops' communiqué of 2010 theologically, I argue that it is evident in this communiqué that the Bishops' Conference dealt very comprehensively with several aspects of the environmental issue in Ghana, grounding their teachings on the principles of respect for creation, stewardship, care of creation, creation as a common good and integral ecology, among others. Theologically speaking also, I posit that the bishops were right in their teaching that the human person was largely responsible for the environmental damage being done and needed to act responsibly towards the environment since we are the only ones who can manage, plan or alter

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 35.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 43.

creation. I posit further that their calls on Government, Civil Society Organisations, Faith-Based Organisations, traditional rulers as well as individuals to get involved to save the environment were calls in the right direction since the proper management and care of the environment is the responsibility of all and not just a few.

Moreover, what I also find remarkably striking and different in this communique from all the other previous documents of the bishops on the environment is the fact that for the first time in their ecological teachings, the bishops made references to Ghanaian traditional and indigenous practices which were aimed at preserving the environment such as the prohibitions against fishing and farming on certain days, among others. I contend that even though the bishops did not elaborate further on how Ghanaian Christians and other citizens at large should adapt these indigenous “ecological” practices in their efforts to save the environment, their reference to these traditional practices on the care of the environment is a clear admission on their part that these indigenous practices can help in the care of the environment in Ghana. I contend further that these indigenous ecological practices offer important options and avenues for the Church’s own commitment to and teachings on the care of the environment in Ghana. Thus, I posit that in the bishops’ quest to collaborate with the Ghana Government on the care of the environment, the Bishops’ Conference should adopt and incorporate some of these indigenous practices in their teachings and practical initiatives on the care of the environment since these can appeal to many more people, but especially those who are outside the Catholic (or Christian) religion to welcome and support their ecological teaching and practical initiatives.³⁸¹

³⁸¹ In Chapter three, where I shall discuss the importance of the traditional ecological practices such as sacred days, sacred groves, taboos and totems to the care of the environment in Ghana, I shall argue that the adoption and inclusion of such indigenous practices in the ecological teachings of the Bishops’ Conference will help contribute more to the care and protection of the environment in Ghana. Moreover, I shall also contend that their adoption in the bishops’ teachings and practical ecological initiatives will be useful in attracting the support of more Ghanaians

In the following year, 2011, the Bishops' Conference did not address the ecological question specifically in their communiqué issued that year but only asked all Ghanaians to refer to their teaching on mining and oil find contained in their previous year's communiqué.³⁸² This is not surprising to me in view of the fact that they had examined the subject of the environment very extensively in their previous 2010 communique.

In 2012, the Bishops' Conference resumed their teaching on the environment in their communiqués by examining the role of Government in protecting and safeguarding Ghana's environment in particular. Here, the bishops taught that "human beings have transcendent worth and value that come from God. This dignity is not based on any human quality, legal mandate, individual merit or accomplishment. Yet, we have situations in this country in which a large number of our compatriots do not have access to good drinking water in the rural areas."³⁸³ In the Eastern Region where the bishops issued their communiqué, and in many parts of the country, there is monstrous and reckless exploitation of forests and land resources. Besides, the prevailing indiscriminate mining activities by illegal and armed individuals and companies is frightening, armed herdsmen feed their animals on the crops of defenceless subsistence farmers while water and river bodies which are the people's only sources of drinking water are muddied and poisoned with extremely dangerous chemicals which pose health hazards to the folk in the rural areas.³⁸⁴ For the bishops, these were ecological challenges which needed to be tackled urgently.

In their ecological teaching above, I opine that it is evident that the Bishops' Conference are applying the principle of integral ecology by linking the care of humanity to that of the

to the Church's teachings in view of the proposal I am making in this work for a Church and State collaboration in the care of the environment in Ghana.

³⁸² Ibid., 43.

³⁸³ Ibid., 69.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

environment in asking the Government to ensure that both are catered for since the neglect of one could have negative consequences on the other. I also contend that by applying this principle of integral ecology as defined by John Paul II, the bishops showed that the care of humanity can never be divorced from the care of the earth and vice versa but that the two always go together.

In their 2013 communiqué, the Bishops' Conference once again addressed the care of the environment in Ghana during their discussions on the socio-economic life in Ghana. Here, the bishops taught that the care of the earth is an exercise of stewardship and of intergenerational solidarity whereby humanity shows responsibility for the welfare of both current and future generations of people. According to them,

Human beings are called to share in the creative works of God through their socio-economic activities which are meant to provide for the development and growth of a just and peaceful society. Our role as collaborators with God is fundamentally one of stewardship and not exploitation. We have a God-given task to protect and use the environment judiciously and with responsibility for future generations who equally have a stake in the world.³⁸⁵

While reflecting on these ecological principles within the context of the new evangelization called forth by Pope John Paul II,³⁸⁶ the bishops noted that, “The new evangelization requires inculcating this new mindset in all of us as we undertake our socio-economic activities. St. Paul expresses vividly the way we misuse the resources of nature available to us as creation groaning for a release from corruption (cf. *Rom 8, 19-23*). It is in this light that we wish to renew our call for a conscious effort to save our arable land, water bodies, and forest reserves from destruction.”³⁸⁷ The bishops

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 101.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 101. In his article, *What is New about the New Evangelisation* published on September 16, 2012, Fr. James Wehner states that for John Paul II, the New Evangelization was to be directed to the situation where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel. In this case, what is needed is “a new evangelization or “re-evangelization. Benedict XVI continued the efforts of John Paul II by establishing the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization in 2010 and following it up with a Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization in 2012. Information accessed online at uscgb.org/beliefs-and-teaching/how-we-teach/catechesis/catechetical-Sunday/new-evangelisation/uphold/What-is-New-About-Evangelisation-2.pdf, on April 20, 2021.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

then addressed the spate of deforestation, illegal mining and bushfires in the Brong Ahafo Region where they held their Plenary Assembly, urging all the indigenes to help protect their environment.³⁸⁸

In the same communiqué, the bishops also discussed the role of the Government in safeguarding the environment, something they had done several times in their previous communiqués. Here, the bishops stated that, “We are delighted to note the efforts being made by Government and Civil Society organizations to address the (environmental) situation and call on the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other such agencies to do more in the protection of the natural resources of the nation.”³⁸⁹ After this, the bishops encouraged all religious leaders to carry out advocacy on the care of the environment, exhorting pastors in particular to carry out and support advocacy programmes on behalf of people whose lands and sources of livelihood are threatened by destructive environmental activities taking place in those areas.³⁹⁰ In a similar way, the bishops spoke about the role of traditional leaders in the care of the environment, saying,

We call on our traditional leaders to resist the temptation of collaborating with the perpetrators of crimes against the environment to the detriment of the common good of their own people. We further plead with them to be circumspect in the way and manner some of them dispose of the land which they hold in trust for their people. They should consider very carefully the needs of future generations. The practice of leasing or selling the same piece of land to multiple applicants thereby creating conflict in the society should be avoided at all cost. We equally call on people engaged in these activities to be law-abiding and to be conscious of the harm that they cause to the present and future generations of this country.³⁹¹

In 2014 the following year, the bishops’ communiqué focused attention on the evangelization and role of the family in the mission of the Church in Ghana. In the bishops’ communiqué, there was no mention of environmental issues in this communiqué which I find surprising and strange. This

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 102.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ *Catholic Bishops Speak, Volume III*, 102.

is because I contend that the family has an important role to play in the care of environment by for example, inculcating into children, ecological practices such as the sorting of waste, the turning off unnecessary lights, the cleaning of compounds, the planting trees, and so on.³⁹²

In 2015, the communique of the Bishops' Conference contained three paragraphs of teachings on the environment, under the topic, *The Laity and Care of the Environment*. In that communiqué, the Conference tasked policymakers in Ghana to make the care of the environment their topmost priority. This is because according to the bishops, the health of the nation is closely linked to the issue of the care of the environment.”³⁹³ In reiterating their calls for the care of the environment in Ghana once again, the bishops posited that there is the need to take good care of the environment because humans depend on it for survival and flourishing. Addressing some of the ecological challenges in Ghana including the persistent pollution of water bodies, the littering of plastic waste everywhere, the careless felling of trees in forests and savannah areas and the rampant illegal mining (*galamsey*) operations in towns and villages, the bishops called on the Church's Laity and indeed all Ghanaians, to rise up against this indiscriminate destruction of Ghana's environment and water bodies, while appealing to the authorities charged with protecting the country's natural resources to be up and doing.³⁹⁴

In November 2014, the Government of Ghana introduced and instituted the *National Sanitation Day* (NSD) as a national policy aimed at protecting the environment. In this policy, Ghanaians were to take part in the cleaning of their surroundings and the planting of trees on the first Saturday

³⁹² Ibid. 102. In his 1990 World Day of Peace Message, titled *Peace with God, Peace with all Creation*, John Paul II stated that a true education in responsibility entails a genuine conversion in ways of thoughts, and that Churches, religious organisations and indeed all members of society have a precise role to play in such education, but the first educator was the family. According to him, the family is where the child first learns to respect his neighbour and to love nature. See John Paul II, Message for *World Day of Peace* (1 January 1990), 13. See also LS # 211.

³⁹³ Ibid., 166.

³⁹⁴ Ibid. *Galamsey* is a local parlance used for illegal surface mining in Ghana. It literally means “gather and sell.”

of each month.³⁹⁵ It is thus significant that in their 2015 communique, that is, just a year after the introduction of the *National Sanitation Day*, the bishops welcomed the idea of the *National Sanitation Day* as laudable and commendable and appealed to all Catholics and all Ghanaians to participate actively in the exercise and to see it as their Christian duty and civic responsibility to care for the environment.³⁹⁶ While supporting the NSD policy, the bishops also urged all Ghanaians “to acquire the habit, not only to clean up our surroundings but most importantly, let us all learn how not to make our environment dirty in the first place.”³⁹⁷

Additionally, in this same communiqué also, the Bishops’ Conference strongly recommended *Laudato Si’*, the encyclical of Pope Francis on the care of creation, to all Catholic laity in particular and all Ghanaians in general. According to the bishops, this document “provides a good resource for all, but most especially, policy makers on the care of our environment,” and “we can certainly do with more education on the care of the environment.”³⁹⁸ They then admonished “all the Laity who are charged with the protection of the environment to know that the environment is God’s handiwork and to protect it is being faithful to God.”³⁹⁹

In the following year, that is, 2016, the Bishops’ Conference once again addressed the care of the environment in their communiqué. In terms of depth and weight with the regard to the ecological teachings of the bishops, I opine that the bishops’ 2016 communiqué is comparable only to that of the 2010 edition. In fact, I contend that the 2016 communiqué of the bishops can rightly be called

³⁹⁵ Information on *National Sanitation Day* is from the article of Justice Mensah, “Effectiveness of National Sanitation Day as a Community-Participatory Approach for Improving Sanitation in Ghana,” accessed online at emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/MEQ-02-2019-0042/full/html on April 20, 2021.

³⁹⁶ *Catholic Bishops Speak, Volume III*, 166.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 166.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 166. Following this call, the Bishops’ Conference has distributed copies of the encyclical to about a half of the over 3 million Catholic faithful in Ghana, including all Catholic Members of Ghana’s Parliament since 2016.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 166-167

a “mini ecological” communiqué of the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference in comparison with that of the 2010 communiqué.

A theological analysis of the contents of this communiqué shows that it was heavily influenced by Pope Francis’ ecological encyclical, *Laudato Si’*, which was published the previous year in 2015. Right at the beginning of the communiqué, the Bishops’ Conference stated that the theme of the entire communiqué, namely, “*Reconciliation with God, Humanity and Nature in the Year of Mercy*”, had been influenced by the Church’s celebration of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, and also by Pope Francis’ encyclical, *Laudato Si’: On the Care of our Common Home*.⁴⁰⁰ In discussing the sub-theme, *Reconciliation with Nature*, the bishops taught among others that, “Mercy must equally prompt our actions from harming our natural environment. Human beings connect with nature in various ways ... our bodies are made of her elements; we breathe her air, and we receive life and refreshment from her waters ... (LS 2).”⁴⁰¹ These words are the same exact words of Pope Francis’ teaching in *Laudato Si’*. In addition, the bishops also taught that, “The earth is our common home. Yet, we have inflicted harm of various kinds and degrees on our natural environment by our irresponsible use of it. We have plundered our environment recklessly through indiscriminate dumping of rubbish and industrial waste, “galamsey” activities, logging, deforestation, water pollution and other forms of ecological degradation.”⁴⁰²

In offering some possible solutions that could help reverse the harm being caused to the environment in Ghana, the bishops said urged all Catholics and Ghanaians in general, to thank God for the wonderful handiwork which God has entrusted to human care and to reaffirm their

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 175.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 178.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 178. In Chapter 1 of *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis enumerates the various ecological crises afflicting the earth such as climate change, pollution, scarcity of water, loss of biodiversity, etc. We see this teaching particularly in *Laudato Si’*, nos. 20-61.

personal vocation to be stewards of creation and to implore God's help for the protection of creation as well as His pardon for the sins committed against the world in which we live.⁴⁰³ Then using the principle of stewardship and care of the environment, the bishops taught that God gave humans the earth "to cultivate and to take care of it" (Gen. 2:15) in a balanced and respectful way. According to the bishops, to cultivate too much and to care too little is to sin, and therefore, "In this *Year of Mercy* and beyond, let us resolve to implore God's mercy for those sins against creation that we have not hitherto acknowledged and confessed. We should likewise commit ourselves to taking concrete steps towards ecological conversion, which requires a clear recognition of our responsibility to ourselves, our neighbours, creation, and the Creator."⁴⁰⁴

It is significant to note here that for the first time in their teachings on the environment in their communiques, the Bishops' Conference also addressed the issue of land grabbing in Ghana in this same communiqué. On this issue, the bishops stated unequivocally that, "We are unhappy with the growing incidence of land grab in the country and the indiscriminate acquisition of large tracts of land by multinational companies, usually led by greedy and unpatriotic indigenes."⁴⁰⁵ They added that, "While we do not discourage investment in food production and opportunities for industrialization, we condemn land acquisition that robs Ghanaians of their heritage and impacts negatively on the ecosystems and food cultures of our people. We call on all key institutions charged with the planning, administration and conservation of land to stop the incidence of land grab."⁴⁰⁶ Then turning to the Church herself, the bishops posited the Catholic Church in Ghana is committed to the care of the environment while embracing wholeheartedly the renewed work of

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 178.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 178-179.

mercy and care for our common home which “allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God wishes to hand to us ...” (LS 85).⁴⁰⁷ The bishops then pledged to demonstrate their care for the environment in simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness and makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world.⁴⁰⁸ The Church cannot be a prophetic voice of care of creation without giving an example.

In this communiqué also, the bishops spoke once again about the *National Sanitation Day* in Ghana as they had done in their previous 2015 communiqué by postulating that,

We commend the current call throughout the country for the monthly clean-up exercises within the immediate surroundings. We further urge Ghanaians to do these exercises more frequently and religiously. As we seek to be godly, let us equally endeavour to be cleaner. We cannot be happy with the perception that Ghana is among the world’s dirtiest countries. Let us treat our environment the very way we will treat ourselves since a healthy environment makes us healthier and happier.⁴⁰⁹

To sum up the contents of *Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Speak Volume III*, I argue that it is evident from the above discussion that the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference applied the principles of the common good, stewardship and care for creation, intergenerational solidarity and integral ecology as their main theological principles to ground their ecological teachings in this document. On intergenerational solidarity, for example, the bishops linked the care of the environment to human survival, security and peace, by insisting that “if we destroy creation, we destroy ourselves and if we protect creation, we safeguard our future” in their 2010 communiqué.⁴¹⁰ On integral ecology also, the bishops asked all to recognize their responsibilities to God, neighbour and creation, and take concrete steps to care for God’s creation. This is mostly seen in their 2016

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 179.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 30.

communiqué.⁴¹¹ Thus, in reviewing this document, I argue that the Bishops' Conference used the principles of stewardship and care of creation, intergenerational solidarity, the common good and integral ecology as the fundamental ecological principles to ground their ecological teachings.

2.5 Review of Recent Communiqués of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference (2017-2020)

In the more recent times, that is, from the year 2017 till date, the Bishops' Conference has also articulated ecological teachings in all their successive communiques. Thus, between 2017 and now, all the communiqués of the Bishops' Conference have contained teachings on the care of the environment. This consistency in the bishops' ecological teachings is particularly remarkable and significant because it shows once again that the Ghanaian Catholic bishops continue to uphold the care of the environment in Ghana as one of the most important aspects of their pastoral ministry.

In their 2017 communiqué, the Bishops' Conference turned their attention to address two environmental issues, namely, illegal mining (“galamsey”) and sanitation and waste management in Ghana. On illegal mining, the bishops commended the Government, the Media, Civil Society and Faith-Based Organizations for their tireless efforts in fighting the menace of illegal mining that had plagued the country, adding that “there is the need to sustain those efforts to reverse the harsh consequences of this self-inflicted destruction.”⁴¹² The bishops apply the principle of intergenerational solidarity to ground their ecological teaching in exhorting Ghanaians on the need to care for the environment: “our natural resources belong to those gone before us, those of us living and those who will come after us. We must therefore refrain from selfish exploitation of our

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 178.

⁴¹² Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference. *Communique 2017 Issued by the Bishops' Conference* at the end of their Plenary Assembly, held in Ho, Ghana, page 8.

natural resources to the extent that generations after us will be deprived of their fair share of these resources.”⁴¹³

On waste and sanitation management in Ghana, the bishops expressed their unhappiness about a recent UNICEF Report, titled *Progress on Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: July 2017 – Updates and SDG Baselines*, which portrayed Ghana as one of the dirtiest countries in the world. According to them, this was a shameful record and “all citizens need to rally in support of the campaign to roll back our country’s unsavoury sanitation challenges.”⁴¹⁴ Turning their attention to the Church and what she can do to help in addressing these and the other environmental challenges in Ghana, the bishops mentioned that, “As a Church, we recently launched an *E-Waste Management Project* to manage electronic waste through aggressive education in order to preserve a safe environment for future generations.”⁴¹⁵ I contend that the E-Waste Management Project which is still ongoing in all the twenty dioceses of the Church in Ghana, provides an important proof and demonstration of the resolution of the Bishops’ Conference to contribute their quota in very practical ways towards the care of the environment in Ghana.⁴¹⁶

In the bishops’ 2018 communiqué, the Bishops’ Conference examined once again the subject of the care of the environment under the theme, “*Care for Our Environment*”. Here in this communiqué, the bishops addressed the issues of pollution, waste disposal, land grabbing and mining in Ghana as they had done in many of their previous teachings. Calling on the Government to help address these environmental challenges in the country, the bishops further stated that, “We

⁴¹³ *Bishops’ Communique 2017*, page 8.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid. Full report on this issue accessed online at graphic.com.gh/features/features/ghana-world-s-7th-dirtiest-country.html, on August 21, 2021.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ For more information on the bishops’ E-Waste management project, see Ghana Bishops’ Conference’s *Project on Electronic Project*, accessed online at <https://ewaste.caritas-ghana.org>, on February 24, 2021.

have observed that our country ... has huge potentials for agriculture and tourism but are only marginally utilized. *The One District One Factory (1D1F) Programme* can therefore facilitate the full actualization of these potentials.”⁴¹⁷

In examining the role the Church can play in addressing these environmental challenges mentioned above, the bishops taught that as a religious body, they see their role as a prophetic one, namely that their role in addressing ecological concerns in Ghana is to remain an active voice calling for moderation and regulation in the exploitation of the country’s natural resources.⁴¹⁸ In addition to this prophetic role of calling attention to ecological challenges and encouraging all to take the necessary actions, the bishops also mentioned that the Church was “taking concrete actions to address the problem of poor sanitation with our new Electronic Waste Management Project and urge Government to be firm in its plans to address the sanitation and environmental problems.”⁴¹⁹

I postulate that the above statement shows clear evidence that the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference is not only interested in speaking about environmental issues in Ghana, but is also committed to taking very practical and pragmatic steps to implement some ecological policy initiatives that will help address the environmental challenges that confront Ghana.

In the following year 2019, the Bishops’ Conference examined again the environmental situation in Ghana by discussing the exploitation of Ghana’s natural resources as well as the issue of climate change. While welcoming the global events that took place in the month of September 2019 to highlight the precarious situation of the Earth, the bishops reiterated the need for urgent local and

⁴¹⁷ Ibid. *One District One Factory* is a Government of Ghana economic policy aimed at utilizing properly Ghana’s natural resources. It is also aimed at industrializing Ghana and through that giving employment to citizens.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

global ecological actions to save the environment.⁴²⁰ Besides, in commending the Government's efforts at fighting the menace of illegal mining that had plagued the nation, the bishops, nonetheless, noted that the fight against illegal mining was not being won due to corruption and lack of political will and vigilance.⁴²¹ Consequently, the bishops posited that, "It looks like the fight against illegal mining and deforestation has now become a mirage since the very institutions and personnel mandated to stop the menace are rather collaborating with the illegal miners and loggers for their selfish gains."⁴²² They then asked the Government and other stakeholders to carry out their respective roles in safeguarding the environment by requesting Government, Traditional Leaders and other stakeholders to put further measures in place that will help citizens to refrain from their selfish exploitation of Ghana's natural resources, a situation which was leading to the pollution of water bodies and the destruction of forest reserves.⁴²³

Moreover, in addressing the issue of desertification in this communique just as they had done in some of the previous ones, the bishops stated that, "Ghana is losing its forest cover at a very alarming rate with very visible signs of desert-like conditions now being experienced in the country. Even rare and economic tree species like the rosewood and shea trees are being felled with impunity in Northern Ghana and in parts of the Oti Region."⁴²⁴ In lamenting about the challenges posed by waste dumping in Ghana, the bishops argued that "the continuous dumping and burning of hazardous waste; especially electronic and plastics at Agbogbloshie, Ashaiman and

⁴²⁰ Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference. *Communique 2019 of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference* issued at the End of their Plenary Meeting at Cape Coast, page 8.

⁴²¹ *Communique 2019 of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference*, 8-9.

⁴²² Ibid.

⁴²³ Ibid., 9.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

other cities in Ghana, have become a public health menace.”⁴²⁵ They therefore called for a halt to these activities to protect the environment and prevent it from further damage.

Finally, in 2020, the communique of the Bishops’ Conference also contained a teaching on the environment. The bishops’ ecological teaching in this document was under the title, *The Integrity of the Environment*. Here, the bishops taught that,

Human beings connect with nature in various ways: “... *our bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air, and we receive life and refreshment from her waters...*” (*Laudato Si’*, 2). The earth is our common home. Yet, we continue to inflict harm of various kinds and degrees on our natural environment by our irresponsible use of it. We plunder our environment recklessly through indiscriminate dumping of refuse and industrial waste, ‘galamsey’ activities, logging, deforestation, water pollution and other forms of ecological degradation. We remind Ghanaians that our natural resources belong to those gone before us, those of us living and those who will come after us. We must therefore refrain from selfish exploitation of our natural resources to the extent that generations after us will be deprived of their fair share of these resources.⁴²⁶

In this statement above, the Catholic bishops of Ghana once again lament the harm being inflicted on the earth, our common home, through the indiscriminate dumping of waste, illegal mining activities, logging and pollution of water, among others. Calling on all citizens of Ghana to refrain from these activities, the bishops applied the principles of the common good and intergenerational solidarity to remind all Ghanaians that the natural resources in the country belong to “those gone before us, those of us living and those who will come after us.” I posit that the bishops expressed the need for a responsible use of these resources in a way that will serve the needs of both the current generation and future generations of people.

Theologically speaking, I argue that an analysis or review of the more recent ecological teachings of the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference from 2017 to 2020, shows that the more recent

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference. *Communique 2020 of the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference* issued at the end of their Plenary Meeting at Keta-Akatsi, Ghana, page 6.

ecological teachings of the Bishops' Conference has also focussed on the major environmental challenges facing Ghana, namely, mining, desertification, pollution of water bodies, dumping of electronic and other hazardous wastes. I contend further that the review shows that the Ghana bishops grounded their ecological teachings on three main principles, namely, intergenerational solidarity, stewardship and care of creation and integral ecology. On intergenerational solidarity, the bishops taught that, "the natural resources belong to those gone before, those presently living and those who will come after us."⁴²⁷ Besides, they linked stewardship and care of creation to the practice of religious faith when they argued that "cleanliness is next to godliness," meaning that the care of the environment must be seen as an essential part of the Christian faith and witness.⁴²⁸ With regard to stewardship and care of creation, the bishops requested the Government, Traditional leaders, Religious bodies and all stakeholders to put in place the necessary measures that will help all citizens of Ghana to care for the environment and refrain from selfish exploitation of the environment.⁴²⁹ As far as integral ecology is concerned, I contend that the bishops applied the principle of integral ecology in their more recent ecological teachings by linking environmental degradation to human ecology. This is evident, for example, in their 2020 communique, where the bishops taught that human beings connect with nature and the earth as our common home as well as their teaching that environmental degradation can also lead to the degradation of the human being, resulting for instance, in the problems of migration and poverty.⁴³⁰

Indeed, I posit that it is noteworthy that in their more recent communiqués, the Bishops' Conference have tended to place a lot more emphasis on the principle of integral ecology than the other theological principles mentioned above. I posit that this is evident from all the communiqués

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁴²⁸ Ibid. See also, Amoah, *Religion and the Environment*, 44.

⁴²⁹ *Ghana Catholic Bishops Conference*, 2019 communiqué, page 9.

⁴³⁰ Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, 2020 communiqué, page 6.

the bishops have issued since 2015 till date. For example, in the bishops' 2016 communiqué, the bishops taught that God gave the earth to humanity "to cultivate and to take care of it" (Gen. 2:15) and that work entails a recognition of human responsibility to God, neighbour and creation.⁴³¹ In their 2017 and 2020 communiqués also, the bishops reiterated similar teachings by insisting that human beings connect with God, others and nature and that resources of nature must be used responsibly because they belong to the past, present and future generations of people.⁴³² This being the case, I contend that the increasing shift to the use of the principle of integral ecology in the recent communiqués of the Bishops' Conference provides clear enough evidence of the influence that Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* has had on the recent ecological teachings in the communiqués of the Ghana Episcopal Conference and also in their more practical initiatives.⁴³³

In summary, I argue that it is significant that the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference have addressed the issue of the care of the environment in Ghana since 1965 till date. It is equally significant to note that in the more recent times, namely, from 2015 to 2020, the Conference has been more frequent and consistent in addressing the issue of the environment in Ghana. That is, unlike in the past when the Conference did not address the environmental question in Ghana in some of the years, from 2015 till date, the Conference have examined the ecological question ever single year. I posit that this frequency or regularity with which the Bishops' Conference has offered teachings on the care of the environment in the last few years has something to do with the publication of Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'* in 2015 and the subsequent renewed global

⁴³¹ *Ghana Catholic Bishops Speak, Volume III*, 178.

⁴³² See *Ghana Catholic Bishops' Communiqué 2017*, page 8, and *Bishops' Communiqué 2020*, page 6.

⁴³³ As argued earlier on in Chapter one, Cardinal Peter Turkson, Kevin Irwin and some other scholars contend that integral ecology is the dominant principle in the encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. Integral ecology stresses that human beings have intrinsic worth and owe responsibility to God the Creator, fellow human beings and non-human creation. For Irwin, Pope Francis is promoting integral ecology to address the inter-related issues of human ecology, development and the natural environment. See Kevin Irwin, *A Commentary on Laudato Si': Examining the Background, Contributions, Implementation, and the Future of Pope Francis's Encyclical* (New York: Paulist Press, 2016), 102.

attention that the publication of the encyclical has brought to the subject of the care of the environment in the world today. Thus, I contend that even though the Catholic bishops of Ghana have addressed the care of the environment in Ghana in several communiques in the years before the publication of *Laudato Si'* in 2015, the publication of the encyclical, *Laudato Si'* of Pope Francis, seems to have given the Ghana Bishops' Conference further boost and motivation in their teachings on the environment in Ghana. I opine that this is a step in the right direction and the right response to the call of the current pope for all people across the globe to get involved in the task of saving the earth. I posit that this ecological campaign needs to be sustained by the Bishops' Conference in the years ahead.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter just as in the previous one, I have undertaken a historical and theological review of the ecological teachings of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference contained in their various communiqués issued since 1965 till date with the rationale to offer the necessary relevant evidence to buttress my argument that the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference has been very consistent in addressing the subject of the care of the environment in Ghana for a long time now. The review was also aimed at helping me to discern the theological principles grounding the Bishops' Conference's teachings on the environment and to determine whether or not there have been any significant shifts in the theological grounding in the teachings of the Bishops' Conference on the environment over these years.

After examining the contents of these communiques of the Bishops' Conference above, I conclude here by reiterating my position that the care of the environment has been one of the major themes that the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference has addressed frequently in their teachings in communiques from 1965 till date. Thus, apart from some few years during which the Ghanaian

Catholic bishops did not address issues relating to the environment, in most of their communiqués, the Bishops' Conference have always addressed themselves to the ecological question in Ghana. I posit that by addressing the care of the environment on such regular and consistent basis in their communiqués and other official statements, it becomes evident that the Bishops' Conference consider the issue of the care of the environment in Ghana as an integral part of their role as teachers and guardians of the deposit of faith. Besides, I opine that the various recommendations and practical policy initiatives of the Bishops' Conference on environmental care in Ghana such as the *Arbor Day/Week* celebration and the bishops' electronic waste management project as well as their support for the Ghana Government's *National Sanitation Day* exercise and other initiatives clearly show that integral ecology is something that motivates the bishops' more practical approaches to the care of the environment in Ghana.

Moreover, from the above review of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference's ecological teachings, it also comes to light that the main theological principles grounding the Bishops' Conference's teachings on the environment are the common good, solidarity, intergenerational justice, stewardship and care of creation and integral ecology. In addition, it also becomes evident that beginning with the principles of the common good, intergenerational solidarity and justice in the 1980s and 1990s, the theological grounding for the ecological teachings of the Bishops' Conference has over the past few years, shifted to stewardship and care of creation. Thus, beginning from 2015, I argue that these principles have shifted to focus more on integral ecology. In arguing that this increasing shift to the principle of integral ecology in the bishops' more recent ecological teachings has something to do with the teachings of Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, I posit further that integral ecology has become the main driving force, motivation and inspiration behind the bishops' more recent teachings on the environment after its publication in

2015. It is therefore not surprising to me that the encyclical *Laudato Si'* is also the main guiding document behind the two most recent practical environmental policy initiatives of the Bishops' Conference, namely, a 2016 case study on land grabbing and the 2018 electronic waste management project initiated in 2018 which is still ongoing.⁴³⁴

Finally, this review has also shown that in their ecological teachings and practical initiatives on the care of environment, the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference had sought to collaborate with the Government of Ghana on the care of the environment in Ghana. The bishops explicitly mentioned this intention on at least three occasions in their documents, namely, in 1981, 1995 and 1997. Even though there is not much evidence to show that the necessary measures were put in place to ensure that the proposed collaboration with Government became a reality, the Church on her own has tried to do something more practical to contribute to the care of the environment in Ghana, including the annual *Arbor Day/Week* celebrations, among other initiatives. While contending that the intended results of these policies have largely not been achieved mainly because those policies did not receive the much-needed attention and participation of members within the Church itself, I propose here that it will be an exercise in the right direction for the Church in Ghana to continue to address the current environmental challenges facing Ghana and carry out practical responses to these challenges. Yet in addition to these, I am also proposing in this work that the Church should take up again her earlier proposed resolution to work in

⁴³⁴ The Bishops' Conference commissioned a *Case Study on Land Grabbing in Ghana* in 2016 to help them understand the phenomenon better and so be able to address it holistically. In the document they published on this issue, the bishops asked all relevant stakeholders including the Government, traditional authorities, NGOs, CSOs, etc., to play their respective roles in addressing this rising phenomenon in Ghana. For more, see Samuel Zan Akologo & Ben Y. Guri, (Eds.) (2016). *Unmasking Land Grabbing in Ghana: Restoring Livelihoods, Paving the Way for Sustainable Development Goals*. Accra: National Catholic Secretariat Press. In 2018, the Conference also initiated a Project on electronic waste in Ghana as the Church's contribution to deal with the menace posed by the dumping of e-waste in Ghana and thereby contribute to environmental care in the country. Information accessed online at Ghana Bishops' Conference's *Project on Electronic Project*, accessed online at <https://ewaste.caritas-ghana.org>, on February 24, 2021.

collaboration with the Government of Ghana on the care of the environment in Ghana. I argue that by bringing about the proposed collaboration with the Ghana Government on the care of the environment in Ghana, the Ghanaian Catholic Church will be in a better position to contribute even more to addressing the environmental challenges facing Ghana today and in the future.

In the next chapter of this work, that is, Chapter three, I will focus my attention on the ecological teachings of African theologians as well as the ecological tradition and practical wisdom within the Akan Traditional Religion (ATR) of Ghana evident in such indigenous traditional practices as sacred days, sacred groves, taboos and totems. I shall argue that these ecological teachings and practices offered by African theology and Akan Traditional Religion contain important resources that should be adopted and incorporated by the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference in their continuous teachings and practical initiatives on the care of the environment in Ghana. It is to be recalled here that in some of their ecological teachings discussed here in this chapter, the bishops appealed to traditional leaders and teachers to help their citizens and Ghanaians in general to deal with the ecological crisis in the country. Thus, in support of the use of African theological traditions in the bishops' ecological teachings, I shall posit that the adoption and incorporation of these resources will help amplify and enhance the voice of the Bishops' Conference as well as encourage many more Ghanaians to accept and support their campaign on the care of the environment in Ghana even as the Bishops' Conference continues to explore more avenues for collaborating with the Government in the care of the environment in Ghana.

CHAPTER THREE

TEACHINGS OF AFRICAN THEOLOGY AND AKAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

(ATR) ETHIC ON ENVIRONMENTAL CARE (ECOLOGY)

As I have already established in Chapter one and two on Catholic social teaching, but particularly in the ecological teachings of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*, I reiterate here that there is no denying the fact of the absolute need today for dialogue, cooperation and an all-hands-on-deck approach in tackling the current global ecological crisis.⁴³⁵ Besides, in collaborating and engaging in dialogue towards resolving the current global ecological damage, Pope Francis has reminded us that science, technology, ethics and indeed, every form of wisdom capable of contributing ideas to this enterprise should be welcomed and not ignored. Thus, according to the pope, “If we are truly concerned to develop an ecology capable of remedying the damage we have done, no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom should be left out, and that includes religion and the language particular to it.”⁴³⁶ Based on this teaching, I posit that Pope Francis in particular and Catholic social teaching in general are right in emphasizing the need to include all disciplines, sciences, wisdom, ethics and religion in the global enterprise of healing the earth and saving it from further ecological crisis. This is because the task of healing the planet Earth today and saving it from further ecological damage goes far beyond any one single discipline or wisdom.⁴³⁷

In this chapter, I argue that the call in Catholic social teaching urging all peoples on earth to dialogue and to listen to all voices on the way forward for resolving the current ecological crisis

⁴³⁵ LS # 1, 14, 21, 64.

⁴³⁶ LS # 63. According to Christiana Zenner, Pope Francis wants to promote a sense of dialogue and complementarity between science and religion. This explains why in *Laudato Si'*, the pope insists that religious and cultural viewpoints are important conversation partners with science and philosophy in identifying and pursuing solutions to common problems like the ecological crisis in the world. See Christiana Zenner, “A Commentary on *Laudato Si'* (*On Care for Our Common Home*),” 535.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

in the world is a call in the right direction. With this background and conviction in mind, I shall examine some of the most important theological ecological insights offered by African theology and theologians on the care of the earth as well as some of the ethical ecological teachings and practices within the Akan Traditional Religion (ATR) of Ghana.⁴³⁸ I shall postulate that the ecological teachings of African theology as well as the ecological wisdom and ethical teachings of the Akan Traditional Religion (ATR) of Ghana on the environment should not be discarded as irrelevant to the quest for solutions to the current global ecological crisis. Rather, they should be considered as offering important resources that can contribute immensely to the global efforts aimed at remedying the current ecological damage in the world to save the earth.

Moreover, basing myself on these ecological insights from African theology and Akan ecological and ethical traditions, I shall argue that in their teachings on the care of the environment in Ghana, the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference should adopt and incorporate some of these teachings and wisdom that African theology and Akan Traditional Religion offer on the care of the environment. In particular, I shall posit that the Bishops' Conference should adopt and incorporate into their ecological teachings, the African theological understanding of God as Creator, the African concepts of the close relationship between human and non-human beings, cosmic harmony and cosmic common good as well as the Akan Traditional Religion's ethical and ecological practices of taboos, sacred groves, sacred days and totems.

⁴³⁸ African theology refers to views about God, human and non-human creation articulated by theologians and other scholars of Africa and African descent. Akan Traditional Religion refers to the traditional, cultural and religious beliefs and practices of the Akan people of Ghana (and the Ivory Coast). In Ghana, the Akan inhabit the southern and central half of the country. The Akan consist of several sub-groups of which the Ashanti and Fante are numerically dominant. The Akan have a common socio-economic and cultural system and speak a common language in diverse dialects. They represent over 53 percent of the current population of Ghana estimated around 30 million. For more on this, see Robert Owusu Agyarko, *God of Life: Rethinking the Akan Christian Concept of God in the Light of the Ecological Crisis*. The Ecumenical Review, 65 (1): 51-66, University of the Western Cape, South Africa, 1. See also K. A. Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*. Singapore: FEP International Private Ltd., 1978.

My argument in here in this chapter shall be that these teachings from African theology and Akan ecological wisdom and practices would greatly enrich the Bishops' Conference's ecological teachings and practical initiatives on the care of the environment in Ghana. Besides, I shall also contend that by incorporating some of these theological teachings and ethical ecological traditions into their own teachings, the Bishops' Conference would be able to attract many more Ghanaians than only Catholics (and for that matter, only Christians) to accept their ecological teachings and hence, support their practical policy initiatives on the care of the environment.⁴³⁹ Thus, in view of the proposal I am making in this work for a Church-State collaboration on the care of the environment in Ghana, I shall argue that if the ecological teachings of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference continue to be grounded only on Judeo-Christian perspectives, traditions and concepts as has been the case all these years, these teachings may continue to appeal mainly to the members of the Catholic and or the Christian faith in Ghana and no more. On the contrary, I shall postulate that if the ecological teachings of the Bishops' Conference make references to African ecological theology and Akan ecological wisdom and ethical practices in addition to their Judeo-Christian grounding and perspectives, these teachings would gain more acceptance and greater support from most Ghanaians, including those who may not necessarily be Catholic or adherents of the Christian faith. Based on this conviction, I shall argue that this will subsequently encourage and inspire many more people to support the practical ecological efforts and initiatives of the Church.

In the conclusion, I shall posit that the adoption and or incorporation of African theological ecological teachings and the ecological wisdom and ethical practices of the Akan Traditional

⁴³⁹ According to the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), Ghana's population in 2010 was 24,658,823 million. The report indicated that Ghana's population increased by 30.4 percent over the 2000 population figure of 18,912,079. Also, it is estimated that Ghana's population will increase to over 31 million in this year's census. Out of this figure, the majority of the population profess to be Christians (about 71%), and while Muslims make up 17 percent, the rest either belong to African Traditional Religion or do not identify with any religion at all. Information accessed online at https://statsghana.gov.gh/gsscommunity/adm_program/modules/downloads/, on May 12, 2021.

Religion into the environmental teachings and practical policy initiatives of the Bishops' Conference will serve both to enhance and amplify the Ghana Catholic Church's teachings on environmental care. With Chapter five where I shall incorporate ideas of African ecological teachings and Akan ecological wisdom and ethical practices discussed in this chapter into the four concrete and practical proposals I am making for a Church and State collaboration on the care of the environment in Ghana in mind,⁴⁴⁰ I shall conclude this chapter by arguing that the inclusion of the African and Akan theological teachings into the ecological teachings of the Ghana Bishops' Conference will lead to a more successful outcome on the care of the environment in Ghana.

3.1 Teachings of African Theology on the Care of the Environment (Ecology)

In the past and even in the present, some theologians among other scholars have spoken about the dearth of published material in African theological research dealing with the questions of ecology⁴⁴¹ while others have lamented the fact that the contribution of Africa to environmental ethics on the global stage has often been overlooked or else, thinly discussed.⁴⁴² Commenting on the above subject, Peter Osuji has argued that “while scholars of environmental ethics have drawn on other non-Western traditions to enrich environmental ethics discourse, very little attention has been paid to the African environmental traditional ethics.”⁴⁴³ Alluding to similar complaints of Workineh Kelbessa, Osuji further noted that, “Those who have studied non-Western religions and philosophies ... have (often) overlooked the contribution of Africa to environmental ethics. They

⁴⁴⁰ In Chapter 5 of my work under the topic, *Building A New Model of Church and State Collaboration in the Care of the Environment in Ghana: Proposals and Recommendations*, I shall discuss in detail four concrete practical proposals for a Church and State collaboration on the care of the environment in Ghana, namely, the celebration of *Africa Environment Day*, *Arbor Week*, *National Sanitation Day* and *World Day of Prayer for Creation*.

⁴⁴¹ These scholars include Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator, Peter Osuji, Peter Knox, Elizabeth Amoah and Robert Owusu Agyarko.

⁴⁴² Peter Osuji, “*Laudato Si'* and Traditional African Environmental Ethics” in Gerard Magill and Jordan Potter (Eds.). *Integral Ecology: Protecting Our Common Home* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 184.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*

have either kept quiet or what they said about Africa was rather thin compared to what they said about Native Americans, Asians and Australian Aborigines.”⁴⁴⁴

The above sentiments of Osuji and Kelbessa on the non-inclusion and or little discussion of African environmental ethics in the global discourse on environmental care has been the subject of concern among some African theologians and other scholars for some time now.⁴⁴⁵ This notwithstanding, Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator has posited that despite the dearth of African theological works on the environment, “African Religion offers useful insights to understanding the nexus or connection between creation, salvation and ecology.”⁴⁴⁶ According to him, “Africa’s blend of culture and spirituality on the continent can provide additional resources for grounding ecological stewardship and responsibility.”⁴⁴⁷ Thus, for Orobator, African theological and ecological teachings and insights have a lot to contribute to the care of the environment and so should not be discarded as irrelevant to the current global discourse on the care of the environment.

In the more recent times, it is significant to underscore the fact that several African theologians have started to show increasing interest in the implications and importance of indigenous African thought and values for environmental ethics. These theologians include Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator, Peter Osuji, Robert Owusu Agyarko and Elizabeth Amoah, among others.⁴⁴⁸ Beyond these above-mentioned theologians, however, I argue that the witness and teachings of Wangari Maathai on the care of the environment in Africa and in the world at large have come to assume a dimension of great continental and global significance. Therefore, I contend that Maathai’s

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ African theologians who have begun to look at African theological contributions to ecology in more recent times include Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator, Peter Osuji, Peter Knox, Workineh Kelbessa, Robert Owusu Agyarko and Elizabeth Amoah, among others.

⁴⁴⁶ Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, *Religion and Faith in Africa: The Confessions of an Animist* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books), 103-104.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ I have referenced these African theologians and scholars already in the footnotes in this Chapter.

ecological teachings and practical activism ought not be discounted or overlooked but considered as very significant.⁴⁴⁹ Thus, even though Maathai is not a theologian but a peace advocate and environmental care activist, as Orobator argues, “her writings reveal several aspects of the ecological credentials of African Religion and her teachings are directly complemented by insights from the thoughts of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and Pope Francis.”⁴⁵⁰ In addition, Orobator also points out that the ecological teachings of Maathai, both in their content and theological understanding, mirror those of Catholic social teaching, but particularly in the ecological teachings of the two most recent popes of the Church mentioned above.⁴⁵¹ This being the case, I reiterate my position that it is important to examine Maathai’s ecological writings, to highlight the most significant aspects of her teachings and to show their significance to the contemporary discussions on the ecological crisis in the world. In the discussion below, I highlight four of these significant teachings.

First and foremost, in her ecological teachings, Wangari Maathai taught that there was a link between environmental pollution and human degradation, that is, Maathai was convinced that the pollution or degradation of the earth also led to the pollution of humanity. According to her, “in degrading the environment, we degrade ourselves. On the contrary, in healing the earth and loving the earth, we love ourselves.”⁴⁵² With this conviction, Maathai argued further that “the ecological crisis is both a physical crisis and a spiritual one, and therefore, addressing it required a new level

⁴⁴⁹ Wangari Maathai is a Kenyan-born peace activist and environmentalist. She won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 as the first African woman and environmentalist to receive this award for her role in leading women in Africa to plant over thirty million trees across the continent. In 2012, the Heads of State of Africa dedicated the March 3 continental celebration of *Africa Environment Day* to her memory and renamed it as *Wangari Maathai Day*.

⁴⁵⁰ Orobator, *Religion and Faith in Africa*, 104.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 104, 108. According to Orobator, Maathai agrees with the teaching of Pope Francis that the task of healing the earth goes beyond any single discipline but ought to connect with science, spirituality and ethics. In addition, Orobator points out that Maathai teaches that an ecological commitment is also a “commitment to service” that manifests itself in caring for the earth which signals possibilities for healing the planet and humanity.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, 16-17.

of consciousness where we understand that we belong to the larger family of life on Earth.”⁴⁵³ For her, the desperate scrambling for the earth’s resources leads eventually to the dehumanization of people, a dehumanization which occurs “when people search for riches in the mud, pits, mines and rivers and when people burn wood for charcoal leading to deforestation and desertification.”⁴⁵⁴ Articulating this teaching further, Maathai posited that the scrambling for more and more resources of the earth which leads to dehumanization of people was influenced by the wrong notion and attitude that “there are always more trees to be cut, more land to be utilized, more fish to be caught, more water to dam and more minerals to be mined.”⁴⁵⁵ Describing such attitudes as both wrong and pervasive, Maathai stated that, “It is this attitude toward the earth that it has unlimited capacity and valuing resources for what they can buy, not what they can do, that has created so many of the deep ecological wounds visible across the world.”⁴⁵⁶ Thus, I argue here that for Maathai, there is a clear link between environmental degradation and the degradation or dehumanization of people, a teaching which Pope Francis has similarly articulated in his encyclical, *Laudato Si*.⁴⁵⁷

Secondly, Wangari Maathai taught that consumerism, that is, the human attitude and constant quest to obtain and use more and more of the earth’s natural resources, was due to “craving.” She argued that “the destruction of the environment is driven by an insatiable craving for more.”⁴⁵⁸ According to her, “The word *craving* so implicated in the physical exploitation of the environment, indicates psychological desperation and spiritual weakness.”⁴⁵⁹ For Maathai also, “the human desire for

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 25. Maathai described the current environmental crisis in the world as “hell”. Thus, according to her, “it is ‘hell’ when there is environmental destruction, poverty and desperate scrambling around for resources. See *Wangari Maathai*, 42.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 43.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ Pope Francis Encyclical, *Laudato Si*,’ LS # 139.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., 45.

more and the capacity to forget the lessons of the past and ignore the demands of the future, goes back to time. For example, Maathai references *Numbers 11:33* when the Israelites “craved” for more and more and were punished by God.⁴⁶⁰ Thus, according to Maathai, the story of the Israelites in *Numbers 11: 33* is “a story of disobedience which teaches that we should respect limits and not demand more than we can handle.”⁴⁶¹ Making further references to the Sacred Scriptures, Maathai taught that the Bible has instructions against craving and so “it is morally wrong when people use biblical religion to legitimize the domination of creation.”⁴⁶²

Thirdly, Maathai postulated that the factors responsible for craving differed among those living in the more developed regions and countries and those living in poorer countries. According to her, in the industrialized regions where people are mainly urban, over-consumption is the main factor for craving, and therefore, the major ecological challenge, “while in the poorer regions of the world, it is deprivation due to persistent inequalities that lead people to over-exploit their local environment; to clear trees and vegetation, to cultivate crops on steep slopes or forested areas, to induce massive erosion or to overgraze livestock and reduce pasture to near desert.”⁴⁶³ Thus, for Maathai, whereas greed is mainly responsible for craving among those living in affluent countries, for those living in poorer regions and countries, it is need that leads to craving and subsequently, to over-exploit their environment. The above teaching of Wangari Maathai is also reflected in

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., 43-45. In *Numbers 11*, the story says that Israelites complained bitterly to Moses and Aaron about having to eat only manna in the desert and crave for other foods (*Num. 11:4*). Although God provided meat for them to eat, He also punished them for displaying lack of trust and faith in Him through their craving and constant complaints (*Num. 11:33-34*).

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 49. For Maathai, craving as a desire can create intense suffering that allows people to disregard the past and not plan for the future.

⁴⁶² Ibid., 45. Maathai taught that the Bible and many Scriptures are replete with instructions about how to maintain the right relationship to food, the land, animals and one another and thus, it is never justified for people to use the Scriptures to support exploitation. For Pope Francis also, biblical teaching, in particular, the interpretation of “dominion” (*Gen. 1:28*) cannot be used to legitimize unbridled exploitation of nature. According to him, the divine injunction, “till and keep” (*Gen. 2:15*) means that human beings must both use and care for the earth. See especially LS # 67-68.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 49-50.

Catholic social teaching, especially in the teachings of Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis, both of whom insist that consumerism among the populations of the highly developed countries is largely responsible for the current ecological crisis while in the less developed nations, it is greed which leads the people to destroy the environment.⁴⁶⁴

Fourthly and lastly, Maathai pointed to people's rapid changing perspectives on the environment as another factor responsible for the current global ecological crisis. Here, Maathai argued that the economy and culture of many native peoples has shifted from a sense of collective responsibility for community well-being and common good to an individualistic ethic that focuses on self.⁴⁶⁵

According to her,

Such changes in the perspective of the natural world have been both the cause and effect of the loss of self-respect and lack of concern for the environment that has affected us ... We need to reflect more thoughtfully on our responsibilities to the planet and to one another and provide a way forward to heal all these wounds by embracing creation in all its diversity, beauty and wonder.⁴⁶⁶

In her ecological teachings also, Maathai addressed herself to the effects of environmental degradation and the measures that could be adopted to resolve them. Speaking on the effects of environmental degradation, she singled out migration as one important effect of ecological degradation. According to her, "As trees are cut and planting stops, grasses vanish and animals disappear, people are forced to migrate and move toward areas already settled by other communities. Struggles over land and water are politicised and characterized by age-old rivalries. Conflicts then result as an inevitable consequence."⁴⁶⁷ I posit here that this teaching of Maathai

⁴⁶⁴ For John Paul II, see CA # 37, 1990 WDP Message # 7-8, 13. For Pope Francis, see LS # 109.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid. 54-55.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis articulates similar views when he posits that even though the earth was given to us as our common home, a sister and mother, we have come to see ourselves as her lord and master, entitled to plunder her at will. Therefore, we have inflicted harm on her by our irresponsible use and abuse and now the earth is calling on us to help save it. See LS # 1-2.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 103.

also reflects Catholic social teaching in which migration has also been identified by both Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis as one of the major consequences of ecological degradation.⁴⁶⁸

With regard to the measures that should be adopted to help halt or reverse the harm being done to the environment by humanity, Maathai postulated that the earth is currently the only planet where life thrives and as such, a sense of wonder of the earth and ecstasy at the great mystery of the cosmos is an important step towards valuing the importance of the earth and thereby taking good care of it.⁴⁶⁹ Quoting the astronaut James Irwin who said that “seeing the earth from space has to change a man and make him appreciate the creation of God and the love of God,” and also Edgar Mitchell, who stated that “my view of our planet was a glimpse of divinity,” Maathai posited that “the discovery of the earth’s complexity, beauty and force should elicit from all people a response of awe, wonder and reverence.”⁴⁷⁰ According to scientists, including the cosmologist, Martin Rees, the Earth has existed several billions of years before the arrival of humanity, and as such, humanity needs to take into consideration the long history of the emergence and development of the Earth as well as its complexity in their approach to the Earth.⁴⁷¹ With this background in mind, Maathai taught that as Sacred Scriptures, science and wisdom of elders try to provide answers for understanding the complexity of the earth, it is important that humanity learns to view and treat the Earth with awe, wonder and respect and also to protect it from further harm and damage.⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁸ See John Paul II, 1990 WDP # 11. Also, LS # 25. In speaking about climate change, Pope Francis laments that there has been tragic rise in migration due to environmental degradation.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 59.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 59-60. James Irwin is the eighth man to walk on the Moon while Edgar Mitchell is the sixth. Both were American astronauts.

⁴⁷¹ For more, see Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 8-9. Also, Denis Edwards, *Breath of Life: A Theology of the Creator Spirit* (Maryknoll, New York, 2004), 10-15.

⁴⁷² Ibid., 62-64. For Maathai, the concept of the earth as one self-sustaining organism that has been in existence for billions of years means that it is almost beyond human capacity to conceive of it in space and time. According to her, science tries to understand this, the world’s Sacred Scriptures also attempt to understand this majesty through their myths of origin and philosophies while Elders who are wisdom keepers or those who continue the traditions of their peoples over many centuries, have also been trying to provide knowledge about the environment and our place

Beyond teaching that the awesomeness and majesty of the planet Earth should elicit respect and care for the earth from humanity, Maathai equally argued that, “As much as humanity needs to take a look at the bigger picture of the earth, it is equally fundamental to pay attention to the small.”⁴⁷³ This is because according to Maathai,

Dwelling on the small and its interconnectedness will enable us to recognize that as much as the planet may seem to us to be a vast and complex web of ecosystems, weather patterns, ocean currents, and so on, it is also an infinitely subtle and intricate network of biomes, that are full of microorganisms, bacteria, insects, plants and other forms of life that are the bedrock of the larger ecosystem on which birds, bats and the bigger species such as our own depend.⁴⁷⁴

The above teaching shows that for Maathai, besides acknowledging the awesomeness of the vast expanse of the earth, there are also the small elements of the earth that need not be overlooked by human beings since these also add to the complexity of the earth. According to her, “Part of acknowledging the small and its connectedness is simply in noticing individual distress and chain reaction it could stimulate.”⁴⁷⁵ For Maathai, the attitude of not ignoring the small and seemingly insignificant parts of creation will help humans to think about the objects they use every day such as telephone or chair that comes from the environment, the palm oil in soap that comes from a plantation and so on. According to her, by focusing on these small and seemingly insignificant things of the earth, human beings are enabled to become a little bit more conscious of their decisions with regard to how they use the resources of the earth and are thus enabled to see how best they can make a positive, immediate difference with regard to the care of the earth.⁴⁷⁶

in it. For Maathai, all of these attempts to understand the world should remind us of the majesty and awe in which the natural world has always been held and the ways our ancestors lived within it. These should lead us to care for it.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., 67.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 67-68.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 68-69.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

It is important to note here that Maathai's arguments that a focus on the small parts of our big ecosystem would help humanity to appreciate the earth more and thereby take better care of it can also be found in the Christian Sacred Scriptures, that is, "the Bible understands the importance of recognizing the smallest."⁴⁷⁷ For example, in the New Testament Gospels, Jesus asked his disciples to consider the simplicity and beauty of the lilies of the field (Matt. 6:28), noting that God cares for sparrows (Matt. 10:29), while in the Hebrew Bible, "one of the marks of King Solomon's wisdom is his thorough knowledge of trees ... (1 Kgs. 4:33)."⁴⁷⁸

On the whole, I contend that in regard to the measures that should be adopted to help deal with and reverse the rapid trend of ecological damage occurring in the world, Maathai contended that there was the need for a change in perspective among humanity towards the earth by noting that "part of the reason for the current environmental crisis is that we are failing to imagine a different way of being in the world. We think that it is luxury that makes us, but we find that well-being and satisfaction are achieved through compassion, the giving of oneself, serving others and sharing."⁴⁷⁹ Thus, according to Maathai, there was the need for a change in perspective among humanity from one which views the earth merely as a natural resource meant only for human exploitation and consumption to one which views the earth as a common good and patrimony of all generations of people, both those living and yet to be born. This change in perspective will then lead to respect, care and protection for the earth and in this way, help address the current ecological damage across the globe.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 68.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid. Maathai also used the biblical stories of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 to argue that the Sacred Scripture reminds us of how small we are and how embedded we must be in the ecosystems surrounding us. In the Bible, the name of the first man, Adam, derives from *adamah*, Hebrew word for soil, and Eve comes from *chava*, which means life ... we are the culmination of the process of creation and yet its most dependent creature who could only be created once everything else had been created (Gen. 1:26-27)

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 115.

Additionally, Maathai taught that the task of humanity today should be to rededicate ourselves to reducing the destruction of the Earth by imagining a new way of living in right relations to the world and with others and through a proper interpretation of the biblical teachings on creation.

Towards this goal, she emphasized that,

To heal the Earth's wounds, we must find a balance between the big picture and the small, wisdom and experience. What often happens is that when material wealth rises, often at the expense of the immediate environment in the form of pollution, waste and destruction of natural resources, people often lose the sense of counting the cost ... We are not material beings; we are filled with spirit.⁴⁸⁰

In summary, I contend that in her ecological teachings as discussed above, Maathai articulated what she considered to be the current crisis of the earth by teaching that the factors most responsible for the current global ecological crisis included pollution, degradation, deforestation, desertification, among others. According to her, these problems do not only degrade the environment, but they also degrade human beings living on earth. For her also, the attitude largely responsible for the environmental destruction today is craving, that is, humanity's insatiable desire to obtain and use more and more of the earth's resources without getting satisfied. Besides craving, Maathai also posited that the shift of focus from a sense of collective responsibility for community well-being and the common good to individualistic ethic is another factor responsible for the current environmental crisis since this change in perspective has led to the loss of self-respect and concern for the environment, leading inevitably to the current situation where the earth is viewed only as a resource and so subjected to unhindered exploitation and use.

In terms of solutions towards ameliorating these environmental challenges, Maathai proposed that humanity should begin to develop a sense of awe, wonder and ecstasy towards the great mystery of the cosmos. In addition, she postulated that humanity must pay attention to the small and

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 114-115.

seemingly insignificant parts of the earth which according to her formed the bedrock of the ecosystem since such a consideration offered opportunities for humans to become a bit more conscious of their decisions regarding the earth, encouraging them to imagine a different way of living and making a difference.

It is important to note here that Maathai's ecological teachings explicated above have a lot of resonance with the ecological teachings of the three most recent popes of the Catholic Church, namely, Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis.⁴⁸¹ In examining the ecological teachings of Wangari Maathai, Anne Marie Clifford, for example has argued that Maathai's ecological teachings mirror those of Pope John Paul II in the latter's 1990 groundbreaking World Day of Peace Message, titled *Peace with the Creator, Peace with All Creation*.⁴⁸² In particular, Clifford posits that both Maathai and John Paul II taught that the ecological crisis leads to poverty and migration.⁴⁸³ In regard to Pope Benedict XVI also, Clifford taught that both Maathai and Benedict XVI considered the environment as God's gift to everyone and the work of the Creator which is to be used responsibly so that the earth can benefit the poor, future generations and humanity as a whole.⁴⁸⁴ In addition, Clifford also noted that both Maathai and Benedict XVI made passionate calls to the world in regard to protecting the environment and safeguarding it from climate change.

⁴⁸¹ These three most recent popes of the Catholic Church have treated the subject of the care of the environment in various encyclicals, documents and papal addresses. For example, John Paul II articulated ecological teachings in some of his social encyclicals, including *Redemptor Hominis* (1979), *Sollicitudo rei Socialis* (1987) and *Centesimus Annus* (1991) as well his 1990 World Day of Peace titled, *Peace with God, Peace with All Creation*. Likewise, Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI talked the environment in Chapter 4 of his encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), and dedicated his 2010 Message to mark the World Day of Peace to the environment under the title, *If you Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation*. Lastly, in his encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis has become the first pope to dedicate a social encyclical exclusively to the subject of the environment. The ecological teachings of these three popes as well as their predecessors and other ecological documents of the Church have already been examined and discussed extensively in Chapter 1 of this work.

⁴⁸² Anne M. Clifford, "Trees, "Living Symbols of Peace and Hope": Wangari Maathai & Ecofeminist Theology" in Jame Schaefer (Ed.), *Confronting the Climate Crisis: Catholic Theological Perspectives* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 2011), 356.

⁴⁸³ Ibid. See also John Paul II 1990 WDP #11, Maathai, *Replenishing the Earth*, 25.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

According to her, while Maathai made this call in 1985 at the Global Women's Conference in Nairobi, Kenya, Benedict XVI made this call in his social encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, which he issued in 2009.⁴⁸⁵

To sum up on Clifford's examination of Wangari Maathai's work, I posit that in reviewing the ecological teachings and activism of Wangari Maathai, Anne Clifford postulated that Maathai's contribution to the care of the environment in the world was monumental. This is because for Clifford, Maathai went beyond the critical issue of the care of the environment to show its links to democracy, peace in the world and women empowerment.⁴⁸⁶ Besides, Clifford posited that by involving poor and rural women in planting trees across Africa and teaching that trees are symbols of peace and hope, Maathai not only helped to promote environmental rehabilitation and protection, but she also inevitably promoted gender equality and women's empowerment in so doing.⁴⁸⁷ I share in the above position of Anne Clifford on Maathai's contribution to women empowerment, peace and democracy through her ecological care activism and teachings and posit that the care of the environment goes beyond simply caring for the earth to embracing the care of humanity itself as Clifford's arguments have shown above.

In addition to the similarities between the ecological teachings of Wangari Maathai on one hand and those of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, on the other, I argue further that when we compare the ecological teachings of Maathai to those of Pope Francis, we also see a lot of resemblances in their respective ecological teachings. I shall highlight below three of these important similarities. Firstly, I contend that both Wangari Maathai and Pope Francis share

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 357-358. See also Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter, *Caritas in Veritate* (Vatican, 2009), CV # 7.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 339-340.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 345, 360.

similarities in their teachings on the major signs of the current global environmental damage. That is, similar to the ecological teachings of Wangari Maathai that the current ecological crisis in the world is evident in deforestation, pollution and global climate change,⁴⁸⁸ Pope Francis also teaches in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, that the current global ecological crisis is evident in global climate change, various forms of pollution, loss of biodiversity and scarcity of water, among others.⁴⁸⁹

Secondly, in the teachings of both Maathai and Pope Francis, there is an agreement that the current global ecological crisis is anthropogenic, meaning that human beings are the main cause of the current ecological crises in the world, while at the same time, there is consensus that ecological crisis also affects human beings. According to Maathai, human beings degrade the earth due to their constant “craving” for the earth’s resources, but by so doing, they also end up degrading themselves.⁴⁹⁰ Reiterating here that there is a clear link between the degradation of the environment and that of humanity in Maathai’s ecological teachings, I posit further that this teaching is echoed by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* where the pope likewise links the degradation of the earth to that of poor sections of humanity.⁴⁹¹ In linking the degradation of the environment to the degradation of the human person, Pope Francis emphasised 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,” for “we are faced not with two separate crises, one social and the other environmental, but rather with one complex crisis which is at once both social and environmental.”⁴⁹² I contend that by teaching in this way, Pope Francis clearly shares in Maathai’s conviction that the degradation of the earth leads to the degradation of the human

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., 25. See also Maathai, *Replenishing the Earth*, 58.

⁴⁸⁹ LS # 2, 20-42.

⁴⁹⁰ Maathai, *Replenishing the Earth*, 16-17, 43.

⁴⁹¹ LS # 101, 105. In Chapter three of *Laudato Si'*, titled “The Human Roots of the Current Ecological Crisis,” Pope Francis details many ways by which human beings are the cause of the current ecological crisis. See LS # 101-136.

⁴⁹² LS # 49, 139.

person, especially the poor, and vice versa, that is, the cry of the earth becomes the cry of the poor as well. Thus, I posit that there is a clear convergence in the teachings of Wangari Maathai and Pope Francis that the degradation of the earth leads to the degradation of the human being and vice versa.

Thirdly and lastly, I contend that both Maathai and Pope Francis share similarities in their respective ecological teachings on the need to view the earth with respect, wonder and awe as one of the responses that would help humanity to save the environment from its current crisis. For example, in *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis re-echoes the teachings of Maathai on the need to view the earth with awe and wonder as a means of appreciating the earth and thereby safeguarding it.⁴⁹³ Thus, while affirming both human uniqueness and the intrinsic value of the natural world in *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis posited that, “From panoramic vistas to the tiniest living creature, nature is a constant source of wonder and awe. It is also a continuing revelation of the divine ... This contemplation of nature allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us ...”⁴⁹⁴. Based on this, I argue that both Maathai and Pope Francis teach that all creation has intrinsic value and therefore, they should not be viewed mainly as existing for human consumption and use but they should be viewed with awe wonder and respect and treat it with care as one means of protecting the earth today.

From the discussions above, I posit that both Wangari Maathai and Pope Francis share at least three significant commonalities in their respective ecological teachings, namely, that they agree on the signs of the current ecological crises in the world, on human beings as the major cause of

⁴⁹³ LS # 85-88. See also Maathai, *Replenishing the Earth*, 59.

⁴⁹⁴ LS # 85.

these crises and on the need for humanity to show respect, awe and wonder as one important means of protecting the earth and saving it from further damage.

In summary, I argue that in reviewing the ecological teachings of Wangari Maathai and comparing them to Catholic social teaching, but particularly those found in the teachings of Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis, Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator is right when he posits that the teachings of Maathai are directly complemented by insights from the thoughts of (Pope John Paul II), Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and Pope Francis.⁴⁹⁵ Yet, at the same time, I postulate that in addition to the links that can be drawn between the ecological teachings of Maathai and Catholic social teaching, especially those found in these three above-named recent popes of the Church, there are at least three fundamental concepts within African theological ecological teachings which can and ought to be highlighted as offering important resources for the global quest for solutions towards the current ecological crisis in the world. These concepts which I shall examine in detail below are the African concept of God as creator, the African understanding of the close relationship between human and non-human creation and cosmic harmony. To these three concepts which I argue are very prominent in African theological and ecological teachings, I shall also add the concept of the *cosmic common good* which was first formulated by Daniel P. Scheid. It was Peter Osuji who brought the concept of the cosmic common good into dialogue within African ecological theology and I argue that he was right in doing so because above all, the concept of the

⁴⁹⁵ Orobator, *Religion and Faith in Africa*, 104. According to Orobator, Maathai's writings reveal several aspects of the ecological credentials of African Religion, and he lists these ecological credentials as including respect for the earth, the attitude of gratitude towards creation, cosmic harmony, etc. For Peter Osuji also, one of the ecological credentials of Africans is that they generally show great respect towards the Earth. According to him, this because the African traditional worldview teaches that humans are interrelated with the rest of nature and upholds the need to live in harmony with them for the good of all. Thus, human well-being or existence is endangered or broken down if the cosmos is disrespected or neglected and abused. This worldview therefore does not permit irresponsible and unlimited exploitation of resources and human beings. See Osuji, *Laudato Si' and Traditional African Environmental Ethics*, 193-194.

cosmic common good offers a very good description of African ecological theological worldview.⁴⁹⁶

In discussing these four African theological ecological concepts stated above, I shall argue that African theological ecological teachings contain important credentials and resources that can contribute significant insights to the ongoing global discussions on solutions to the current ecological crisis facing the world. Based on this position, I shall then contend that these African theological concepts should not be discarded as irrelevant but welcomed as significant resources that can contribute important insights to the current discussions on the care of the environment.

3.2 The African Concept of God as Creator in the Light of the Ecological Question

The concept of God as creator can be found in almost all cultural and religious traditions of the world.⁴⁹⁷ Within the African Traditional Religion also, God is viewed as the creator of everything that exists in the world. Speaking about the concept of God as creator among Africans, Jacob Olupona explained that among the Akan of Ghana, God is a male Creator who is called *Nana Nyame*, who alone remains responsible for the cosmos and the earth.⁴⁹⁸ Olupona further explained that among the Dogon of Mali, the creator God is called *Amma*, who is a male who impregnated the Earth, a female, and together, *Amma* and the Earth produced *Nommo* (water spirits) who formed human beings.⁴⁹⁹ In Zambia, the Lozi believe that the Supreme Being, *Nyambe*, created his wife,

⁴⁹⁶ Daniel P. Scheid is an Associate Professor of Theology at the Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, USA who came up with the theological formulation, the *cosmic common good*, in his book, *The Cosmic Common Good: Religious Grounds for Ecological Ethics* (2016). Following this, Peter Osuji has posited that the cosmic good reflects African ecological worldview and has subsequently brought the concept into African environmental theology. For more, see Peter Osuji, *Laudato Si' and Traditional African Environmental Ethics*, 187-191.

⁴⁹⁷ In his book, *The Doctrine of God, A Global Introduction: A Biblical, Historical and Contemporary Survey*, Veli-Matti Karkkainen surveys the concept of God in Christianity and in other religions including and cultures including Asian, African, Latin American contexts. See Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *The Doctrine of God, A Global Introduction: A Biblical, Historical and Contemporary Survey*. Grand Rapid, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004.

⁴⁹⁸ Jacob Olupona, *African Religions: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 26.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

Nasilele, and the first human being, Kamunu. *Nyambe*, the creator God, once lived on earth before departing to the sky.⁵⁰⁰ Beyond these examples listed by Olupona regarding the concept of God as creator in Africa, I contend that among the many different African tribes dotted across the continent, there are similar stories like these which show that God is viewed and understood as creator among Africans. Thus, I posit that despite the different views or conceptions of God across the African continent, the various tribes and people of Africa share analogous views on the basic idea of God as creator.

More significantly, I contend that what unites the diverse stories or conceptions of God as creator among Africans is the belief that not only did God create the universe and everything in it, but that God also sustains and maintains the cosmos and everything in it. Thus, I argue that for the African, God is not only the creator of human beings whom He protects, but He is also the creator of the non-human creation whom He protects as well. The above belief is affirmed by John Mbiti who teaches that “the belief that God is the creator of all things is common everywhere in Africa. For that reason, there are many names which describe him as Creator, Creator of all things, Moulder, Begetter, Bearer, Potter, Fashioner, Architect, Carpenter, Originator, Constructor, and so on.”⁵⁰¹ Mbiti teaches further that, “God sustains, keeps and upholds the things he has created. This means that God looks after the universe, cares for it and keeps it together so that it does not fall apart or disintegrate.”⁵⁰² According to him, “As a result of the belief that God keeps and sustains all things, African people speak of God as the Keeper, Upholder, Protector, Preserver, Guardian, Caretaker, Pastor and Saviour.”⁵⁰³

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion, Second Edition* (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press Inc., 1991), 49. John Mbiti is often referred to as the “father of modern African theology.”

⁵⁰² Ibid., 49-50.

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 52.

Based on the concept of God as creator and sustainer of both the human and the non-human creation among Africans, I argue further that the African also acknowledges and accepts the reality that since the non-human creation is very much part of God's creation, human beings ought to take good care of the non-human creation in accordance with the will of God. This is because, among others, Africans believe that "the human person is the only creature who is gifted with the intelligence to explore creation and the sagacity to utilize the resources of the earth" and that "he is ultimately responsible for its choices and the consequence of those choices."⁵⁰⁴ This belief is similarly reflected in the teachings of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference when they posit that, "We (human beings) are the only beings on earth who can consciously plan and improve, alter or destroy the world we live in."⁵⁰⁵ Thus, I contend that for the African, the importance of the unique position of human beings in the cosmos is that God has placed humanity in that position in order to care for the rest of God's creation. Consequently, I opine that this concept offers great resource for the care of the earth today because it leads to the understanding that humans owe a responsibility of care and stewardship to creation due to the fact that they are related to them as God's creation.

The above African concept of God as a creator who protects and sustains His creation, both human and non-human, is found expressed also in the traditional religious concept of God within the Akan Traditional Religion of Ghana. Among the Akan of Ghana, God is viewed as the Supreme Being who created the universe and whose care and benevolence extends to every created being, human and non-human. In his article, *God of Life: Rethinking the Akan Christian Concept of God in the*

⁵⁰⁴ Marjorie Keenan, *From Stockholm to Johannesburg*, 46. This statement was made by the representatives of the Holy See at the Rio Summit on the environment held in 1992.

⁵⁰⁵ Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, *Ecclesia in Ghana*, 160.

Light of the Ecological Crisis, in which he examined the Akan concept of God, Robert Owusu Agyarko affirmed this belief by stating that,

The Akan traditional worldview expresses belief in a Supreme Being referred to as *Onyame* or *Onyankopon*. *Onyame* is seen as the supreme being whose benevolence extends to all people and all creation. The creation of the universe is attributed to *Onyame* (God), and he/she is regarded as the governing principle of the universe. To the ancient Akan, the *Onyamedua* (literally, “God’s tree,” *Alstonia boonei*) serves as a symbol of their dependence on God.”⁵⁰⁶

The Akan believe that God is the Supreme Being who is the creator of everything in the world and He governs and cares for everything He has created. He also points out that among the Akan, the *Onyamedua* is a symbol of humanity’s dependence on both God as well as non-human creation for their survival and flourishing. It is significant to note that Owusu Agyarko’s teaching above finds support in Elochukwu Uzukwu who similarly argues that, “The symbolic closeness of *Onyame* through God’s tree (*Onyamedua*) explains the frequent prayers and offerings made to God,” and that the “*Nyamedua* is neither a face nor strictly an image; *Nyamedua* is a symbol of God’s providential care for humans revealed within an ecologically friendly divine economy.”⁵⁰⁷

While I support the above teachings of both Owusu Agyarko and Uzukwu concerning the closeness of God to humanity through the symbolism of the *Onyamedua* among the Akan of Ghana, I also postulate that the presence of *Onyamedua* on the compounds of Akan people is a constant reminder not only to the Akan about humanity’s relatedness to and dependence on God,

⁵⁰⁶ Owusu Agyarko, *God Life: Rethinking the Akan Christian Concept of God*, 1-2. In this article, Owusu Agyarko discusses the concept of God in relation to the current ecological crisis. He posits that, “Looking at the human and non-human forms of relations, the current environmental crisis may be seen as a theological problem” since “our perception of who God is shapes our actions and attitudes to others and to nature.” Articulating the concept of God among the Akan of Ghana, Owusu Agyarko postulated that the Akan concept of God offers a rich resource for the care of the environment today.

⁵⁰⁷ Elochukwu Uzukwu, *God, Spirit and Human Wholeness* (Eugene, Oregon, PICKWICK Publications, 2012), 74. The *Onyamedua* (or God’s tree) is a three-pronged branch that is positioned at the entrance of compounds and planted in the ground. It contains on top of it a pot of rainwater referred to as “God’s water”. This is considered as holy water and is sprinkled on family members and others who visit to secure divine blessings. The Akan believe that the ancestors drink from it as well.

but also humanity's relatedness to and dependence on the non-human creation for survival and flourishing. In effect, I contend that *Onyamedua* is not only a symbolic reminder to the Akan that humans have an obligation to God who provides them rain (water) but also that humans have an obligation to care for the non-human creation (symbolized by the tree) which provides them with food and nourishment. Thus, I argue that the *Onyamedua* plays a symbolic role of reminding the Akan that they owe to the non-human creation the responsibility of care and protection precisely because they are also an important part of God's creation and that humans depend on them for their sustenance and flourishing, and therefore, they ought to be protected and cared for.

In summary, I posit that among Africans in general and the Akan of Ghana in particular, the concept of God as creator of all things, both human and non-human creation, provides an important theological ethic for ecological care, an ethic which I argue is worth considering today in view of the current global efforts at finding solutions to the contemporary global ecological crisis.

3.3 African Religious Thought on the Relationship Between Human and Non-Human Creation

In addition to the argument above that the African concept of God as creator of both human and non-human creation serves as an important ethical resource for the care of creation, I also argue that in African religious thought, there is strong belief in the close connection between humans and non-human creation, I argue further that this belief leads to the situation where Africans believe that humanity is obliged to care for the non-human creation in order to maintain the balance in the ecosystem and to ensure their own survival and flourishing. Teaching about this close interconnection between humans and non-human creation in the African religious thought, Peter Osuji argued that "the African worldview is one of mutual interrelationship devoid of the contrasts

between plants, animals, matter and spirit, communal and individual ... it is a network of relationships and interactions among beings and non-beings of the ecosystem that includes the supernatural beings, the gods, the spirits and the Supreme Being.”⁵⁰⁸ Osuji argues further that, “within this network, human beings are believed to be part of nature, not distinct from it. All living and non-living things are also seen as part of a single web of life and are mutually interdependent.”⁵⁰⁹ Positing that “the (African) philosophy of live and let live gives rise and continues to shape Africa environmental ethics,”⁵¹⁰ Osuji further argued that in African environmental ethics, “There is a (fraternal) interconnectedness and the interrelationship between the Earth and all its entities ... and this network of relationships and interactions among beings and non-beings of the ecosystem is meant to maintain the integration and balance among the beings and the ecosystem.”⁵¹¹

The above teachings of Osuji on the close interrelationship or interconnectedness of all things, human and non-human creation, find support in Orobator, who similarly teaches that in African Religion, all things are linked together.⁵¹² Postulating that “by reclaiming “animist” dimension of African Religion, people will be able to appreciate its contribution to the ecological debate and project, Orobator contends further that,

Animism ... affirms the basic belief that all reality is enfolded in a divine caress and animated by life-long breath of the Spirit. Trees, animals and water are sacred elements, and human beings have the duty to care for and protect them. To destroy or pollute them incurs the wrath of the gods and goddesses with which they are associated, and also the sanctions of the community.⁵¹³

⁵⁰⁸ Peter Osuji, *Laudato Si' and Traditional African Environmental Ethics*, 186-187.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁵¹² Orobator, *Religion and Faith in Africa*, 104.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.* Even though the label “Animism” is often used as a derogatory and pejorative term to describe African religion (s) in general, Orobator argues that Animism is a deep belief in the livingness of creation and that it represents a profound and intense belief that nothing in creation is lifeless, but everything has power and meaning. For Orobator, animism affirms the basic belief that all reality is enfolded in the divine caress and animated by the

I support the above positions of both Osuji and Orobator on the close relationship between humans and non-human creation in African religious worldview and their arguments that the African concept of the close interrelationship between humans and non-human creation can help greatly with regard to the care of the earth. This is because this interconnection leads to the understanding among humanity that they need to care for the earth in order to ensure its survival and to guarantee humanity's own survival and flourishing. Thus, I contend that the concept of the close relationship between human and non-human creation in African traditional religious thought can also serve as a useful resource that can be used to advocate for the need to care for the environment just as the African concept of God as creator.

It is equally significant to note that the African understanding of the close relationship between human and non-human creation articulated above is found also in the teachings of the Akan Traditional Religion where there is the belief that humans and non-humans share a close connection between them. Explaining this Akan concept, Owusu Agyarko posits that this belief leads to the understanding among the Akan of Ghana that “no one sins directly against God only.”⁵¹⁴ Consequently, even though the Akan phrase, *W'abra Nyame* (“You have sinned against God”), indicates an offence against God, Owusu Agyarko contends that, “Because nature also constitutes God's own being, the Akan believe that any unnecessary hurt (oppression) against human and non-human forms of life constitutes evil against God. To the Akan, to hurt someone is to hurt God just as to hurt non-human forms of life unnecessarily is also to hurt God.”⁵¹⁵ To support his argument, Owusu Agyarko makes references to John Pobee, a Ghanaian priest-theologian, who

breath of the Spirit. Trees, animals and water are sacred elements and human beings have the duty to care for and protect them. For more, see Orobator, *Faith and Religion in Africa*, 16, 104.

⁵¹⁴ Owusu Agyarko, *God of Life: Rethinking Akan Christian Concept of God*, 4.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*

also argued that, “If creation is through the decisive will of God as affirmed by both the Akan traditional culture and the Christian faith, then human beings must seriously consider the intention and will of God in creating the world in their interaction with non-human creation ... The careless and irresponsible use of creation can only be regarded as assault on God.”⁵¹⁶ Thus, I contend that for Owusu Agyarko as for Pobee, due to the close and integral relationship between human and non-human creation in the Akan religious worldview, any unnecessary hurt against non-human creation constitutes an offence against God also.

In articulating the belief in the close connection between human and non-human creation in Akan traditional worldview further, Owusu Agyarko posited that this close connection flows from the belief among the Akan that all human and non-human beings belong together in God through God’s Spirit. Here, I argue that this Akan concept is also thoroughly a Christian concept because Christian theology also teaches that “the Spirit is the personal presence of God and companion with each creature. Besides, as Thomas Aquinas teaches, “the Spirit of God dwells in each creature and thus there is a real relationship of dependence between the creature and God, a relationship by which the creature exists.”⁵¹⁷ Thus, we see here the commonality between the Akan teaching of God’s Spirit dwelling in all creatures and that of Christian theology for in both teachings, the Spirit of God dwells in all creatures, human and non-human, animating them.

Explaining the above Akan belief further, Owusu Agyarko taught that “*Onyame* (God) is immediately present to each and every creature through their *sunsum* (Akan word for spirit) which are considered as sparks of God’s Spirit (*Sunsum*).”⁵¹⁸ He postulated that, “Creation as the sparks of God’s *sunsum* implies that creation belongs to God and participates in God’s very being. *Sunsum*

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

⁵¹⁷ Edwards, *Breath of Life: A Theology of the Creator Spirit*, 112-113.

⁵¹⁸ Owusu Agyarko, *Akan Christian Concept of God*, 5.

serves as an essential link between God, oneself and other forms of life ... As the *sunsum* of nature are only sparks of the *Sunsum* of God, God's otherness or transcendence is maintained."⁵¹⁹ Thus, according to Owusu Agyarko, the implication of the concept of God's sparks is that the Creator dwells in his/her creation as a whole and in every individual created being and that by virtue of the Spirit, God holds everything together and keeps them alive.⁵²⁰ The proposal of creation as a spark of God's *Sunsum* is significant because it allows for the understanding that all creation is bound up with God (Gen. 9:1-17) through the Spirit (*Sunsum*) of God. Yet, at the same time, it retains an emphasis on the promise of redemption (Rom. 8:19-23; Col. 1:19-20) when all individuals will ultimately return to God in the end. This conveys the idea of redemption as encompassing "all things" and not only human beings.⁵²¹ Pope Francis makes similar arguments in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, thus showing some commonality between this Akan concept and that of Catholic social teaching.⁵²²

With the above understanding, Owusu Agyarko then opined that "this view of the immediacy of God to all creatures has consequences for the way the Akan, at least theoretically, value and treat one another and other creatures. *Onyame nti* ("Because of God" or "For the sake of God"), one acts or refrains from acting against another person or non-human forms of life."⁵²³ Based on this, Owusu Agyarko contended that because the Akan view all other humans and even non-human creation as possessing the Spirit (*Sunsum*) of God, they refrained from acting in ways that will hurt them, because they believe that by so doing, they would also inevitably hurt God in the process. Here, I argue that even though Christian theology shares in the Akan belief that God dwells in

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 11-12.

⁵²⁰ Ibid., 12-13.

⁵²¹ Ibid., 12-13.

⁵²² LS # 83.

⁵²³ Owusu Agyarko, *Akan Christian Concept of God*, 5.

every creature through His Spirit, Christian theology, nonetheless, does not teach that to hurt non-human creation is to hurt God. What Christian theology teaches is that even though God is present (immanent) to non-human creation, God is at the same time transcendent to them and so God cannot be positively identified with creation as if to suggest that there is no real difference between God and His creation of which there is.⁵²⁴ Even though Pope Francis teaches that human life is grounded in three fundamental relationships, namely, with God, with others and with creation and to rupture any of them is to sin,⁵²⁵ the pope does not teach that to sin against nature is equal to sinning against God. It is sin against nature and not God as such for God is not to be positively collapsed into His creation since “there is an infinite distance between God and the things of this world which do not possess his fullness.”⁵²⁶ Thus, we see here some difference in the teachings within Akan worldview and that of the Christian Church.

Furthermore, Owusu Agyarko explains that the concept of the close connection between human and non-human creation is borne by the Akan belief that both human and non-human alike will be ultimately saved by God. According to him, there is the belief among the Akan of Ghana that God is the saviour of all things and all forms of life, human and non-human. He argues that this Akan belief is based on the understanding among the Akan that “every creature has God’s nature (*Sunsum*), and thus, returns to God after it dies.”⁵²⁷ Thus, Owusu Agyarko contends that the belief among Akan that both human beings and non-human nature are closely related to each other and will also be ultimately redeemed by God, is an important reason why the Akan refuse to act in ways that will hurt or harm other human beings and non-human creatures.⁵²⁸ I argue that the above-

⁵²⁴ The belief that God is to be positively identified with His creation is called pantheism and is not accepted within Christian theology. See Denis Edwards, *Breath of Life*, 140-141.

⁵²⁵ LS # 66,

⁵²⁶ LS # 88.

⁵²⁷ Owusu Agyarko, *Akan Christian Concept of God*, 5.

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

mentioned Akan belief in the ultimate redemption of all creatures is also shared by Christian theology which similarly upholds the teaching that each creature participates ultimately in the redemption of Christ, and that “the diverse range of creatures finds redemption in being taken up eternally into the communion of God.”⁵²⁹ Pope Francis likewise teaches that the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ present from the beginning and that at the end of time, Jesus who is the Son of God will deliver all things to the Father so that “God may be everything to everyone” (1 Cor. 15:28).⁵³⁰ With this, I argue that the Akan belief in the ultimate redemption of all creatures which is shared by Christian theology is one that should inspire, motivate and encourage human beings to treat the non-human creation with respect and care.

In summary, I posit that based on the above teachings of Osuji, Orobator and Owusu Agyarko, there is enough evidence and considerable consensus within African theology and among African theologians that there is a close interconnectedness or relationship between human and non-human creation. I posit further that this close relationship between human and non-human creation in African theological worldview leads to the promotion of harmonious relationships between humans and other natural entities as well as elicit moral obligation on the part of humans to treat the non-human creation with gratitude, respect and care. Thus, as Maathai rightly asserts and Orobator corroborates, within the African religious worldview, concept of the close interconnection between human and non-human beings leads to the belief that in caring for the earth, human beings care for themselves, while at the same time, in destroying the earth, human beings destroy themselves due to this same interconnection.⁵³¹ Based on the above understanding,

⁵²⁹ Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith*, 98. See also Paul’s teachings in his Letters to the Romans (8:19-23), Colossians (1:15-20) and Ephesians (1:10-15).

⁵³⁰ Pope Francis, LS #99-100.

⁵³¹ Orobator, *Religion and Faith in Africa*, 109-110. For Orobator, healing the earth is primarily about healing humanity, since according to him, how we treat mother earth is an accurate measure of how we treat ourselves. This position reflects the teaching of Benedict XVI who links human ecology with the natural ecology, and also of Pope

I argue that the deep interconnectedness and close interrelationship between human and non-human beings in African religious thought can also serve as an important theological wisdom and ethical foundation for the care and protection of the earth just as the African concept of God as creator.

3.4 Cosmic Harmony in African Religious Thought

In its broad sense, cosmic harmony in the African religious context refers to “the network of relations and interactions among beings and non-beings, that is, all members of the ecosystem, including the Supreme Being, the gods, the spirits and the deities.”⁵³² According to Osuji, “This is meant to maintain the integration and balance of the beings and ecosystem and its occupants, hence the cosmic harmony.”⁵³³ Osuji explains further that,

in the traditional African metaphysical worldview, striving to maintain harmony and a balanced relationship with all creatures and the supernatural beings – the gods, the spirits and the deities – the human beings both alive and dead – ancestors and the unborn, the plants, animals, fauna and flora ... and other elements and phenomena in the universe, is of paramount importance. The well-being of a person consists in keeping in harmony with the cosmic totality.⁵³⁴

The above teaching of Osuji on cosmic harmony in the African religious thought is shared by Orobator who like Osuji, also posits that in the African belief, “the human person and the cosmos have a vital connection and that both influence and depend on each other.”⁵³⁵ Quoting Benezet Bujo to support his position, Orobator argues further that in African thought, “one can only save oneself by saving the cosmos as well.”⁵³⁶ Orobator also made reference to Wangari Maathai who

Francis, who likewise argues that the way humanity treats the earth reflects the way they treat one another since the ecological problem reflects social problem. See *Laudato Si'* paragraphs 49 and 139.

⁵³² Ibid.

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

⁵³⁵ Orobator, *Religion and Faith in Africa*, 110.

⁵³⁶ Ibid., 110-111.

argued that the concept of cosmic harmony in African worldview leads to two key ecological virtues, namely, gratitude and respect for the earth's resources, "the gratitude we ought to feel for what the earth gives us."⁵³⁷

Additionally, Orobator taught that in African Religion, creation is experienced and revered as a revelation of God who triumphs over death to save both mankind and the cosmos, and according to him, "The result is a moral imperative or duty to care for our common home."⁵³⁸ For Orobator, in its true sense, animism avoids any exploitation of nature. Instead, "it demonstrates that care for the environment affects the quality of our relations with God, with other human beings and with creation itself. It touches our faith in and love for God. Here, well-being is conceived of as harmony between self, others, the spirit world and nature."⁵³⁹ According to Orobator, the cosmic harmony entails

not only taking positive actions and solidarity for the earth but is demonstrable as a lifestyle of solidarity in which we show genuine concern for the environment, as in the words of Maathai, "If we love the environment, we must identify with the tree that is cut down and the human and other communities that are dying because their land no longer sustains them. We must express regret for the destroyed landscapes, become angry when we hear of another species under threat from human activity or see another polluted river or a landfill."⁵⁴⁰

Moreover, in support of his position that African Religion and its wisdom offers great treasure for environmental care and protection, Orobator postulated that even though ecological wisdom from traditional African Religion complements the dominant approaches in the Judeo-Christian traditions, it can also be considered as set apart from the latter.⁵⁴¹ According to Orobator, the

⁵³⁷ Ibid., 111. According to Orobator, in the African worldview, gratitude for what the earth gives us is similar to the gratitude for what a mother gives a child. He cites the African proverb which says that "A child can never (re)pay for its mother's milk", to support the type of gratitude that Africans have for the earth and what it gives us.

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

⁵³⁹ Ibid. Maathai describes cosmic harmony as "love for the environment."

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., 111-112.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 108.

wisdom of traditional African Religion on the care of the environment goes much deeper than the Judeo-Christian teachings and approach to the care of the environment. Explaining this further, Orobator offered four principles to justify his position. First and foremost, Orobator contended that in traditional African Religion, there are multiple agents such as spirits, deities, ancestors, gods, etc., who are deeply involved and invested in the process of creating the world and human beings. Thus, African religious traditions allow for multiple creative agents with some playing the role of intermediaries or secondary agents who actually complete the process of creation.⁵⁴² The interaction and work of these agents ensure that the world continues to exist as one cosmic whole.

Secondly, Orobator postulated that even “though the idea of “stewardship” in Judeo-Christian tradition sounds positive in regard to the care of the earth, stewardship seems one-dimensional whereby human beings care for the earth and other creatures and no more, thus assuming that other creatures or constituents of nature do not have any equal or reciprocal responsibility of stewardship toward human beings.”⁵⁴³ According to him, the critical difference between stewardship in Judeo-Christian theology and cosmic harmony in African Religion is that unlike the former, cosmic harmony in the latter emphasizes the mutuality, solidarity and interdependence because while human beings care for non-human creation, the latter in turn also cares for human beings.”⁵⁴⁴

Thirdly, Orobator averred that in African ecological ethic, the earth is the subject of an on-going renewal in time and space. Creation is not a definite act sequestered in an impenetrable and irretrievable past but an enterprise continually being fulfilled in mutuality and reciprocity. For him, in African religious thought, the focus on creation is not so much on how the earth came into being

⁵⁴² Ibid., 108-109.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., 109.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

as it is on how it is to be continued and sustained and how it survives into the future. Even though human beings can mistreat the earth, the belief in the ongoing renewal of creation reminds Africans that they can chart a different course, namely, one of care and protection of Mother Earth.⁵⁴⁵

Fourthly and lastly, Orobator argued that the duty and responsibility of healing, replenishing and renewing the earth is a communitarian experience since healing the earth is also primarily about healing humanity. Africans believe that how they treat Mother Earth is a measure of how they treat one another. As a result of this, healing the earth sets Africans on a path toward the survival and salvation of humanity itself.”⁵⁴⁶ With these arguments, Orobator then postulated that “the spiritual imagination embodied in African Religion can make a unique contribution to our joint planetary responsibility.”⁵⁴⁷ I contend that for Orobator, the African concept of cosmic harmony is a broad and significant ecological concept that can help humanity to protect and save the earth from its current ecological crisis. Thus, in support of Orobator’s arguments above, I contend further that at the present time when saving the planet and healing the earth continues to dominate global discourse on sustainability, climate change and ecological integrity, these four principles of traditional African Religion explicated above by Orobator can help humanity to cultivate appropriate and effective ecological virtues to save the earth.

Additionally, I support Orobator’s argument that from the perspectives of African traditions and spirituality, ecology means more than a physical environment of organisms and inanimate objects.⁵⁴⁸ This is because as Orobator rightly articulates, in African religious traditions, “at a much deeper level, ecology constitutes a universe of spiritual meaning and ethical imperatives ... A

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., 109-110.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., 110.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 112.

person's sense of self is ultimately tied with his or her relationship with this universe."⁵⁴⁹ Thus, for the African, the relationship between nature and humanity is so vital because the African understands that "what we do to the earth, we do to ourselves and to others. Saving one implies saving the other. The fate of humanity and the fate of the earth are inscribed in the same ecological book."⁵⁵⁰ Based on this understanding, I equally agree with Orobator when he argues that,

the African religious traditions blend well with the pivotal idea that Benedict calls the "book of nature", St. Francis of Assisi calls the "magnificent book" (LS 12) and Pope Francis calls God's "precious book" (LS 85). This understanding concurs with Christianity in recognizing creation as a gift, freely given for our responsible use which entails a responsibility of compassionate care and faithful stewardship.⁵⁵¹

In summary, I support Orobator's teachings above and contend that in African religious thought, "concern for ecology can never be viewed as a cold and detached matter because the earth exists as a gift that is to be received and nurtured with gratitude."⁵⁵² I hold this view because for the African, the environment is not simply thought of as nature separate from the life of humans. Rather, the environment includes nature and the interaction between humans and everything around them. Significantly, this expansive understanding of the environment within the African religious thought is reflected in the encyclical *Laudato Si'* in which Pope Francis argues among others, that "the "environment" is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it," and therefore, "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."⁵⁵³ Thus, I contend that in both African religious thought and Pope Francis' ecological

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵⁵² Ibid.

⁵⁵³ LS # 139. For Pope Francis, the care of our common home should be considered as a work of mercy. According to him, such work implies "a grateful contemplation of God's world" that allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us." See *Laudato Si'*, paragraph 214. From the pope's teaching, Orobator posits that it is not surprising that in African Religious tradition, reverence and protection for the environment are not optional.

teachings in *Laudato Si'*, the environment is more than just nature; it includes the interaction between humans and everything around us. With this broad understanding, I posit humanity is invited to treat the environment with care and respect since our own fate and that of the environment are tied closely together.

3.5 The Cosmic Common Good in African Traditional Religious Thought

As indicated earlier on in this chapter, the cosmic common good is a theological principle which was formulated and proposed by the American theologian, Daniel P. Scheid.⁵⁵⁴ According to Scheid, “the cosmic common good is a thoroughly Catholic concept rooted in a Catholic theology of creation, yet its basic tenets are flexible enough that it can find resonance in other religious traditions that do not share the same theological foundation.”⁵⁵⁵ The principle is based on two cornerstone principles of Catholic Social Teaching, namely, human dignity and common good. Scheid postulates that while “human dignity affirms the essential goodness and dignity of each and every human person who is a whole both unto himself and a part that belongs to something greater,”⁵⁵⁶ the common good, on the other hand,

affirms the essentially social nature of the human person, such that a human being cannot fulfill her vocation or achieve happiness apart from others. The common good affirms the essential goodness of the whole, composed of intrinsically dignified parts ... the common good can include material goods that every individual needs as well as a set of goods that belong to the whole as a whole such as water sources and clean air ... the common good also includes some goods that cannot be achieved except in community. It includes the full social, intellectual and spiritual flourishing of persons.⁵⁵⁷

Rather, healing the earth is a religious experience and a moral imperative. Restoring the harmony between humanity and nature is a mutually beneficial experience of wholeness.

⁵⁵⁴ Referenced earlier on in this chapter. See Daniel P. Scheid, *The Cosmic Common Good: Religious Grounds for Ecological Ethics* (2016). Peter Osuji has rightfully posited that the cosmic common good reflects African ecological worldview and has consequently brought the concept into the context of African ecological theology.

⁵⁵⁵ Daniel P. Scheid, “The Moral Vision of *Laudato Si'*: The Cosmic Common Good as a Common Ground for Interreligious Ecological Ethics” in Gerard Magill and Jordan Potter (Eds.), *Integral Ecology: Protecting Our Common Home* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 165.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

Daniel Scheid explains the principle of the cosmic common good further by arguing that, “Traditionally, the principles of Catholic Social Teaching were understood solely in a human context: human dignity and the human common good.”⁵⁵⁸ According to him, this is no longer justifiable and so “the Catholic Tradition is best expressed if it is reoriented ecologically to embrace the cosmic common good, creaturely dignity.”⁵⁵⁹ The reasons Scheid assigns for this new proposal and preference for the use of cosmic common good in place of human dignity and human common good are three-fold. In the first place, Scheid posits that human beings are part of the history of the evolution of the earth and therefore “any reasonable theological ethic must attend to a realistic picture of the world and the sciences offer substantial support for a broader and cosmic common good.”⁵⁶⁰ According to him, to understand the human common good and the scope of human experience today, humanity needs to see itself as included in the planetary history that makes human existence possible. With this, Scheid avers that the cosmic common good presents a more honest assessment of humanity’s place within the cosmos and its long history.⁵⁶¹

Secondly, Scheid argues for ecological interdependence using this argument to explain that a common good limited strictly to human beings makes little sense in light of ecological interdependence.⁵⁶² He avers that,

Humans are related to earthly creatures and the cosmos itself ... We are radically dependent on the Earth and its ecological systems for survival and flourishing: food, water, air, shelter – every day, we depend on the Earth’s soil and energy of the sun to survive ... without looking at the great common good, our individual and collective human flourishing is impossible.”⁵⁶³

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., 166.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

⁵⁶² Ibid., 167.

⁵⁶³ Ibid.

Thirdly and lastly, Scheid contends that “we are now aware that the Earth is vulnerable to human action and inaction ... A degraded Earth reconfirms that we cannot separate human common good from that of the other creatures.”⁵⁶⁴ Thus, for Scheid, the moral vision of the cosmic common good “is not the human person (anthropocentrism), but instead, the center is God (*theocentrism*) ... A Catholic cosmic common good has as its focus, the totality of what exists, created by God.”⁵⁶⁵

In addition to the above arguments in support of his proposal for the cosmic common good, Daniel Scheid posited further that the cosmic common good can help humanity to articulate a globally shared common moral vision. He listed the features of this common moral vision as *theocentrism* (focused on God for those who believe in a Creator) or *cosmocentrism* (focused on the well-being of the entire cosmos rather than one species above others); the *cosmos as commons* (a place in which creatures sustain their bodies and form meaningful relationships, allowing us to call the Earth our home); and *creaturely dignity* (each member of the universe possesses intrinsic value and dignity). Other features of this vision are *diversity of species* (intrinsic value of a diversity of species); *holism* (a concern for holistic systems as well as for the individual creatures that populate them, that is, inclusion of the Earth as a whole, its ecosystem and the plants animals and creatures that live in them); *ecological justice* (threat to the order of the universe, the order of love is a matter of justice requiring moral action; the cosmic common good is a moral vision that alerts us to a polluted Earth as a moral problem); and *Humans as Earth’s guardians* (humans do not fulfill their human calling unless they seek the good of all creatures with whom we share our lives. Human dignity consists in this).⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., 168-169.

In a nutshell, Scheid contended that “the cosmic common good captures the cosmic moral vision which re-centers us on God and helps us to see God in all creation and the interconnectedness of all beings. It envisions the universe as a splendid communion.”⁵⁶⁷ In relating the cosmic common good to religious traditions in the world, Scheid argued that the cosmic common good shares multiple similarities with the ecological moral vision developed in other religious traditions.⁵⁶⁸ Here, he listed Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Native American Religions as examples of religious traditions which contain teachings that bear similarities with the ecological vision and ideals encapsulated in the cosmic common good.⁵⁶⁹

In this dissertation, while I support the position of Scheid that the principle of the cosmic common good is an important Catholic theological formulation capable of achieving the integral moral vision of the earth and that its tenets can be found in some of the religious traditions of the world, I nonetheless fault him for failing to extend this vision into the context of African environmental ethic which I argue also contains in its fold some of the elements of the cosmic common good articulated by him above. I contend that this missing link is clear and obvious in the light of the fact that he mentions various religious traditions across the globe without making similar reference to the religious traditions in the African context. Nevertheless, this lacuna is addressed by Peter Osuji who has brought this concept into dialogue with African ecological theology by arguing that the cosmic common good formulated by Scheid is also found in African ecological ethics.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 164.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., 169.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., 169-175. According to Scheid, Islam teaches that all creation has a purpose and usefulness; they exist to praise God, and human beings are stewards of creation. Hinduism teaches that the Supreme Being resides in all things on earth. Buddhism whose understanding of how the cosmos works stresses interconnectedness which Thich Nhat Hanh, the famous Vietnamese monk, refers to as “inter-being”. In Native American Religions, the traditions stress balance and reciprocity as well as harmony between creatures as a constant goal. For Scheid, these teachings in the various religions above show the idea of the cosmic common good.

⁵⁷⁰ Osuji, *Laudato Si’ and Traditional African Environmental Ethics*, 187-191.

In his teaching on the cosmic common good, Osuji points out that in Africa, “the idea of communal life is intrinsically connected to the concept of the (cosmic) common good, wherein individuals advance their interest in such a manner that is both consistently respectful of other people as well as other things, and also mindful of fostering the common good of the community.”⁵⁷¹ Making reference to the Ghanaian philosopher, Professor Kwame Gyekye, to back his argument, Osuji argued that in Africa, “the idea of the common good is not an aggregate of individuals’ good. Rather, it is that which is essentially good for human beings as such and encompasses the necessities that ‘are basic to the enjoyment and fulfilment of each individual’s life.’”⁵⁷² According to Osuji, due to the African philosophical concept of “live and let live” and the cosmic common good, it is an ethical code not to take more than one needs from nature. This attitude thus prohibits or prevents the irresponsible and unlimited exploitation of resources and human beings by reflecting a deep respect and balance between various things.⁵⁷³ For him also, this traditional moral wisdom is a moral code employed for the proper management of the natural resources and it helps preserve a reasonable balance among the different entities constituting the ecosystem.⁵⁷⁴

In addition to the above teaching, Osuji further argued that Africans’ deep respect for the cosmic common good imposes on them the obligation to care for the ecosystem and its interrelations among the past, present and future, that is, among the dead and ancestors, the living and the unborn (future generations). Therefore, “there is intergenerational connection entailing a “considerability” for the future generation.”⁵⁷⁵ Citing an example of this intergenerational connection with reference to the use of the land in Africa, Osuji pointed out that, “For the African, the land belongs not to an

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., 188.

⁵⁷² Ibid.

⁵⁷³ Ibid., 189.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 190.

individual or the current generation but to the community that includes the unborn. It is the responsibility of the current generation to preserve it for the future generation by judiciously using it. The belief is that the environment is our common inheritance, and it is shared across generations and so ought to be preserved as far as possible.”⁵⁷⁶ Flowing from the above argument, Osuji concluded his teaching on the cosmic common good by stating that, “By considering the good of the whole cosmic community that includes the unborn, the cosmic common good is realized and that leads to harmony, the cosmic harmony.”⁵⁷⁷ I agree with Osuji’s teachings above on the cosmic common good in African religious thought and argue further that though the theological formulation of the cosmic common good is Western, the concept itself is very much reflective of African religious thought and ecological wisdom. Thus, I contend that the cosmic common good is but another important African theological ecological concept which I contend can also help in the care and protection of the environment.

To sum up the discussions above on the teachings of African theology on environmental care , I reiterate my position here that the African concept of God as creator as well as African theological teachings on the interconnection between all creation (human and non-human creation), cosmic harmony and cosmic common good, all attest or point to the fact that African ecological theology has within its fold, important credentials and resources that can help contribute to the global efforts aimed at finding solutions to the current global ecological crisis. Based on this position, I argue further that these resources and insights must not be ignored, but on the contrary, must be considered as capable of contributing important insights to the global discourse on the environment and the efforts to tackle and resolve the current ecological crisis facing the world.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., 191.

3.6.0 Akan Traditional Environmental Ethic as Solution to Ecological Crisis in Ghana

In addition to the teachings offered by African theology on the care of the environment discussed above, I also posit that the Akan Traditional Religion of Ghana contains important ecological wisdom and ethical practices that must be considered as important resources for the global efforts to save the earth today.⁵⁷⁸ In examining the role that Akan Traditional Religion in particular and religion in general can play in the current ecological crisis in Ghana, Elizabeth Amoah, mentioned that the concept of religion in Akan traditional understanding is diverse and broad,⁵⁷⁹ arguing that, “From the indigenous Akan worldview, religion is generally about *ahoto*, an Akan word that stands for the well-being of individuals, the community and the entire universe. Other words include *nkwa* (holistic and comprehensive life), and *asomdwee* (peace, literally “calmness and coolness within the ear”).”⁵⁸⁰ Amoah mentioned further that similar concepts embodied in the understanding of religion among the Akan such as mercy, healing and good relationship, depends to a large extent on a healthy environment.⁵⁸¹ Thus, according to Amoah, among the Akan,

religion includes a continuous life in which there is a proper balance between members of the community and the numerous spirit powers that are believed to reside in nature and are part of the community. These spirit powers include the Creator spirit, the numerous gods and goddesses and the ancestors who continue to be part of the community and are committed to the judicious use of nature by humanity.⁵⁸²

Based on the above teaching, Amoah posited that “the indigenous Akan religion demands that members of the community use nature in a judicious and responsible way to ensure a continuous,

⁵⁷⁸ In Ghana, only a few theologians and scholars in the other fields have examined the topic of religion and its relationship to the environment and the few who have looked at this topic include Elizabeth Amoah, Robert Owusu Agyarko and John Pobee.

⁵⁷⁹ Elizabeth Amoah, *Religion and the Environment in Ghana*, 30.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

⁵⁸² Ibid.

harmonious and peaceful life for all.”⁵⁸³ Thus, for Amoah, in the traditional Akan religion, there is an interrelationship between nature, and the well-being of people and total well-being is possible only in an environmentally friendly context. According to her, “This implies that all people, including religious and secular leaders, should ensure that all the natural resources, the commonwealth given to all by the Creator Spirit, are properly managed for all, including the unborn members of the community.”⁵⁸⁴

Additionally, in arguing that from the Akan indigenous religious worldview the concept of the environment is comprehensive and broad, Amoah explained that this is because among the Akan, the environment is defined to include, “all the natural objects and surroundings that enhance *nkwa* (spiritual and physical life). It includes all natural objects such as trees, rivers, and all the resources of the earth, are interconnected.”⁵⁸⁵ With this, Amoah argues that the Akan believe that Nature has a sacred origin, that some of the spirits reside in nature and that the sacred and the secular interact with nature. Hence, serious religious activities take place in the forest, by the riverside and around trees described as sacred. Amoah argues further that a lot of religious activities and ritual draw heavily on symbolic objects from nature, explaining that within the traditional religious mindset, refusal to respect nature or the environment contradicts any claim to be religious.⁵⁸⁶

Based on the above Akan perspective that nature is sacred and that to be religious includes showing respect towards nature, Amoah posited that, “The core of the Akan traditional religion is to promote *nkwa* (life), *ahoto* (well-being) and *asomdwee* (peace), and therefore, it is not part of the Akan indigenous spirituality or religious life to destroy the environment or be unconcerned about

⁵⁸³ Ibid., 30-31.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., 31.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid.

the environmental crisis which is currently destroying the earth and its inhabitants.”⁵⁸⁷ Thus, for Amoah, in the understanding and practice of the Akan Traditional Religion, there is a close link between religion and the totality of human well-being which includes environmental cleanliness. Similarly, Amoah argues that the Akan Traditional Religion ensured that its practitioners remained constantly conscious of the need to take good care of their environment as part of their daily living and practice of religion through the traditional observance of taboos, sacred days and sacred groves which were religious and ethical practices within the religion.⁵⁸⁸ Hence, in examining the current environmental crisis in Ghana where some markets and centers of economic activities are full of rubbish heaps, with plastic waste and filth seen everywhere in Ghana, Amoah lamented that Ghanaians are creating more problems for themselves, including flooding in rainy seasons, cholera and guinea worm infections.⁵⁸⁹ She then asked the questions: “Is religion today mindful of the environmental crisis facing the nation? Are religious people searching through Scriptures and traditions for possible and viable solutions to the crisis?”⁵⁹⁰

In Ghana today, while it can be argued that outwardly, many citizens seem to be very serious about religion and link the spiritual dimension of Christianity with other aspects of life, it can also be argued equally that the same cannot be said of their concern for the environment as most citizens “seem to care less about sustaining the environment which is an integral part of (the Christian) religion.”⁵⁹¹ Due to this disconnect between religious creed and practice, Amoah opines that,

This lethargic attitude of religious people (Christians) to the rampant destruction of the earth, which is currently the only habitat for all humanity, is an indication that something is drastically wrong with religious teaching and practice in Ghana. The gap between religion and environmental issues is enormous and it raises issues such

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., 32

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., 39-40.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., 36.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., 37, 42.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., 37.

as the divergence between religious teaching and practices, knowledge and action.⁵⁹²

In proposing a way forward for closing the missing link or gap between religious teachings and practice with regard to the care of the environment in Ghana, Amoah opined that the Christian religion in Ghana has a lot to learn from the indigenous religious practices of the Akan Traditional Religion. Arguing that the Akan indigenous “ecological” practices of taboos, totems, sacred days and sacred groves helped to a great extent in safeguarding and protecting the environment, Amoah contended that these ethical practices are important resources that could be adopted by the Christian church (religion) in Ghana to help contribute to the care of the environment in Ghana.⁵⁹³

Broadly speaking, I share in Amoah’s position above on the contributions of Akan Traditional Religion and her ethical ecological practices of taboos, sacred days, sacred groves and totems to the care of the environment and argue that some of these traditional practices, if not all, must be adopted by the Ghanaian Christian Church in general and the Catholic Church in particular, in their ecological teachings and practical initiatives. I argue this way because I believe that first and foremost, these Akan traditional indigenous practices can contribute immensely to the care of the environment in Ghana when they are adopted. Secondly, I argue that these practices can provide important ecological resources for the Christian Church in addition to the Church’s own ecological teachings and practices in the latter’s quest to contribute more to the care of the environment in Ghana. Having said this, I shall now proceed to discuss the above-mentioned traditional indigenous practices within the Akan Traditional Religion, namely, taboos, sacred days, sacred groves and totems, to examine how they can contribute to the care of the environment and why they must be adopted by the Catholic (Christian) Church in Ghana.

⁵⁹² Ibid., 38.

⁵⁹³ Ibid., 39-40.

3.6.1 The Observance of Taboos

According to Peter Sarpong, the English word *taboo* originally comes from the Polynesian term, *tabu*, which simply means forbidden and can be applied to any sort of prohibition.⁵⁹⁴ Sarpong explains further that taboos generally spell out what must be done and what must not be done at any given point in time.⁵⁹⁵ Speaking about taboos in *Religion and the Environment in Ghana*, Amoah for her part mentioned that among the Akan, there were a number of taboos which regulated daily behaviours and actions and for her, a significant number of these taboos related to the care of the environment.⁵⁹⁶ According to her,

The indigenous Akan religion nurtures balance between harmony and a sustainable relationship between people's pursuit of their biological and basic needs and all the organisms within the natural environment, including living and non-living things. To achieve such a goal, Akan religion puts in place a series of do's and don'ts in the form of taboos.⁵⁹⁷

Amoah explains further that these series of do's and don'ts included not farming or fishing on every day of the week or cultivating forest areas designated as sacred groves.⁵⁹⁸ In addition, Amoah argued that periodically, the Akan used other forms of taboos to make people clean and protect their environments. For example,

in order to control noise in the environment, the pounding of fufu, with its rhythmic noise, was banned at certain times of the day, notably after 6:00 pm, with the warning that such acts attract home *mmotia* (dwarfs), spirits considered mischievous and harmful at times. Similarly, reckless indulgence in drumming and other unnecessary forms of noisemaking in general were restricted at certain periods of the year.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁴ Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture* (Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974), 51.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁶ Amoah, *Religion and the Environment in Ghana*, 38-39.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., 39.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid. 39-40. Fufu is a local Akan delicacy made with yam, cassava or plantain and served with soups and stews.

Thus, according to Amoah, “These and many other do’s and don’ts (taboos) which could come under the umbrella of code of decent behaviour were shrouded in religious mysteries and the supernatural” and that “while these practices ensured conformity and automatic behaviour patterns, they were also geared towards ensuring clean environment and healthy existence.”⁶⁰⁰

In relating the observance of taboos among the Akan of Ghana to Christian religion and practice, Amoah further posited that a cursory look at Judeo-Christian traditions reveals parallel tenets between religion and the environment.⁶⁰¹ According to her,

In the creation stories, God made a beautiful garden with animals and trees, including the tree of life for Adam and Eve, with a strict command to cultivate and take proper care of it (*Gen. 2:15*). In addition, they were to traverse this beautiful environment till they filled the entire earth (*Gen. 1:28*). Unfortunately, this command was broken, and in the process, the natural resources were mismanaged.⁶⁰²

From the above passages, Amoah explained that the divine injunction to cultivate and care for the garden of Eden was an environmental ethic akin to the practice of taboos among the Akan. In support of this position, she quoted Modupe Oduyeye who argues that “the Adam and Eve story is a story of an ecological crisis, not so much a conflict between Eve and Adam since such a conflict will not have resulted in the sprouting of thorns, thistles and barrenness of the land. There was definitely a deficiency in men’s husbandry practice in the Garden of Eden.”⁶⁰³

In addition to citing references from the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2 to teach about the use of “taboos” towards the care of creation, Amoah also cited the story of Noah’s Ark (*Gen. 6-9*) to

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid., 40. The Akan of Ghana observe such practices as ban on drumming, noise making, burials, drumming farming, fishing, etc., during some specific times of the year, particularly in the days and weeks leading to the celebration of major feasts and festivals. The explanation is that the gods need not be disturbed so that they can reflect and give blessings to the people during those occasions. I opine that even though these observances were mostly intended to help the people reflect on the impending celebrations, these injunctions (taboos) served ecological importance as they helped to give rest to the land, to control noise pollution, etc.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

⁶⁰² Ibid.

⁶⁰³ Ibid., 40-41.

argue that “what comes to mind when one ponders over animal population of the Ark is an attempt to recreate a miniature “Garden of Eden” where there was eco-balance. The pair of animals taken on board the Ark was to ensure the survival of each of the species.”⁶⁰⁴ Besides, Amoah also referred to the Book of Leviticus to argue that the book chronicles an endless list of do’s and don’ts to remind readers of the possibility of the resurgence of ecological crisis because of the poor care of the earth (*Lev. 25: 18-28*), She also referred to the Book of Deuteronomy to teach that it talks about the proper way of disposing human waste and warns children not to upset the nests of birds (*Deut. 22:6*). According to her, these rules were all intended to ensure balance and harmony in the ecosystem.⁶⁰⁵ Citing passages also from the New Testament, Amoah argued similarly that during Jesus’ teaching ministry, he “showed awareness of the possibility of mismanaging the environment in humanity’s diverse economic pursuits. Thus, Jesus reminds his listeners to see how the birds of the air and lilies of the field do not disturb the ecosystem in their search for basic survival (*Matt. 6: 25-31*).”⁶⁰⁶

Drawing on the above biblical perspectives and examples, Amoah concluded that within the Akan indigenous teachings and practices and the teachings of the Christian Church, there are clear indications that religious teachings and traditions can be reinterpreted to save the environment.⁶⁰⁷ According to her, “This is what contextual theology and theology of life is all about – enabling us to fulfill the stewardship God has given us ... The contextual theologies in our time should be relevant enough to save the environment from ecological crisis and threat to life in general.”⁶⁰⁸ In support of Amoah’s position on the need to make contextual theologies relevant to the questions

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., 41.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid.

of our times, I argue that the similarities which she draws from the biblical teachings on the injunctions not to abuse the earth, particularly from Genesis 1, 2, 6-9, Leviticus 25 and Deuteronomy 22, and also from and those of Akan taboos, shows us that both Christian theology and Akan ethical traditions can be used as important resources for solutions to the current ecological question.⁶⁰⁹

In addition, I posit that the teachings of Amoah on the practice of taboos within the Akan ecological ethic and wisdom find support in the teachings both Peter Osuji and Peter Sarpong. For instance, according to Osuji, in Africa, “The maintenance and restoration of balance in the ecosystem is also achieved through taboos.”⁶¹⁰ Osuji also posits that “even though some of these taboos may not have originated as environmental ethic, they evolved into that; they instruct against environmental degradation ...”⁶¹¹ On his part, Sarpong also postulated that among the Akan, in order to ensure that the taboos were strictly observed in a bid to help protect and safeguard the environment and not violated, heavy penalties were imposed on those who violated them. According to him,

In the past, the penalty for breach of these religious prohibitions could be death. The heavy penalty imposed on the “crime” was to obviate the mystically and magically evil consequences of such bad behaviour that could easily be the lot of the whole community. Traditionally, it is the custom to make sacrifices to the earth before it is cultivated. The sacrificial objects could be chickens, sheep, eggs, mashed yam or plantain.⁶¹²

In summary, I contend that from the teachings of Amoah, Osuji and Sarpong, it can be argued that among Africans in general and Akan of Ghana in particular, the need to preserve or care for the environment was of such primary importance that this was sometimes shrouded in the form of

⁶⁰⁹ In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis uses the various biblical accounts here and in other passages of the Bible to argue that human life is grounded in three fundamental relationships, namely with God, neighbour and creation and that the Bible has no room for tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures. See Chapter 2 of the encyclical, especially paragraphs 66-68, 71.

⁶¹⁰ Osuji, *Laudato Si' and Traditional African Environmental Ethic*, 191.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁶¹² *Ibid.*

taboos with dire consequences for non-compliance. By so doing, the observance of taboos helped to preserve and protect the environment. Consequently, in support of the teachings of Amoah, Osuji and Sarpong with regard to the observance of taboos within the African context and the Akan indigenous religious people, I contend that the African and Akan traditional practice of taboos must be adopted and used by the Catholic (Christian) Church in Ghana in their ecological teachings and practical initiatives. I hold this view because of the two reasons below.

Firstly, I argue the observance of taboos finds resonance in the Christian Scriptures. We see this, for example, in the divine injunction to Adam and Eve “to till and keep” the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15) and in Deuteronomy 22:6, where there is a prohibition against taking the mother with the eggs and the young. Thus, I argue that in the divine command to “till and keep” in Genesis 2:15, the implication is that human beings have both the right to use the resources of the earth for their benefit, and the corresponding duty to protect the earth and ensure its fruitfulness for future generations and not to misuse or abuse the earth. At the same time, I posit that Deuteronomy 22:6 implies that human beings have a relationship with non-human creation, one that consists of stewardship and care. Consequently, I argue that due to their resonance with the ecological teachings found in the Christian Scriptures, the use of taboos in Akan ecological wisdom provides a significant ethical tool which the Christian Church in Ghana and the Catholic Church in particular, can adopt for use in their ecological teachings.

Secondly, I argue that because the observance of taboos is already a traditional practice among the Akan, who constitute more than fifty percent of the current population of Ghana, its adoption and use by the Church in Ghana as part of her ecological teachings and practice with the aim of saving the environment in Ghana will receive acceptance and support by the people, and this would,

consequently, encourage more Ghanaians to care for the environment and thus refrain from abusing and exploiting it.

3.6.2 Sacred Groves

Within the Akan Traditional Religion also, there was (and still is) the traditional indigenous practice or observance of sacred groves. Thus, among the Akan, certain portions of the forest are declared sacred and are to remain virgin or inaccessible to people. Amoah explains that these portions of the forest inevitably became the controlled banks where biodiversity was preserved and fallen upon for regeneration of the forest as well as places where sacred activities took place. Thus, destroying such places implied putting an end to religious activities.⁶¹³ According to Amoah also, “invariably, most of the sacred forest growth tended to be the origin of rivers within the community. The rivers very much required the thick canopy that the forests provided in order not to dry up and to protect the source from human pollution.”⁶¹⁴

Today, it can be argued that the practice of sacred groves among the Akan of Ghana in varied ways helped to prevent the indiscriminate lumbering of trees as well as loss of biodiversity because the injunction not to farm or fell trees from the forest and other areas demarcated as sacred groves ensured that trees and the forests were preserved from exploitation while the rivers and other water bodies in such areas were protected from pollution and from drying up quickly. In her book, *Replenishing the Earth*, Wangari Maathai alluded to the significance of sacred groves in Africa and around the world in her discussions on the importance of trees. According to her, the practice of sacred groves played important roles in protecting trees considered as sacred among diverse

⁶¹³ Amoah, *Religion and the Environment in Ghana*, 39.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid.

peoples in many places and religious traditions as well as forests from needless human abuse and exploitation.⁶¹⁵ In lamenting the fact that the sacred groves in Africa and other places are gradually becoming sacred no more, Maathai blamed the Judeo-Christian tradition as being largely responsible for this situation due to the latter's attitude of uncritically assessing the importance of sacred groves and looking down upon them and consequently, destroying them.⁶¹⁶ For Maathai, sacred groves protected trees and forests from extinction and also promoted a sense of beauty, awe and wonder across the world, and therefore, their destruction shows that the significance of sacred groves has now given way to a different vision, namely, a vision of what humans can use, exploit and control.⁶¹⁷ According to her, humanity needs to work to change this perspective by encouraging the love for trees and forests so that the world's sacred groves would become sacred again. Consequently, Maathai posited that,

If we love the environment, we must identify with the tree that is cut down, and the human and other communities that are dying because their land no longer sustains them. We must express regrets for the destroyed landscapes, become angry when we hear another species under threat from human activity or see another polluted river or a landfill ... when a river no longer reaches the sea.⁶¹⁸

In support of Maathai's teaching above, I also posit that the observance of sacred groves is one of the surest ways of showing love for the environment and protecting it from abuse and destruction. I posit further that there is no doubting the fact that trees play such an important role in the world and also in the lives of humanity. Thus, quite apart from serving economic purposes, trees also give spiritual, psychological and emotional support to humanity. Therefore, I contend that there is the need to protect trees and not exploit them solely for economic purposes. I argue that the need

⁶¹⁵ In *Replenishing the Earth*, Maathai explains the importance of trees across Africa and the world as well as the significant functions that trees played in biblical times and among various religious peoples and traditions. But she also avers that honouring trees and sacramentalising them does not mean that they cannot be cut down. For more, see especially pages 79-87.

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 101-102.

to protect certain species of trees and forest areas from exploitation so that trees could continue to serve their useful purposes explains why the Akan of Ghana practised the observance of sacred groves as an indigenous way of protecting certain species of trees and certain portions of forests from being exploited. I argue further that this practice of sacred groves among the Akan invariably helped to ensure that trees and the forests were not destroyed while rivers were protected, and biodiversity guaranteed.

Today, as trees are being felled indiscriminately across many parts of the world and as sacred groves are being destroyed, I opine that a positive change of attitude towards the environment, particularly in Africa and Ghana for that matter, will help us to save the trees and forests and restore our sacred groves to their original “sacredness”. I contend that the traditional, indigenous Akan practice of sacred groves which was geared towards the protection of the environment in Ghana and safeguarding it from reckless exploitation is of much relevance in today’s global quest for ecological care. I therefore argue that it will be of great help if the Catholic Church in Ghana should adopt the observance or practice of sacred groves into their ecological teachings and practical policies today.⁶¹⁹

3.6.3 The Observance of Sacred Days

Among the Akan of Ghana also, there was (and still is) the practice or observance of sacred days where people refrain(ed) from working on the environment on certain days of the week with the belief that the earth also need to rest to rejuvenate itself. Affirming the practice of sacred days among the Akan of Ghana, Elizabeth Amoah argues that “to ensure the judicious use of the forest resources ... the Akan religion set aside certain days as sacred holidays with the general consensus

⁶¹⁹ In Chapter 5, I shall elaborate on this subject in more details when I discuss *Arbor Week* celebration in Ghana.

that the Spirits of the land need rest. Thus, in some Akan communities, Thursdays, Fridays or Tuesdays were sacred holidays when farmers and fishermen, respectively, were forbidden to farm or fish.”⁶²⁰ Amoah’s position on the practice of sacred days among the Akan is supported by Sarpong who also articulates that, “The Ghanaian’s (and Akan’s) sense of dependence upon the earth finds concrete expression in the taboo to till it on certain days of the week. Among the Ashanti, the earth should not be “disturbed” on Thursdays. She must rest. The Fante have put aside Friday as the day of the earth on which she must have peace of mind.”⁶²¹

While I argue that the observance of sacred days was for the Akan an important means of ensuring that the environment was protected from needless human use and exploitation, I posit at the same time that the adoption of these indigenous Akan practices can contribute greatly to the current efforts being made to save the environment in Ghana from its present crisis. I contend that instead of uncritically dismissing this indigenous Akan practice of sacred days as superstitious and irrelevant, the Catholic Church in Ghana must re-assess this practice just like the others in the light of Christian Scriptures and Tradition to see how best she can incorporate it into its ecological teachings. Here, I argue that Sunday, which is the Christian Sabbath day and day of rest, would be a good corollary, particularly for the Catholic Church in Ghana with regard to incorporating the observance or practice of sacred days within the Church’s ecological teachings and practice.

In the encyclical, *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis has among others taught the Church how the celebration of the Eucharist, particularly on Sundays, should help humanity to turn its attention to the redemption of the earth. In reiterating the Catholic Church’s teaching that the Eucharist is the source and summit of the care for the environment in his teaching in *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis

⁶²⁰ Ibid., 39.

⁶²¹ Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 116. The Ashanti and Fante make the bulk of the Akan population in Ghana.

reminded all Catholics that every participation in the Eucharist should motivate their work towards the redemption of the degraded environment.⁶²² Explaining this teaching further, Pope Francis taught that the Eucharist takes place on a special solemnity on Sundays, the day of rest, and therefore,

On Sunday, our participation in the Eucharist has special importance. Sunday, like the Jewish Sabbath, is meant to be a day which heals our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others and with the world. Sunday is the day of the Resurrection, the “first day” of the new creation, whose first fruits are the Lord’s risen humanity, the pledge of the final transfiguration of all created reality. It also proclaims, “man’s eternal rest in God ... Rest opens our eyes to the larger picture and gives us renewed sensitivity to the rights of others. And so, the day of rest, centered on the Eucharist, sheds its light on the whole week, and motivates us to greater concern for nature and the poor.”⁶²³

Thus, for Pope Francis, the rest on the seventh day “is meant not only for human beings, but also for creation, so ‘that your ax and your donkey may have rest’ (Ex. 23:12).”⁶²⁴ Based on the above papal teaching, I postulate that similar to the observance of sacred days in Akan Traditional Religion, the Christian sabbath day of Sunday should be used to constantly remind and inspire all people, but especially all Christians, to ensure as far as it is within their human capacity, that other elements of God’s creation are made also to enjoy the rest and respite which they require for their natural rejuvenation or restoration.⁶²⁵ In this way, I argue that the observance of Sunday as a day of rest can be the Ghanaian Christian Church’s own way of replicating and or imitating the Akan practice of sacred days with the aim of ensuring that the non-human parts of God’s creation also do enjoy some amount of rest from the constant human use and consumption.

⁶²² LS # 237.

⁶²³ LS # 237.

⁶²⁴ LS # 68.

⁶²⁵ About sabbath, Daniel Castillo posits that the Sabbath rest is meant to sustain communion with God, neighbour and the earth. According to him, the passage from Leviticus 25:3-7 envisions essential functions of the practice of Sabbath, including allowing the land to rest thereby preserving the land at least in part from human abuse. It also calls the community to enact peaceable relations with the land’s wild animals. See Daniel P. Castillo, *An Ecological Theology of Liberation: Salvation and Political Ecology* (Maryknoll, New Yor: Orbis Books, 2019), 112-113.

In summary, I argue that if the Catholic Church in Ghana makes reference to the Christian Church's understanding of Sunday as a day of rest to teach both Christians and non-Christians in Ghana and others to welcome and embrace the Akan practice of sacred days, this would help and encourage more people to understand the need to care for and protect Ghana's environment by refraining from working on the environment all the time. I opine that the Catholic Church can do this first and foremost, by teaching all Christians to understand properly the concept of Sunday as a day of rest for both humans and the environment alike, and secondly, by using this sabbath day understanding to help all Christians and all other people to understand and embrace the Akan sacred days as days of rest. Since these Akan days of rest from work are used by the Akan as days to spend with family and reflect on human work, Christians in Ghana can also learn something from the Akan sacred days in welcoming the Christian sabbath as a day to be spent with the family and to reflect on creation and human labour. I postulate that when this is done, it will help Ghanaians to be more conscious of the need for rest for both humans and the environment around them.

3.6.4 Totems

The Akan practice of totems is an age-old practice whereby the different Akan tribes view certain animals as sacred to them and thus refrain from eating them. According to Peter Sarpong, the word *totem* itself comes from a North American Indian language and has been widely used to refer especially to the objects of the animal and vegetable kingdoms which are held to be in a special relationship with particular groups of people or with individuals in a society.”⁶²⁶ Sarpong teaches further that, “Totemism may be defined as a relationship that is supposed to exist between a person

⁶²⁶ Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 59.

or a group of persons and an animal or group of animals or objects.”⁶²⁷ According to him also, a number of features are generally associated with totemism, the first one being that it is a group institution, and the second, that lineages may respect their totems such as lions, crocodiles, lizards, etc., either because these creatures are thought to have been the progenitors of the lineages or because they are supposed to have helped the lineages in one way or the other, or to have magically manifested themselves to some lineage member in the past.⁶²⁸

Additionally, Sarpong explains that people usually adopt an attitude of reverence towards their totem, that is, they respect rather than fear it. Sarpong posits that, “The custom of ritual avoidance of the totem is widespread. Members of the totemic groups will generally shudder at the idea of killing or eating their totem if it is edible, though others may do so. Those who develop totemistic alliances refrain from molesting or eating their newly found relations.”⁶²⁹ He teaches further that the traditional ethnic groups in Africa consider various species of plants and animals as totems and the harming, killing and or eating of these totems were considered as taboo and therefore prohibited through “totemism.”⁶³⁰ In support of Sarpong’s teaching that those who observe totemism usually refrain from harming their totems, I argue that through the Akan (African) practice of totems, animal species were protected from unnecessary exploitation and saved from extinction. This position is confirmed by Osuji who postulates that for this reason, “it was very rare driving any of them (totemic animals) to extinction,” adding that “this practice helped to conserve and strengthen the lives or “vital forces” of these beings, thereby contributing to maintaining the desired cosmic harmony.”⁶³¹

⁶²⁷ Ibid.

⁶²⁸ Ibid.

⁶²⁹ Ibid.

⁶³⁰ Ibid.

⁶³¹ Osuji, *Laudato Si’ and Traditional African Environmental Ethic*, 192.

In summing up, I posit that based on the discussions on the Akan indigenous practices of taboos, sacred days, sacred groves and totems above, these ethical “ecological” practices not only helped the Akan of Ghana to become more conscious of their responsibility to care for the earth, but these practices also in the long run contributed in various ways towards safeguarding the environment of Ghana. In examining these Akan traditional practices in his article, *God of Life: Rethinking the Akan Christian Concept of God in Light of the Ecological Crisis*, Owusu Agyarko, on one hand, commended the Akan Traditional Religion as having played an important role in preserving the environment of Ghana for years, while on the other hand, blaming the advent and teachings of Christianity in Ghana for the discontinuation of such practices. Arguing that the discontinuation of such traditional Akan practices following the advent of Christianity in Ghana and some of its teachings is responsible for the ecological crisis in the country, Owusu Agyarko postulated that,

Now it is common for Akan Christian converts to dare their chiefs, traditional priests and elders on such issues as taboos and traditional customs. For instance, Christians contravened the days that the community was not supposed to farm, and they ignored injunctions against fishing from stipulated rivers and weeding around selected places. Christians viewed these injunctions as expressions of the fear of the lesser divinities and ancestors regarded as adjudicators of community morality.⁶³²

Thus, for Owusu Agyarko, “such resistance to the early preservation of non-human forms of life was very common in the early years of Christianity and became rampant when Christianity became the dominant form of religion among the Akan.”⁶³³

Furthermore, due to the advent of Christianity in Ghana, Akan Christians generally see human beings as the masters of non-human forms of life.⁶³⁴ Owusu Agyarko explains that this situation can be attributed to many historical factors, including the following. Firstly, the early Christian

⁶³² Owusu Agyarko, *The Akan Christian Concept of God*, 7.

⁶³³ Ibid.

⁶³⁴ Ibid.

missionaries assumed that the Akan's reverence for nature was only based on fear, and consequently, they thought that mastery over nature was the answer to overcoming this fear. Towards that end and in place of traditional sacramental rites, they introduced Western technology and the person of Jesus Christ as the one who has power over all spirits and nature. He contends that by so doing, the missionaries offered the power of God as a way to dominate nature and perceived evil forces.⁶³⁵ Thus, according to Owusu Agyarko,

The new converts were taught to challenge traditional taboos and customs since these were believed to be promulgated and adjudicated by lesser divinities and ancestral spirits. The missionaries assumed that by teaching their converts to override traditional taboos and customs, they were engaging in a spiritual battle against the lesser divinities and the ancestors they labelled as evil spirits.⁶³⁶

The teachings of Christian missionaries that traditional taboos and other customs were promulgated by lesser divinities and that Christians had power over those through Jesus Christ, largely account for the disrespect and subsequent abuse of non-human forms of life among contemporary Akan Christians and Ghanaians as a whole.⁶³⁷

Secondly, Owusu Agyarko postulated that while teaching their converts that as Christians, they had power over evil spirits and nature, the early missionaries in Ghana interpreted the term "dominion" as the power of Christians over non-human forms of life. According to him, this interpretation of "dominion" subsequently came to assume great prominence among Christians and was used especially in contemporary Pentecostal churches.⁶³⁸ Stating that even though some evangelical scholars have re-interpreted the term "dominion" (with reference to Genesis 1:28) to mean responsible stewardship, Owusu Agyarko, nonetheless, contends that the term is still

⁶³⁵ Ibid., 8

⁶³⁶ Ibid.

⁶³⁷ Ibid.

⁶³⁸ Ibid. Archbishop Nicholas Duncan Williams regarded as the father of Pentecostalism in Ghana named his church, "Dominion Church". I argue that this shows the impact the term "dominion" had and continues to have on the Pentecostal movement in Ghana.

commonly believed by Pentecostal and Charismatic Ghanaians that non-human forms of life are merely available for human service and consumption.⁶³⁹ Thus, for Owusu Agyarko, this wrong interpretation of “dominion” has had negative consequences on how Christians relate to and treat the environment in Ghana since the advent of Christianity in Ghana till now.⁶⁴⁰

Thirdly and lastly, some Christian Church hymns and popular gospel music alike sometimes promote notions of escapism, namely, that human beings are just strangers on this earth and that we should focus our attention more on heaven than on earth. These songs promote the belief that nature is an addendum that only has a transitional value.⁶⁴¹ Quoting Ernst Conradie who argued that an adequate environmental praxis can only be empowered on the basis of hope and that without any hope, without any vision of a future for the earth itself, an environmental praxis will soon lose its impetus, Owusu Agyarko stated that this attitude does not encourage Christians in any way to care for the earth.⁶⁴² Rather, the consequence of the attitude of escapism was that Christians did not pay much attention to the care of this “passing” world because they were only passing through the world to go to a better place called heaven. Thus, according to him, this attitude has had a negative effect on how Akan Christians have treated the environment around them since that time till now.⁶⁴³

Flowing from the above arguments, Owusu Agyarko posited that there was the need for Christianity in Ghana to rethink its theology of God and the relationship between humans and non-human creation in a way that would respect the non-human creation and promote the care of the

⁶³⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid., 8-9. One of the most popular Ghanaian gospel songs says, “We are strangers on earth, heaven is our home.”

⁶⁴² Ibid. For Ernst Conradie, it is only where there is hope for the earth can caring for nature become meaningful. Without any hope for nature, it will literally be unnecessary to fight to care for it or save it.

⁶⁴³ Ibid.

environment. To do this, he proposed that the Christian Church in Ghana needed to learn useful lessons from the Akan concept of God and nature. According to him, among the Akan, non-human forms of life are not merely available for human use and consumption. This is because,

according to Akan traditional beliefs, all forms of life are endowed with an intrinsic value called *sunsusm* (a conscious vitality) which is a spark of God's *Sunsum* – a constituent of God's nature. The Akan show respect and fondness toward nature even when nature is used. It would be odd in Akan communities to entertain the thought that God has placed non-human forms of life at humanity's disposal.⁶⁴⁴

The recognition among the Akan that the *Sunsum* (Spirit) of God dwells in both the human and non-human creation leads to the understanding among the Akan that there is a close connection between them and nature. This understanding subsequently inspires the Akan to see that nature not just as meant for consumption and exploitation but also for their care and safe keeping.

In addition to the above teaching, Owusu Agyarko also postulated that among the Akan, the word “stewardship” used in relation to the care of the environment had a more nuanced understanding and a deeper meaning than the Judeo-Christian understanding of it. This is because unlike the one-dimensional Judeo-Christian understanding of stewardship which teaches that humanity is entrusted with the duty of caring for the Earth without emphasising the corresponding duty of the Earth to care for man,⁶⁴⁵ the Akan did not see themselves merely as stewards over creation but as

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid., 5, 8, 10.

⁶⁴⁵ Teaching about the one-dimensional understanding of stewardship in Christian theological understanding, Christiana Zenner has argued that Catholic magisterial theology in *Laudato Si'* and in prior teaching is not biocentric. According to her, human dignity is at the center of the questions of moral value. Humans are entitled to what is essential for life accompanied by a “duty to care and protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for future generations” (LS 67). Zenner argues that while it may be the case (as Francis suggests in LS) that sources in historical theology proffered different forms of relationship between humans and the earth, it is also the case that as Sean McDonagh has written - the perspective of Vatican II remained quite anthropocentric. *Gaudium et Spes*, for example, describes a “unanimous opinion of believers and unbelievers alike (that all things on earth should be related to man as their center and crown (GS 12). Still faced with the facts of environmental degradation and social exclusions, writes Francis, “believers should acknowledge that ... we were not faithful to the treasures of wisdom which we have been called to protect and preserve” (LS 200). Because it is within the purview of Catholic theology to reinterpret the Bible and its moral implications in light of new knowledge, “Our dominion of the universe should be understood more properly as responsible stewardship” (LS 116). See Zenner, 526. I argue that Pope Francis tries to rectify this understanding of stewardship in *Laudato Si'* by teaching that The Earth our mother and sister, who sustains and governs us (LS 1). “We are made from the dust of the earth (cf. Gen. 2:7), our very bodies are made

being in a symbiotic relationship with it. In other words, for the Akan, not only are human beings entrusted with taking care of the Earth, but the Earth also takes care of human beings. Thus, in the Akan worldview, the use of the term “stewardship” emphasizes mutuality, interdependence, communion and solidarity between human beings and non-human creation unlike the Christian understanding of it, which is only one-dimensional, namely, human beings taking care of creation. This teaching reflects what Pope Francis similarly teaches in *Laudato Si’* in which his preferred word in regard to humanity’s relationship to creation is not stewardship of the creation but “care” of creation which emphasizes solidarity and mutuality.⁶⁴⁶ Explaining the Akan understanding of stewardship further, Owusu Agyarko argues that for the Akan, “to think of human beings as being stewards of Mother Earth would be bizarre. This explains why permission is sought from Mother Earth before digging a grave. Similarly, permission is usually sought from the sea and rivers before one embarks on fishing.”⁶⁴⁷ Based on this, Owusu Agyarko proposed that the Christian Church should adopt the Akan traditional religious understanding of the concept of stewardship,⁶⁴⁸ because, according to him,

The theology of domination or stewardship (in Christianity) fails to accentuate that we belong to the earth more than the earth belongs to us; that we are more dependent on it than it on us; that we are of the earth and living on earth. In traditional Akan thought, both human and non-human forms of life co-exist for mutual benefit and God is regarded as the sustainer, protector and judge of all.⁶⁴⁹

from her elements, we breathe her air and receive life and refreshment from her waters (LS 2). The earth thus takes care of us and vice versa.

⁶⁴⁶ Kevin Irwin, *Commentary on Laudato Si’*, 119-120.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid.* There are a number of Akan proverbs which teach that exploiting the earth unnecessarily amounts to disrespecting God and that such behaviours incurred the wrath of God. For example, the Akan saying, *Aboa onni dua, Nyame na epra noho* (literally, “God is the protector of tailless animals”) attests to the idea that non-human forms of life are protected by God and do not exist merely for human consumption. Also, the Akan saying that, *Wo bu koto kwasea a, Nyame hw3 wo to* (literally, “If you cheat the crab, God sees your nakedness”) teaches that we cannot harm creation unnecessarily without having to answer before God.

In summary, I posit that just like the African theological teachings on the environment, the Akan Traditional Religion has great contributions to make towards the care of the environment in terms of its ethical teachings and ecological wisdom found in the indigenous practices of taboos, sacred days, sacred groves and totems. I posit further that these traditional religious practices as discussed above provide important ways by which the environment could be protected from needless and reckless exploitation by human beings. Based on this, I opine that the Christian Church in Ghana has a lot to learn from the ethical ecological teachings inherent in these traditional indigenous practices of the Akan Traditional Religion if she hopes to contribute meaningfully to reversing the current environmental crisis in Ghana and helping to save the country's environment. I posit therefore that it is important for the Christian Church in Ghana not only to learn useful lessons from these practices, but also to adopt them in her quest to contribute more to the care of the environment in Ghana because I contend that the adoption of such teachings and practices by the Christian Church will further enhance the care and protection of the environment in Ghana.

My position on the need for the Christian Church in Ghana to learn from and adopt the above-mentioned Akan traditional environmental practices reflects that of Elizabeth Amoah who similarly argues that the time has come for the Christian Church in Ghana to look at these traditional Akan practices and adopt them to help tackle the current ecological crisis facing Ghana.⁶⁵⁰ Arguing that a religion like Christianity “has in place existing structures and resources that can be used to create awareness for proper management of the environment,”⁶⁵¹ Amoah posits further that instead of uncritically challenging some of the traditional practices with regard to the responsible use and management of the environment to enhance the holistic concept of life in the

⁶⁵⁰ Amoah, *Religion and Environment in Ghana*, 44.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

Akan traditional religion, the Christian Church in Ghana should find viable ways of retrieving the good beliefs and practices of the Akan traditional religion with regard to sustainable environmental management.⁶⁵² Thus, for Amoah as for me, the adoption of some of these indigenous ecological practices of the Akan Religion by the Christian Church in Ghana is a step in the right direction in respect of the care of the environment in Ghana.

In addition to Amoah's proposal for the Christian Church in Ghana to adopt some of these indigenous Akan ecological practices mentioned above, Amoah suggests two other ways by which the Christian Church in Ghana could contribute more to the care of the environment. In the first place, she suggests that the Christian Church should encourage the State and Government institutions to enforce the laws that are already in place to make people keep their surroundings clean.⁶⁵³ According to her, "there should be effective legislation on the judicious and responsible use of nature and keeping one's surroundings clean and healthy. Faith communities can help legislators by creating awareness among their members through preaching. They should organise activities for the proper sanitation and general care of the environment."⁶⁵⁴ According to Amoah, the continent of Europe did something similar years ago when Christian Church leaders came up with the catchy phrase, "cleanliness is next to godliness," that created awareness in the minds of the people about personal and ecological hygiene.⁶⁵⁵ This subsequently helped Europe to address its ecological challenges during that time.

⁶⁵² Ibid.

⁶⁵³ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid. Historically, the first idea behind the phrase "cleanliness is next to godliness" is found in the writings of Sir Francis Bacon, who wrote in *Advancement of Learning* in 1605 that, "Cleanliness of body was ever esteemed to proceed from due reverence to God, to society and to ourselves." However, the best-known use of the phrase is by John Wesley who in his *Sermon*, "On Dress" which he delivered around 1791, said that "Cleanliness is indeed, next to godliness." Accessed online at phrases.org.uk/meanings/cleanliness-is-next-to-godliness.html, on September 9, 2021.

Secondly, Churches can also help address the environmental challenges in Ghana by mobilizing existing Church groups and associations to clean their environments on regular basis.⁶⁵⁶ To do this effectively, Amoah proposes that “seminars, catechesis and the institution of environmental days can be used to encourage people to keep their environment clean,” and “all members of the Church, youth, men and women must be mobilized to work towards a healthy environment.”⁶⁵⁷ While Amoah does not give details of what the environmental days would look like, I would propose here that these environmental days should include the celebration of the four policy initiatives which I am proposing in this work, namely, *Africa Environment Day*, *Arbor Week*, *National Sanitation Day* (NSD) and *World Day of Prayer for Creation*, as well as any other days the Church may choose for such environmental activities in the course of the year.⁶⁵⁸ I propose further that these ecological days could be made to coincide with special feast days or anniversaries which have themes which are related to the care of creation, such as the celebration of the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi on October 4 each year in the Catholic Church.⁶⁵⁹

Lastly, I opine that these proposals above offer important ways through which the Christian Church in Ghana can contribute her quota towards safeguarding the environment of Ghana from further ecological damage, and therefore, I argue that they are worth considering. I argue further that with her numerical strength and institutional structure, the Christian Church in Ghana can do a lot in terms of contributing its quota to helping save the environment in Ghana. Consequently, I propose that the Church should regularly sensitize and educate their members on ecological care through seminars and workshops on the environment, organize clean-up campaigns and tree-planting

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid., 44-45.

⁶⁵⁸ In Chapter five, I shall elaborate more on the details of these policy proposals.

⁶⁵⁹ In the Catholic Church, St. Francis is the patron of all those who promote ecology and ecological concerns. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis explains that St. Francis is the example for the care of the vulnerable and of integral ecology, particularly concerned about God's creation, the poor and outcast. See LS # 1, 10-12.

exercises, include homilies on ecology and intercessory prayers for creation in her liturgy, etc., as part of her contribution to the care of the environment in Ghana.

Following from the above position and with specific reference to the Catholic Church in Ghana, I argue that the Bishops' Conference already acknowledges that there is a lot of wisdom in the Akan traditional teachings and ethic on the environment, which if adopted, can help in the quest to safeguard and promote the care of the environment in Ghana. My argument is based on the 2010 communique issued by the Bishops' Conference in which the Conference for the first time in their teachings on the environment in communiqués, made a significant reference to these indigenous ecological practices. In this communique, the Bishops' Conference stated among others that,

Respect for creation has always been upheld in the culture of all peoples. For example, for all peoples in Ghana, there were and still are certain prohibitions which ensure the preservation and responsible use of natural resources. These include prohibitions against cutting trees from certain forests, farming on certain days of the week and fishing in some water bodies that were considered sacred; for people living along the coast, fishing on certain days was and is still prohibited. Such prohibitions underscore not only the ingenuity of our forebears but also their insight and intelligence, as these were cultural ways of preserving the ecosystem. Currently, the over-exploitation and unbridled use of nature is threatening to disrupt the ecosystem as designed by the Creator and is undermining our survival, security and peace.⁶⁶⁰

I contend that in the Bishops' Conference's statement above, we have a clear acknowledgment on the part of the Ghana bishops regarding the relevance of indigenous ecological practices such as taboos and sacred days to the care of the environment. I contend further that this acknowledgement is a good step for the Catholic Church in Ghana to build on in examining various ways and means of adopting and or incorporating some of the Akan traditional teachings and practices on the care of the environment into the Church's own environmental teachings and practices. Thus, I posit that the time has come for the Church to build on this important foundation by adopting and

⁶⁶⁰ *Ghana Bishops' Speak Volume III*, 30-31.

incorporating some of the ethical ecological teachings and practices of the Akan Traditional Religion. I contend that doing so will not only enhance and amplify the Church's environmental teachings and practices in Ghana but will also become extremely useful in the efforts of the Bishops' Conference towards collaborating with the State on the care of the environment in Ghana. I contend further that when the Church's ecological teachings adopt and incorporate some of the Akan indigenous ecological wisdom and practices, they will resonate well with both Christians in Ghana and non-Christians alike. This will then attract the attention and participation of many more people beyond the members of the Christian religion in Ghana to the practical efforts that the Church will formulate and implement together with the State towards the care of the environment in Ghana. Based on this conviction, I argue that the care of the environment in Ghana will be greatly enhanced and promoted.

3.7 Conclusion

In Ghana today as elsewhere in the world, I contend that there is more than enough evidence of ecological crisis and thus, there is the need for everybody, including individuals, Governments, Civil Society, the Christian Church and all other stakeholders, to contribute their respective quotas to finding the appropriate solutions to the environmental crisis facing the country. Towards this goal, I argue that the Ghanaian Christian Church in general and the Catholic Church in particular, can and must make recourse to the teachings of African theology and the indigenous Akan traditional environmental ethic and practices such as taboos, sacred days, sacred groves and totems. These African theological teachings in general and Akan indigenous practices in particular provide some of the useful teachings and ways through which the environment can be protected and safeguarded from needless human destruction and damage and animals saved from extinction in the context of the Akan Traditional Religion.

Today, while I consider it unfortunate that with the advent of modernity and Christianity in Ghana, most if not all of the Akan traditional practices have largely been ignored giving way to the exploitation of the environment and leading to the current ecological crisis facing Ghana, I also think at the same time that it is not too late to return to some, if not all, of these practices in a renewed effort to reverse the trend of ecological crisis facing Ghana today. Thus, I fully support the positions of both Amoah and Owusu Agyarko that instead of uncritically challenging these Akan indigenous “ecological” practices and seeing them as irrelevant, the Christian Church in Ghana must rather examine critically these indigenous traditions for their positive teachings and ethic on the care of environment and adopt some of them, if not all, in their teachings and practices on the care of the environment.

Moreover, with particular reference the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference, I argue that the adoption of these traditional indigenous practices is particularly urgent and necessary because the adoption and incorporation of these Akan ecological ethic and practices will not only serve to enhance and amplify the bishops’ ecological teachings but also, it will attract a more inclusive and better participation of the majority of Ghanaians in the care of the environment. Besides, I posit that in view of the proposal I am making in this work for a Church and State collaboration on the care of the environment in Ghana, the adoption and or incorporation of these Akan ecological and wisdom and ethical practices will be particularly useful in terms of encouraging more citizens to contribute their efforts to safeguarding and protecting the environment of Ghana.

In Chapter four, that is, the next chapter of this work, I shall review the three currently existing Church and State partnerships in Ghana in the areas of healthcare delivery, education management and good governance, and discuss the main principles undergirding these historical Church and State partnerships and the lessons learnt from them. Here, I shall argue that my proposal for a new

model of Church and State collaboration in the care of the environment in Ghana will not only strengthen further and consolidate these already existing partnerships, but more importantly, that it will help Ghana to deal much more effectively with both her current and future ecological challenges.

CHAPTER FOUR

A THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF CURRENT EXISTING CHURCH AND STATE COLLABORATIONS IN GHANA

The importance of collaboration in all human endeavours, not least the care of the environment, cannot be overemphasized. Through collaboration, Governments, Civil Society Organisations, Religious Bodies, community members and other stakeholders come together to undertake development projects for the cosmic common good in both formal and informal partnerships. In his 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si'*,⁶⁶¹ Pope Francis talked about the importance of collaboration within the context of the care of the environment by inviting all people across the globe to engage in dialogue and joint actions on the way forward on how to save the earth, our common home.⁶⁶¹ Also, by citing in an unprecedented manner, quotations from the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and a Sufi mystic,⁶⁶² and by including ecological statements from twenty-one Episcopal Conferences from across the world in this encyclical,⁶⁶³ Pope Francis evidently sought to emphasise the importance of collaboration in environmental care just as in other human activities. In this encyclical, the pope teaches us that in all human endeavours and more so, in the quest to save the earth, everything ought to be “integral” and “integrated.”⁶⁶⁴ In sum, I contend that in *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis gives us a clear and unambiguous teaching that collaboration is an essential aspect of human life and that the efforts to save the Earth from its current crisis cannot

⁶⁶¹ Pope Francis' Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si'*, LS # 3, 14, 64.

⁶⁶² LS # 9. Pope Francis quotes three times from statements of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew where the latter draws attention to ethical and spiritual roots of the environmental problems and urges for solutions not only in technology but also in sacrifice, generosity, spirit of sharing, asceticism and loving. The quotation of the Sufi mystic, Ali al-Khawwas in *Laudato Si'* is found in LS no. 233 and in footnote 159 where the mystic teaches that there is a subtle mystery in each of the movements and sound in the world and that if we listen to how the wind blows, the trees sway, the waters flow, etc., we can get in tune with the message of creation.

⁶⁶³ These twenty-one conferences include those of Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, USA, Portugal, South Africa, Mexico, the Philippines, CELAM, among others. See LS 38, 48, 52, 54, 69, 85, 159, etc. I posit that the quotation of ecological insights of these conferences is a concrete sign of the pope's collaboration with bishops across the globe.

⁶⁶⁴ LS # 21, 70, 120, 138, 240.

be a one-man enterprise but ought to involve the concerted and collaborative efforts of all individuals and groups, and indeed, all disciplines.

In this chapter, with the above background and context in mind, I shall evaluate three existing historical collaborations between the Catholic Church in Ghana and the Government of Ghana. In evaluating these three historical collaborations which are in the areas of healthcare, good governance and education, I shall also draw out the most significant theological principles grounding these existing Church and State collaborations while postulating that these collaborations have contributed positively to the advancement of the common good and integral development of all citizens of Ghana. Flowing from these evaluations, I shall argue that the time has come for the Catholic Church in Ghana to collaborate also with the Ghanaian Government on the care of the environment since the care of the environment in Ghana as elsewhere, ought to be a collective responsibility of all stakeholders, including the Government and the Church.⁶⁶⁵

Moreover, in defence of my proposal for a Church and State collaboration in the care of the environment in Ghana, I shall postulate that as an established religious body in Ghana, the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference is well positioned to contribute immensely to ecological care in Ghana in close collaboration with the Government. This is because besides the fact that the Bishops' Conference enjoys a lot of goodwill and credibility among the Ghanaian citizenry, the Conference also has the organizational and institutional structures to help her play a leading and decisive role in a national campaign on the care of the environment in Ghana. In particular, I shall contend that the Bishops' Conference has the capacity and the experience to effectively mobilize

⁶⁶⁵ Already in their 1981 and 1995 communiques as well as in their 1997 Pastoral Congress document, *Ecclesia in Ghana*, the Bishops' Conference had expressed their willingness to collaborate with the Government on ecological care in Ghana, a desire which has never materialized. I argue that in the context of the current global focus on the care of the environment and how to deal with the current ecological crisis to save the earth, now is the most opportune time to revisit these earlier resolutions and to work to bring them to fulfilment.

her network of dioceses, parishes, schools as well as Church groups, societies and associations⁶⁶⁶ to play critical and influential roles in any mission on the care of the environment in Ghana in collaboration with the State.

In the conclusion of the chapter, I shall postulate that with the new proposed model of collaboration between the Church and the State in the care of the environment which I am making in this work, the already positive relationship between the Catholic Church in Ghana and the State of Ghana will be further strengthened for the pursuit of the common good and integral development of the Ghanaian populace. In addition, I shall contend that the new collaboration between the Church and the Ghana Government in the care of the environment will succeed because it would apply useful lessons learnt from the three current existing Church and State partnerships to this new area of collaboration. Besides, I shall argue that the prospects of getting the support of most Ghanaians for this collaboration are high because of the subject matter, namely, the care of the environment, which is something dear to the Church and most Ghanaians. With this said, I shall proceed to evaluate the three collaborations between the Church and the State, beginning with healthcare.

4.1 Brief Evaluation of Church and State Partnership in Healthcare Delivery in Ghana

The Catholic Church in Ghana has worked in close collaboration with Ghana's Government both before and after Ghana's independence in March 1957 to ensure that most if not all citizens have

⁶⁶⁶ Currently, the Catholic Church has around 3 million people in 20 dioceses with over 300 parishes and more than 20 Church groups, associations and societies. Besides, the Church boasts of 40 hospitals, 106 clinics, 61 Senior High Schools, 62 Technical schools, 15 Colleges of Education and over 1,000 Basic schools. I argue that these networks can effectively be mobilized by the Church across the country for an effective campaign on the care of the environment in the country. For more information on these statistics, see, Ghana catholic Bishops Conference. *Catholic Diary and Directory*. Accra: Catholic Book Center, 2020. See also Damien Avevor, *Strengthening Church-State Partnership in Education*, 8. Information accessed online at <https://www.modernghana.com/news/415646/strengthening-church-state-partnership-in-education.html>, on June 17, 2021.

access to healthcare. In examining the history of the Catholic Church's involvement in healthcare delivery in Ghana, Peter Yeboah and Gilbert Buckle mention that the Ghana Catholic Church began to be formally involved in healthcare services in the late 1940s when the Church realized that the then colonial government's capacity to meet its social obligation of providing access to healthcare for the population was virtually non-existent, and where available, mostly limited to the two major cities of Ghana, namely, Accra and Kumasi.⁶⁶⁷ Yeboah and Buckle further mention that the Church began filling access gaps by situating healthcare facilities in villages and rural communities as well as establishing health programmes to address the needs of marginalized populations and those with neglected health conditions.⁶⁶⁸ According to the two, this approach of the Church was in line with the core shared principles of the Church, namely, solidarity, subsidiarity and stewardship.⁶⁶⁹

In 1957, the Catholic Church in Ghana, together with the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG), played an instrumental role in the establishment of the Christian Health Association of Ghana (CHAG), to bring together all Church-managed health facilities to support the Christian Church's mission to address the healthcare needs of the Ghanaian public.⁶⁷⁰ As of today, CHAG is composed of 25 denominational groupings with over 300 health facilities, including hospitals, clinics, maternity homes and health training institutions, etc. All these facilities are involved in the

⁶⁶⁷ Peter Yeboah & Gilbert Buckle, *The Evolving Partnership between Government of Ghana and National Faith-Based Health Providers*, 764. Accessed online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2017.1332163>, on May 30, 2021. Peter Yeboah is the current the Executive Secretary of the Christian Health Association of Ghana (CHAG), the body that coordinates the activities of the hospitals, clinics, health training institutions owned by the Christian Churches in Ghana. Dr. Gilbert Buckle is his immediate predecessor. Their article sheds important light on the current state of the relationship between CHAG and the Government of Ghana on healthcare.

⁶⁶⁸ Yeboah and Buckle, *Evolving Partnership*, 764.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., 767.

provision of health service and training across Ghana, with an intentional focus on the poor, the marginalised and the deprived populations throughout the country.⁶⁷¹

In 2006, a *Memorandum of Understanding and Administrative Instructions on Church and State Partnership* on healthcare delivery in Ghana was signed between the Government of Ghana and the Christian Health Association of Ghana (CHAG).⁶⁷² This MoU both formalized and clarified the relationship, roles, rights, and responsibilities of the two parties in respect of the provision of healthcare services that would be available, affordable and accessible to the Ghanaian populace. This partnership has resulted in CHAG collaborating with the Government through several interventions and initiatives in making health services more accessible to all people, especially the deprived, marginalized and neglected in society. As of today, due to this close collaboration between the Church and the State in healthcare delivery in Ghana, many Catholic (and other Christian) Mission hospitals have been designated and being used as Government District Hospitals. About 45 to 60% of the total operational revenues of these mission health facilities come from Government subsidies and while the State pays the salaries of most of the workers, the facilities themselves also generate funds internally to pay the rest of their staff and to undertake needed maintenance and rehabilitation works.⁶⁷³

It is important to mention here that the Ghana Government has over the years appreciated and commended the key role the Church's partnership with the State has played in the country's healthcare delivery. For instance, in 2014, Dr. Victor Bampoe, then Ghana's Deputy Minister of

⁶⁷¹ Ibid. The percentage of CHAG's contributions to the health care infrastructure in Ghana is often contested. While some estimate it at 20%, others say 30% and still others at 40%. What is not contested though is the Church's pro-poor health policy in service to the poor and the marginalized. The Catholic Church alone accounts for more than 70% of CHAG's overall contribution to health service delivery in Ghana.

⁶⁷² Ministry of Health (MOH) & Christian Health Association of Ghana (CHAG). *Memorandum of Understanding Between the Ghana Health Service and the Christian Health Association of Ghana*. Accra, 2006. This MoU has been renewed and updated since December 2013.

⁶⁷³ Ibid.

Health, in presenting the State of Health Care Delivery in Ghana at a Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, USA, said among others that Ghana had made giant strides in healthcare delivery. For example, infant and under-5 mortality in Ghana had dropped significantly while polio and guinea worm infestation had been eliminated.⁶⁷⁴ Significantly, Dr. Bampoe attributed the success story of Ghana's healthcare delivery not only to the radical reforms carried out over the last few decades by the Government of Ghana, but also through the improved partnership and collaboration with the private sector, most especially, the Christian mission sector in Ghana.⁶⁷⁵

In evaluating the current Church and State collaboration in healthcare delivery in Ghana, I argue that this collaboration has yielded both successes and challenges even though I contend that the successes far outweigh the challenges. With regard to the successes, I posit that over the years, the partnership between the Church and the State in healthcare has proven to be an indispensable way of promoting healthcare and healing for much of the population of Ghana. For example, as a result of this partnership, the Church has supported the national agenda of the Ghanaian Government to provide equity and accessibility to healthcare with the aim of contributing her quota to the Government's agenda of achieving universal healthcare for all citizens in the country.⁶⁷⁶ This is confirmed by Yeboah and Buckle who articulate that the leadership of the Church's hospitals and other health facilities has collaborated with the Government through several interventions and initiatives in making healthcare services accessible to all people, especially the deprived, the marginalised and the neglected in society.⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷⁴ These statistics were culled from the *Ghana Health and Demographic Report* compiled by the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) in 2014. Summary of this Report presented by Dr. Victor Bampoe was accessed online at ghanaphysicians.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/kensagoe.pdf, on May 30, 2021.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁶ Yeboah and Buckle, *Evolving Partnership*, 768.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid, 769.

Furthermore, the Church played a very crucial role in the establishment of the National Insurance Scheme (NHIS) in Ghana by piloting this policy in three of the Church's hospitals in the late 1990s before it was adopted in 2004 by the State as a national healthcare policy. This fact is also attested to by Yeboah and Buckle when they postulate that since the establishment of the National Health Insurance Scheme in 2004, there has been composite service-level or contractual agreements with the National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA) to provide services to cardholders of the Scheme. The composite service-level or contractual agreements in the healthcare sector in Ghana refer to signed contracts between the NHIA and CHAG-managed facilities whereby the latter provides healthcare services to patients who are enrolled with the National Health Insurance Scheme. The costs covering the patients' healthcare expenses are reimbursed later by the NHIA to the CHAG facilities. Besides, the NHIA second its staff to help CHAG-managed facilities to expedite the processes of reimbursement. This system and contractual relationship have effectively eliminated the previous cash-and-carry policy in Ghana where patients paid for healthcare services out of their pockets before their health needs were attended to at all facilities.⁶⁷⁸

Additionally, Yeboah and Buckle cite an instance in September 2016, when Government pharmacists embarked on an indefinite strike that crippled healthcare delivery in the public sector and the Ministry of Health of Ghana publicly directed all patients to access services in CHAG facilities. According to them, this was a direct acknowledgment of CHAG's non-strike tradition and an affirmation of its reliability.⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid. Before the introduction of the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) policy in 2004, the healthcare policy that operated in Ghana was the full-cost recovery (also called "cash-and-carry system"). Under this system, the healthcare needs of an individual were only attended to after initial payment for the service was made even in cases of emergencies. Three Catholic hospitals piloted the insurance scheme some years before it was adopted by the Government as a national policy. Today, due to the NHIS policy, citizens pay an annual premium of 160 Ghana cedis (equivalent of \$40) and can access healthcare at all health facilities in Ghana throughout the year.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid. 769-770. Despite the strong support of the Ghana Catholic Church for labour unions, there is a policy agreement in all the Church's healthcare facilities where staff of Catholic (and some other Christian) hospitals and

Another success of the Church and State partnership in healthcare delivery in Ghana worth mentioning is that through this partnership, healthcare services have been brought to the doorsteps of many residents in Ghana's rural areas, smaller villages, and towns. Thus, in a very conscious and deliberate manner, the Church has strategically located her hospitals, clinics, rehabilitation centers, Health Training Institutions (HTIs), etc., in mostly remote areas and villages of Ghana in order to afford the residents of these poor and deprived communities the opportunity to access healthcare at their doorsteps.⁶⁸⁰ Besides, because the Church's healthcare facilities operate as not-for-profit health institutions, patients from these deprived communities and other areas are mostly able to access quality healthcare from them at very affordable costs.⁶⁸¹ I posit that the theological foundations underlying this policy commitment are three-fold, namely, the option for the poor, solidarity and subsidiarity.

The Church in Ghana believes in the principles of the option for the poor and solidarity in regard to healthcare and teaches that everybody must be assisted to have access to healthcare and that nobody should be deprived of healthcare due to poverty. Because of this, the Church's healthcare facilities are not primarily intended to make profits but to cater for the healthcare needs of all, but most especially the poor and vulnerable. In addition, with regard to the principle of subsidiarity, the Church understands that the central Government alone cannot provide every community with all their socio-economic needs, including hospitals and clinics, and that local communities can be supported to put up such facilities. Therefore, the Church works closely with mostly poor and deprived communities to acquire local lands and with the local people providing labour, put up

clinics in Ghana do not go on strike as part of their service to the sick and solidarity with them. This has made these facilities the preferred destinations for many patients and the first port of call for most citizens when the staff of Government health facilities go on strikes which are quite frequent in Ghana's healthcare sector.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., 767-768. Church-run facilities introduced primary health care services to Ghana leading to the development of Ghana's primary health care programmes called the Community-Based Health Planning and Services (CHPS).

⁶⁸¹ Ibid., 772.

such facilities which in the end, benefit the local people themselves. Thus, I posit that the option for the poor, solidarity and subsidiarity are the three major principles which the Church applies in locating her healthcare facilities in small towns in Ghana.

Furthermore, in terms of successes, I argue that the important work that Church-based facilities have carried out in the reduction of the cases of infant mortality, especially in the northern parts of Ghana, must be highlighted as one of the successes of the Church's partnership with the State in healthcare delivery in Ghana. In 2008, the National Catholic Health Service (NCHS), the umbrella body which coordinates the activities of all the Church's healthcare facilities across the country, started a project dubbed, "Project-Five Alive", to reduce infant mortality by 66%, that is, from 110 per 1000 live births to 40 per live births in northern Ghana. In 2015, after very successful outcomes of this project, the Ghana Government decided to collaborate with and support the NCHS to scale up and implement this policy nationwide.⁶⁸² This I contend is but another testimony to the success of the Church and State collaboration in healthcare in Ghana.

Moreover, I also posit that the Church's work in the provision of healthcare services to women and children in Ghana cannot be overemphasized. Currently, the only children's specialist hospital in Ghana, namely, the Princess-Louise Marie Hospital, based in the capital city of Accra, as well as the only women specialist hospital, namely, the Women Mercy Center, based in Cape Coast, are both Church-run health facilities.⁶⁸³ In addition to this, the Church's role in the fight against HIV/AIDS and its related stigmatization and discrimination through public education and

⁶⁸² According to Dr. Sodzi-Sodzi Tetteh who was the Director of this project, *Project Fives Alive* (PFA) started by the Church's facilities has helped Ghana to achieve Millennium Development Goal 4 (reducing morbidity and mortality in children under five). Information on the project was accessed from www.ih.org/Engage/initiatives/ghana/Pages/default.aspx, on May 30, 2021.

⁶⁸³ Information was received in an interview with George Adjei, the current Director of the Directorate of Health at the National Catholic Secretariat, Accra, on May 30, 2021. The Church is building a second Children's hospital at Takoradi in the Western Region to be called Jubilee Children's Hospital.

sensitization has also been significant even as the Church continues to lead the efforts to offer palliative and pastoral care for both victims and their families.⁶⁸⁴

Finally, owing to the existing Church and State partnership in healthcare, the Government of Ghana has granted the Church the license to open and run healthcare training institutions in Ghana to train healthcare professionals to support Ghana's healthcare delivery. These Health Training Institutions (HTIs) established by the Church use Government-approved curricula as well as the Church's ethics and identity to run their programmes. Some of these schools are specialized training institutions like the Brother Tarcisius Orthodontics and Prosthesis School and College at Nsawam and St. John College of Health at Duayaw-Nkwanta.⁶⁸⁵ I contend that the role that these institutions have played and continue to play in training much needed health staff to support Ghana's healthcare service delivery in the country cannot be downplayed.

In summing up, I posit that the Church's collaboration with the Government of Ghana in healthcare has achieved a lot of successes so far. These successes include general improvement in terms of accessibility in the provision of healthcare services to the vast majority of people in the country, especially to poor and deprived communities, rapid reduction in infant mortality, improved healthcare services for children and women, and the training of many more healthcare staff, including nurses and doctors, to staff Ghana's hospitals and clinics, which has also contributed to reduction in youth unemployment in the country. These successes, notwithstanding, the Church's collaboration with the Ghana Government in healthcare also suffers from several challenges.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid. At *Matthew Chapter 25 House*, the Catholic Church currently runs the biggest palliative care, shelter, medication, food and educational support for Patients Living with AIDS (PLHWA) in Ghana. For more, see <https://www.matthew25houseghana.com>, accessed online on August 26, 2021.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid. The Catholic Church currently runs 11 health training institutes across Ghana to support the training of health staff for Ghana's health sector.

As regards challenges within the Church and State partnership in healthcare in Ghana, I argue that the first major challenge is the perennial indebtedness of the National Health Insurance Scheme to Church-run facilities due to consistent delayed payment of insurance claims by Government. This situation often impedes Church-run health facilities from carrying out their operations, sometimes compelling the Church to criticize the Government openly and to threaten to resort to the use of the “cash-and-carry system.”⁶⁸⁶ As Yeboah and Buckle postulate, the fallout from this situation of delayed payments to CHAG facilities and the Church’s criticisms whenever it occurs is that Government begins to rethink the partnership and begins to issue subtle threats to withdraw financial support to Church facilities, leading at times to strained relationships in the partnership.⁶⁸⁷

The second biggest challenge facing the Church and State partnership in healthcare is widespread corruption in the health sector, ranging from petty thievery and extortion to massive distortions of health policy and funding fed by pay-offs to officials in the sector.⁶⁸⁸ With particular reference to the National Health Insurance Scheme, issues relating to the exemption of large groups of people, weak gatekeeper systems, mistrust between providers and staff of the Scheme, delay in Identity Card production and distribution, subscribers feigning sickness to collect drugs for sick relatives, friends and family members and the perception that prescription drugs given are substandard, are but a few areas of corruption also bedeviling the smooth operations of the Scheme.⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁸⁶ Yeboah and Buckle, 770. As recent as 2019, the Bishops’ Conference has raised the issue of delayed reimbursement of Church health facilities from the NHIA and urged Government to review the Scheme in dealing with this perennial challenge before it cripples the health sector. See *Bishops’ Conference 2019 Communique*, 8.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁸ Robert Kaba Alhassan, Edward Nketsiah-Amponsah & Daniel Kojo Arhinful, *A Review of National Health Insurance Scheme in Ghana: What Are the Sustainability Threats and Prospects*, published on November 10, 2016, pages 3, 5, 7-8. Accessed online at <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0165151>, on August 3, 2021.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid. Information also confirmed by Mrs. Adelaide Akowuah-Bunatal, retired Deputy Director Provider and Clients Relations of the National Health Insurance Authority, Ghana, in a phone conversation on May 30, 2021.

The challenges posed by corruption subsequently affects the Church and State partnership in healthcare delivery in very negative ways. First and foremost, I contend that corruption in the health sector in Ghana deprives the Government of much needed funds which end up in private pockets. The Government is deprived of resources which it could have used in supporting the operations of both Government and Church-owned healthcare facilities. Secondly, due to corruption, medical and other essential healthcare supplies which could be given to the Church's health facilities and other private healthcare institutions are sometimes diverted or stolen with the result being that the Church-managed facilities suffer most since the scarce healthcare supplies are often given to the Government hospitals and clinics first before Church-run facilities are considered. Thirdly and lastly, corruption in Ghana's healthcare sector brings a lot of pressure on the Church's facilities because of the perception that the Church's facilities are less prone to corrupt deeds, and also due to the fact that they are mostly more accessible to the general public because of their locations in the villages and smaller towns.⁶⁹⁰ Thus, I posit that there is no denying the fact that corruption in the healthcare sector always impacts negatively on the relationship between the Church and the State in the provision of healthcare services in Ghana. To address these challenges posed by corruption in Ghana's healthcare sector, the Church has at various times called for transparency and good governance in Ghana's healthcare sector. This call is mostly done through meetings with stakeholders in the healthcare sector and sometimes through the issuing communiqués.

⁶⁹⁰ For more on this, see Pius Agbenorku, *Corruption in Ghanaian Healthcare System: The Consequences*, 622-630. Accessed online at researchgate.net/publication/233529115_Corruption_in_Ghanaian_Healthcare_System_The_Consequences, on August 3, 2021. See also, www.transparency.org/content/download/4912/28857/file/Ghanaian_Chronilce_06-02-02.pdf, on August 3, 2021.

Lastly, in terms of challenges, because certain healthcare policies approved and or supported by Government, including abortion, euthanasia, the use of contraceptives, etc., are opposed to the Catholic Church's position on these issues, these issues occasionally lead to misunderstanding and "clashes" between the Church and the State which subsequently strains the existing Church-State partnership in healthcare delivery in Ghana. In August 2015, for example, the Bishops' Conference organized a first-ever national Pro-Life Conference in Ghana to protest against the rising spate of abortion, homosexuality, the promotion and use of condoms among the youth, etc., in the country, blaming the Government for encouraging such practices even in the Church's hospitals and other health facilities.⁶⁹¹ For the Bishops' Conference, these practices were encouraging promiscuity, teenage pregnancy, masturbation, homosexuality, and immorality among Ghanaian youth, and so needed to be stopped by the Government.⁶⁹² In Ghana's healthcare sector, the practice of Family Planning is approved as legal and no patient who requests to use such resources as contraceptives, condoms, abortion, etc., can be denied them. On the contrary, even though the Catholic Church approves of Family Planning, she teaches that individual parents must practise Natural Family Planning in accordance with conscience enlightened by Catholic principles. According to the Ghana Church, the dignity of human life which is upheld and cherished by the Ghanaian culture means that any programme of Family Planning that promotes abortion, the use of condoms and other contraceptives must be rejected as unacceptable and sinful. Besides, the Church believes that

⁶⁹¹ The first national Pro-Life Conference brought together about 1,000 participants made up of bishops, priests, religious, laity, parliamentarians, lawyers and government representatives, students, healthcare workers, etc., to deliberate on issues that promote the culture of life. More information can be found in Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, *Essays on Pro-Life*. Accra: AA Concept, 2015.

⁶⁹² Ghana is a secular State, and the Constitution guarantees the economic, social and cultural rights of all people, including healthcare services without any discrimination. Patients who require healthcare services, including family planning services such as abortion, contraceptives, etc., receive them at Government hospitals and clinics without any problems. The Catholic Church in Ghana, on the other hand, advocates Natural Family Planning following the global Church's social teachings as found particularly in Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968) and John Paul II's encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae* (1995). As a result of this, services such as abortion and the use of contraceptives, etc., are not offered in her healthcare facilities across the country.

such practices, especially among the youth and unmarried, promote promiscuity and sexual immorality in the country, and therefore, the Government needs to help put a stop to these practices by encouraging the use of Natural Family Planning across all healthcare facilities in the country.⁶⁹³

To sum up the challenges within the Church and State collaboration on healthcare in Ghana, I contend that the collaboration between the Church and the State in healthcare delivery in Ghana suffers from many challenges. These include perennial indebtedness of the National Health Insurance Authority to the Church's facilities, massive corruption in the healthcare sector and differences between the Church and the State on family planning policies. These challenges, notwithstanding, I reiterate my position that the successes in the Church and State partnership in healthcare in Ghana far outweigh the challenges in it. Therefore, I contend that it is important for both the Church and the State to continue to work together to minimize the challenges within this partnership in order to make the partnership work more effectively and efficiently for the optimal benefit of the entire citizenry of Ghana.

In examining the theological principles grounding the current existing Church and State partnership in healthcare in Ghana, I posit that there are three main principles grounding this partnership, namely, the common good, preferential option for the poor and solidarity. In the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, the common good is defined as, "The sum-total of all social conditions which allow people either as groups or as individuals to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily".⁶⁹⁴ The principle teaches that every member of society is an individual person with an inviolable worth and dignity, but at the same time, the full meaning

⁶⁹³ *Ghana Bishops Speak Volume I*, 56. The challenge posed by these competing values are mostly evident at the Church's healthcare facilities designated as Government District hospitals but run with Catholic ethical principles.

⁶⁹⁴ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa), 90. Also, in John XXIII's encyclical letter, *Mater et Magistra* (1958), 65.

of each person is achieved only in community with others. Therefore, while the community must be at the service of individual persons, individual persons must also contribute to the welfare of the community.⁶⁹⁵ Based on this understanding of the common good above, the Catholic Church teaches that healthcare is a common good issue because it is closely linked to the right to life which is the most primary and basic right of all peoples.

In articulating the Church's teaching that healthcare is a common good, the bishops of the United States Conference in their *1993 Resolutions on the Health Care Reforms*, taught that, "Every person has a basic right to adequate health care. This right flows from the sanctity of human life and the dignity that belongs to all human persons made in the image of God."⁶⁹⁶ Affirming this teaching, Lisa Sowle Cahill has argued that, "Health is a basic human and social good necessary to the common good of local communities, a good that could even be considered as a right."⁶⁹⁷ Thus, in adhering faithfully to the Church's teaching that healthcare is a common good, the Church in Ghana undertakes practical and concrete actions at all levels of health service delivery and provides a healthcare ministry that is rooted in the commitment to promote and defend human life and dignity. This is because for the Ghanaian Church, the mandate to care for the sick must always be geared towards contributing to the common good since every person has a right to healthcare, a right which as I have already alluded to above, flows from the sanctity of human life and the inviolable dignity that belongs to all humans as persons made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26) and redeemed by Christ (Eph. 1:10).⁶⁹⁸

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁶ Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Theological Bioethics: Participation, Justice, Change* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 143.

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid., 131.

⁶⁹⁸ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine*, 65.

Additionally, in upholding the global Church's understanding and teaching that healthcare is a common good, the Catholic Church in Ghana also believes, upholds, teaches and practises the principle that no person or group of persons should be denied healthcare for to do so will be to treat such persons as less than full human beings and members of the community. In his 1967 encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, John XXIII taught that the most basic right of all human beings is the right to life and that healthcare is indispensable to the right to life.⁶⁹⁹ Thus, healthcare is a condition sine qua non to guarantee a person's continuous existence and life in community with others. Articulating this teaching further, Cahill posits that "a basic level of health is key to a person's ability to function in his or her social and physical environment" and that "the opportunity to enjoy good health is essential not only to individual well-being and fulfilment, but also to one's participation in and contribution to the community in which one lives."⁷⁰⁰ Based on these teachings, I reiterate my earlier position that to deny healthcare to any person or groups of persons amounts to denying them their membership and full participation in community life. I opine that it is based on this same principle that the Church in Ghana has had this long collaboration with the State in healthcare delivery for all these years. I posit further that this collaboration has resulted in the current situation in Ghana whereby healthcare has come to assume the status of a common good, leading to the provision of reasonable access to all categories of people who need healthcare in the country regardless of their financial or economic status.⁷⁰¹

⁶⁹⁹ John XXIII, Encyclical Letter, *Pacem in Terris* (Vatican, 1963), PT # 11.

⁷⁰⁰ Lisa Cahill, *Theological Bioethics*, 131.

⁷⁰¹ Yeboah and Buckle, 768. Today, through the collaboration between the Church and Government and the implementation of the NHIS policy, healthcare is easily accessible and affordable to all categories of people in Ghana. Besides, CHAG is using the Community-Based Health Planning and Services (CHPS) strategy which involves the building of small clinics and first aid facilities in villages and rural areas of the country to rapidly expand primary healthcare and thereby accelerate the attainment of universal health coverage in Ghana.

With reference to *preferential option for the poor*, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* defines the preferential option for the poor as “the principle that teaches that institutions are required to respond to the inequities between and among individuals that particularly threaten the dignity of the most disadvantaged in society.”⁷⁰² Thus, according to the Church’s Social Teaching, those with the greatest needs and burdens have the first claims on the common efforts of society, and that in protecting the lives and promoting the dignity of the poor and the vulnerable, we strengthen all of society.⁷⁰³ Articulating this principle in their *1993 Resolutions on the Health Care Reform*, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops stated that, “Every person has a basic right to adequate health care ... since all human persons are made in the image of God. It implies that healthcare which is necessary and suitable for the development and maintenance of life must be provided for all people, regardless of economic, social and legal status, with special attention to the basic health needs of the poor.”⁷⁰⁴ Commenting on this teaching, Lisa Cahill posits that the bishops of the United States were right in their teaching because this teaching is based on “the biblical call to heal the sick and serve the least of these, to embrace the priorities of social justice and the common good and to practice the virtue of solidarity and the ‘option for the poor.’”⁷⁰⁵

From the above discussion, I argue that the principle of the preferential option for the poor is one which the global Church uses to encourage all people to give special priority to the poor and the vulnerable in society. I contend subsequently that in her quest to respond to the need to provide access to healthcare for all citizens, the Catholic Church in Ghana has made and continues to make

⁷⁰² *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 98-99.

⁷⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰⁴ Lisa S. Cahill, *Theological Bioethics: Participation, Justice, Change*, 143.

⁷⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

conscious and deliberate efforts to protect the poor, the vulnerable and the marginalized by prioritizing their healthcare needs. This is because for the Church in Ghana just as for the global Church, access to healthcare must not depend solely on the ability to pay since healthcare is not a commodity whose value must be left solely to market forces to decide or the ability of people to pay.⁷⁰⁶ I posit further that this is one of the most fundamental reasons why the Catholic Church in Ghana has strategically located her healthcare facilities in mostly rural communities and small towns and villages of Ghana to ensure that residents of those deprived communities also have access to affordable and quality healthcare services at their doorsteps. Besides this, I contend that the Church's not-for-profit policy on healthcare is intended principally and purposefully to make it possible for the poor and the vulnerable in the Ghanaian society also to receive quality and affordable healthcare at the Church's health facilities dotted across the country. I opine that by ministering to the poor and the sick in this way, the Catholic Church in Ghana has clearly demonstrated that her healthcare ministry is one that is grounded on the principle of preferential option for the poor.⁷⁰⁷

Finally, regarding solidarity, the Church's Social Doctrine teaches that solidarity is about recognizing others and all people as brothers and sisters and actively working for their good and also enabling all people to contribute to the common good. In other words, the Doctrine stresses that in our connected humanity, we are invited to build relations and to understand what life is for the poor, the vulnerable and the disadvantaged and to commit to their wellbeing to ensure that they have what they need to live with dignity. Thus, for the Church, solidarity is basically about sharing,

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid., 150.

⁷⁰⁷ In their 1995 communique, the Bishops' Conference stated that they have consciously sited their hospitals, clinics, and other health facilities in the rural areas where people are the poorest so that such categories of the Ghanaian population can also have access to quality healthcare services. According to them, their contribution to healthcare was meant solely to complement the efforts of Government in providing for the healthcare needs of all Ghanaians. For more on this, see *Ghana Bishops Speak Volume II*, 4-5.

but not only that, it is also connected to the common good and the recognition that others deserve justice and the right to participate in the common good just like everyone else.⁷⁰⁸ Thus, in acknowledging the reality that making healthcare accessible to all people is a task that goes beyond any one individual or group or institution, and even the Government, the Catholic Church in Ghana has over the years, collaborated closely with Ghana's Government and other stakeholders to provide affordable, equitable and accessible healthcare services to all citizens by way of partnerships. Even as of today, the Church continues to seek innovative and pragmatic ways and means of partnering and or collaborating with individuals, groups, institutions, organisations and the Government to help provide more access to healthcare for all, but especially the poor and vulnerable members of society, through the establishment of Health Training Institutions and health facilities like hospitals, clinics, rehabilitation centers, etc., in places where such facilities do not exist and where the poor and vulnerable people in society could easily access these facilities at very affordable costs. Based on this, I posit that for the Church in Ghana, the principle of solidarity is key if Ghana is to guarantee universal health coverage for all her citizens.

In summing up the Church and State partnership in healthcare in Ghana, I contend that the current existing partnership between the Church and the State in healthcare delivery in Ghana can best be described as one of collaboration and critique. In terms of collaboration, the Church maintains a supportive relationship with Government in ensuring equitable provision of quality healthcare to all Ghanaians in line with the Church's mission and obligation to be a reliable partner in the health sector, while in terms of critique, the Church plays a watchdog role in critiquing Government's

⁷⁰⁸ According to the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), solidarity refers to the fact that we are one family and that whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic and ideological differences, we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers wherever they may be. Accessed online at <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/solidarity>, on June 11, 2021.

healthcare policies and actions to ensure that such policies and actions do not threaten in any way but rather promote equity and universal healthcare. The ways through which the Church plays her watchdog role in Ghana's healthcare delivery include the following three. Firstly, the Church engages Government on all healthcare policies to ensure that such policies are deliberately pro-poor so that they are able to benefit the entire citizenry of the country and not just the needs and wellbeing of a select few. Secondly, by locating her facilities in rural and remote communities of the country, the Church invariably invites and encourages the Government to also prioritise healthcare for deprived, rural and poor communities, and to provide the relevant resources necessary to improve and expand such facilities to cater for poor and deprived communities. Thirdly and lastly, the Church always insists that the Government shows commitment to healthcare for all citizens by ensuring that critical healthcare staff such as nurses and doctors are evenly distributed among the hospitals and clinics across the country to cater for the healthcare needs of all patients and not only those in the big towns and cities. Through this, the Church is able to collaborate with Ghana's Government to provide equitable access to healthcare for all citizens.

Based on the foregoing, I posit that the current relationship of both collaboration and critique provides the best arrangement in ensuring that the existing Church and State partnership in healthcare in Ghana works effectively and efficiently in the country. Thus, I contend that it is important for both the Church and the State to continue to collaborate together, firstly, to overcome the challenges inherent in this partnership, and secondly, to strengthen this partnership for the common good and integral development of the entire Ghanaian citizenry.

4.2 Brief Review of Church and State Collaboration in Good Governance in Ghana

The Catholic Church's collaboration with the Government of Ghana in good governance is a more recent development with its tentative beginnings in the early 1990's following the return of Ghana to democratic rule in 1992. Yet, one can trace the contribution of the Catholic Church to the promotion of good governance in Ghana to as far back as the time of the country's independence in 1957 when the Ghana (Catholic) Bishops' Conference began to speak and to engage Government frequently on national issues and how to improve the socio-economic conditions of the citizens. Beginning from the mid-1960s, the Bishops' Conference started to issue communiques, pastoral letters and statements and other writings to advocate for good governance in Ghana, a practice the Conference has continued to do till date. In his article, *The Catholic Church on the Path of Advocating for Good Governance in Ghana*, Africanus L. Diedong, in reviewing the Ghana Catholic Church's contribution to good governance in Ghana, argued that,

The teaching and spreading of the Church's social doctrine on the promotion of an integral and social humanism, like good governance, are part of a genuine pastoral priority. The Church cannot, therefore, tire of proclaiming the Gospel that brings salvation and genuine freedom from temporal realities. She is mindful of the solemn exhortation given by St. Paul to his disciple, Timothy: "Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching ..." (2 Tim. 4:2-5).⁷⁰⁹

Thus, for Diedong, the contribution of the Catholic Church in Ghana over the years is very much in line with the global Church's mission to preach the gospel at all times and without fail.

According to the Church's Social Doctrine, the Church and the State are unique, and yet, they are partners in seeking the integral development of the individual person. While emphasizing that the

⁷⁰⁹ Africanus L. Diedong, *The Catholic Church on Path of Advocating for Good Governance in Ghana* (The International Journal of African Catholicism, Winter 2016. Volume 7, Number 2), 6. In the same article, Diedong also posited that good governance is built on four thematic areas of democracy and political governance, economic governance and management, corporate governance and socio-economic governance.

Church cannot be confused with the State and vice versa, the Church's Social Doctrine at the same time affirms that the two entities can collaborate to ensure that the integral development of people everywhere in the world are realized.

In *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, the Second Vatican Council affirmed this teaching when it articulated that, "The Church is not to be confused with the political community and is not bound to any political system. The political community and the Church are independent of each other in their own fields, and both are, even if under different titles, devoted to the service of the personal and social vocation of the same human beings."⁷¹⁰ In support of the above teaching of *Gaudium et Spes*, Diedong postulates that, "The Church's approach to promoting good governance can be traced right from the early days of the Church (Acts 6:1-7, 15:1 ff.)" and that "Ecumenical Councils, especially the Lateran Council VI and Vatican Council II, provide ample material for the Universal Church's approach to good governance."⁷¹¹ He cites various papal documents, including *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo XIII (1891), *Mater et Magistra* (1961) and *Pacem in Terris* (1963) of John XXIII, *Populorum Progressio* of Paul VI (1967) and *Caritas in Veritate* of Benedict XVI (2009), among others, to argue that, "It is obvious that the motivation of the Church to be involved in issues of governance can be traced to the social teachings of the Church as found, taught and recommended in the encyclical letters of the popes of this and the last century."⁷¹² According to Diedong,

The papal encyclical letters focus on how to guide in the formation of a correct conscience in matters of public life – economic, social, political and cultural ... On the local front in many countries, based on the reality of the existing social cultural economic and political contexts, the hierarchy of the Church may issue pastoral letters, statements, memoranda and communiques on important issues of national concern to political leadership of the country.⁷¹³

⁷¹⁰ *Gaudium et Spes* # 76.

⁷¹¹ Diedong, 6.

⁷¹² *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁷¹³ *Ibid.*, 7.

It is worth noting here that the Church's engagement with politics and governance in general has always been a very controversial and debatable subject. While some scholars like Hauerwas and others like him argue that the Church should pull out of political engagements altogether, others like Thomas Massaro support the Catholic Church's engagement with politics, contending that when the Church in particular and religion in general engages with politics, it supplies politics with religious ideals such as virtue, the common good, love and order.⁷¹⁴

Speaking about the Church's role in politics in his 1963 encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, Pope John XXIII taught that it should be marked by "reserve and disengagement." While asking bishops to take a more pastoral role than a political one, the pope posited that, "Bishops are not to meddle in matters that are not their business. Instead, they are to preach to all alike and in general terms, justice, charity, meekness, gentleness and other evangelical virtues."⁷¹⁵ The Second Vatican Council which was convoked by John XXIII in 1962 and concluded in 1965 under Paul VI, his successor, took a cautious stance with regard to the Church's involvement in politics and governance in general but did not advocate total disengagement. Thus, while affirming that the Church must respect the rightful independence of earthly affairs as in politics, the Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, at the same time taught that the Church should cooperate with political establishments in service of the personal and social vocation of the same human beings while inviting Catholics to exercise responsibility in politics to improve the world.⁷¹⁶

Today, flowing from these teachings above, I contend that Catholic social teaching on the whole does not promote the Church's total disengagement from the political sphere but warns against

⁷¹⁴ Thomas Massaro, *Living Justice*, 19-20.

⁷¹⁵ Kenneth Himes, *Modern Catholic Social Teachings*, 221.

⁷¹⁶ GS # 36, 76. Also, Massaro, *Living Justice*, 29.

excessive entanglement of the Church and her leaders in the world of politics. For example, in his 1995 Post-Synodal Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, Pope John Paul II articulated that, "... the Synod rightly considered that an authentic democracy which respects pluralism is one of the principal routes along which the Church travels together with the people ... The lay Christian engaged in the spirit of the Gospel, is the sign of a Church which participates in the promotion of the rule of law in Africa."⁷¹⁷ Reiterating this papal teaching later, Benedict XVI also taught in his 2011 Post-Synodal Exhortation *Africae Munus*, that "... the building of a just social order is part of the competence of the political sphere. Yet, one of the tasks of the Church in Africa consists in forming upright consciences receptive to the demands of justice."⁷¹⁸ According to the pope, "The Church's role is not political in nature. Her task is to open the world to the religious sense by proclaiming Christ ... for people to seek the supreme truth regarding their deepest identity and their questions."⁷¹⁹ Teaching that politics can be a major instrument at the service of reconciliation, justice and peace and the vocation to the communion of persons, Pope Benedict XVI further stressed that for this to happen, "the Church in Africa must help build up society in cooperation with government authorities and public and private institutions that are engaged in building up the common good."⁷²⁰

Based on these teachings above, I argue that in terms of politics and the Church's role and or engagement in it, contemporary Catholic social teaching in general does not advocate total disengagement. However, it cautions against excessive entanglement in politics on the part of the Church and her leaders due to the fact that "there exists a legitimate autonomy of the secular realm that ought to be respected while at the same time, the Church and her leaders are to remain true to

⁷¹⁷ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa* (Vatican, 1995). EA # 112.

⁷¹⁸ Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Africae Munus*, AM # 22.

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*, 81.

their calling and mission which is spiritual.”⁷²¹ Thus, whereas the Church ought to involve herself in political and social action to make life on earth more just, humane and peaceful, she must take care never to become so politicised that she loses sight of her transcendent or spiritual purpose.⁷²²

Based on the above, I posit that the Catholic Church’s involvement in politics in general and in particular, her promotion of good governance across the world, is well informed by the teachings found in the Social Doctrine of the Church. Consequently, in specific contexts and circumstances, the Church in particular regions and localities adopt and use these teachings as appropriate in addressing peculiar governance issues pertaining to their locations and territories, sometimes through communiques, pastoral letters and other forms of communication, and other times through organized social action.

With specific reference to the Catholic Church’s role in promoting good governance in the context of Ghana, it is important to state that the Catholic hierarchy and press have remained consistently engaged with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. Beginning from 1965 when the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference began to publish communiques, memoranda and pastoral letters on issues of ecclesial and national importance till today, the Catholic Church in Ghana has addressed various issues of social justice and good governance, both through the editorial pages of *The Catholic Standard* newspaper which the Church owns and runs and also through the various pastoral letters, memoranda and communiques issued periodically by the Bishops’ Conference.⁷²³

Through these means, the Catholic Church in Ghana has not relented in her efforts to promote good governance and democratic practice in Ghana by expressing concerns over issues of public

⁷²¹ Massaro, *Living Justice*, 29.

⁷²² *Ibid.*, 31-32.

⁷²³ *Ibid.*

interest such as bribery and corruption, democratic accountability and degradation of the environment.⁷²⁴ Thus, I argue that Diedong is right when he points out that the Church's interest in the socio-political affairs of the country is borne by the fact that the Church views good governance as service to the growth and integral development of the people and the advancement of the principles of subsidiarity, solidarity, common good, integral humanism and justice.⁷²⁵

Significantly, in the Catholic Church's efforts to preserve her record on promoting good governance in Ghana, the Ghana Bishops' Conference has compiled her contributions to the development and promotion of good governance in Ghana in the form of communiqués, memoranda and pastoral letters issued since 1965 till date in three volumes of documented works, titled *Ghana (Catholic) Bishops Speak*.⁷²⁶ These communiqués, memoranda and pastoral letters address all aspects of good governance in Ghana, including justice, human rights abuses and the care of the environment. In evaluating these documents, Diedong posits that, "Much of what the Church has had the occasion to comment on essentially touch on the major characteristics of good governance: participation, consensus-oriented rule of law, responsive, equitable and inclusive development, effective, efficient, accountable and transparent governance."⁷²⁷ According to him, "The Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference is relentless in calling for leaders to combine leadership qualities with integrity as well as showing willingness to place service before reward."⁷²⁸

⁷²⁴ Ibid., 7, 14.

⁷²⁵ Ibid., 5, 8-12.

⁷²⁶ *Ghana Bishops Speak Volume I* contains communiqués, memoranda and pastoral letters of the Bishops' Conference from 1965 to 1996, *Volume II* contains documents from 1997 to 2006 while *Volume III* contains documents from 2007 to 2016. I have already extensively reviewed the ecological teachings in these documents in Chapter 2 of this work.

⁷²⁷ Ibid., 14.

⁷²⁸ Ibid., 14-15.

In evaluating these documents, I posit that the *Ghana (Catholic) Bishops Speak* series give ample evidence of what the Ghana Catholic bishops have said concerning issues of good governance and other issues of both national and ecclesial importance over the years, beginning from 1965 till date. Yet, at the same time, I posit that in addition to the periodic issuing of communiqués, memoranda and pastoral letters, the contribution of the Catholic Church to good governance in Ghana can be seen also in the role the Church has played and continues to play as mediator, civic educator, defender and promoter of human rights and an attentive and impartial listener to the issues affecting Ghana.⁷²⁹ Over the years, the Bishops' Conference has collaborated with the various Governments of Ghana in mediating on governance issues such as the demarcation of new constituencies and regions, the siting of development projects like schools and hospitals in the country, and also by educating Ghanaians on the need to register for voting purposes and to live in harmony with one another, among other national issues. In addition to these, I also argue that the Church's partnership role with other Religious Bodies, such as the Christian Council of Ghana (CCG) and the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council (GPCC) and with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations like the Civil Forum Initiative (CFI)⁷³⁰ and other such groups in promoting the good of the ordinary Ghanaian citizen cannot be glossed over.

Another aspect of the Catholic Church's contribution to the promotion of good governance in Ghana can be seen in the role the Church has played in monitoring and observing all presidential and parliamentary elections in Ghana from 1996 till date. In particular, from the year 2008 till date,

⁷²⁹ Ibid., 14

⁷³⁰ Ibid. The Bishops' Conference liaises with all these groups and many others to promote good governance in Ghana. The Civil Forum Initiative (CFI) is a broad coalition of civil society actors with membership from advocacy NGOs, policy think tanks, FBOs, youth groups, and individual citizens, etc. The Secretariat of the CFI is hosted by the Institute of Democratic Governance (IDEG) based in Accra, the capital city of Ghana.

the Catholic Church has played key and significant roles in national elections held in 2008, 2012, 2016 and in the recent 2020 elections.⁷³¹ In speaking about the role the Church played in the 2008 elections in Ghana, Diedong posits that, “The membership of the Catholic Church in the Civic Forum Initiative (CFI) of Ghana has positively influenced electoral democracy in Ghana. The Catholic Church participated in a campaign CFI launched in 2008 on civic and community actions in support of the cleaning of the voters register for the December 2008 presidential and parliamentary elections.”⁷³² In this role, the Church participated in various election-related activities, including training workshops for observers and civic educators (national and regional trainings), convening the first National Forum of the CFI, engaging in regional outreach activities and publicity campaigns on cleaning of voters register, domestic election observation, media engagements (interviews, press statements, etc.) and coordination, documentation and publication, all in the effort to ensure peaceful and successful elections in Ghana.⁷³³

In addition to the role played by the Catholic Church in observing and monitoring Ghana’s 2008 elections as a member of the CFI, it is equally important to note that in the aftermath of the 2008 elections when tensions were high in Ghana due to the wafer-thin difference between the winning and losing candidates, Cardinal Peter Appiah Turkson, a member of the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference who was then the Chairman of the National Peace Council (NPC), led various negotiations and mediations between the candidates and their political parties which eventually

⁷³¹ Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference. *Report on Ghana’s First Biometric System for Voting for Presidential & Parliamentary Elections – 2012* (Accra: National Catholic Secretariat, 2103), 9. Even though the Bishops’ Conference has observed and closely monitored Ghana’s elections since 1996, the Conference started to document its role in Ghana’s elections from 2012. The report for the 2012 elections is titled, *Report on Ghana’s First Biometric System for Voting for Presidential & Parliamentary Elections – 2012* while that of 2016 is titled, *Forum for Accountability, Integrity, Transparency and Harmony (FAITH) in Ghana’s 2016 Elections*. The report of the recent December 2020 elections is yet to be published by the Bishops’ Conference.

⁷³² Diedong, 16.

⁷³³ Ibid.

restored calm and brought down the tensions in the country, leading ultimately to the acceptance of the election results and the gracious concession of defeat by the losing candidate.⁷³⁴

Furthermore, the Catholic Church also contributed immensely to the success of Ghana's national elections in 2012. In preparations towards the elections of 2012, the Bishops' Conference and the National Catholic Secretariat rolled out an elaborate Civic and Voter Education Programme across all 20 Archdioceses and Dioceses of the country as part of the Church's broad electoral programme dubbed, *Civic Agenda for Smooth Political Transition: Focusing on Biometric System of Voting and Transition Law for Ghana's 2012 Election – CAST for Ghana 2012 Project*.⁷³⁵ Through this project, the Election Team of the Bishops' Conference and their National Secretariat closely monitored developments relating to pre-voting, voting and post-voting in Ghana. These efforts of the Church culminated in a limited election observation in thirty-seven (37) carefully selected constituencies in Ghana involving 500 carefully selected Observers.⁷³⁶ According to Bishop Paul Bemile, "This was the Church's contribution to ensuring fair, violence-free and credible elections in Ghana" and reminding all Ghanaians on the need to participate actively in the country's political and social life as responsible citizens.⁷³⁷ In the aftermath of the elections in 2012, the Catholic Church was commended by many individuals and groups for her role in ensuring peaceful elections across Ghana. Bishop Bemile contends that, "It is not an exaggeration to state that without the intervention of the Church in negotiation with political parties, Ghana could have been plunged into a civil war following national elections in 2012."⁷³⁸

⁷³⁴ Information accessed online at <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/vCcbhqkqIGT1XKuC2fjPI/Africas-top-candidate-for-pope-seen-as-a-peace-maker.html>, on June 11, 2021. The National Peace Council is a statutory body that is responsible for ensuring peace and harmony in Ghana. In 2011, Turkson was also sent by Benedict XVI to mediate in the electoral conflict between Laurent Gbagbo and his opponent Alassane Ouattara in Ivory Coast.

⁷³⁵ Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference. *Report on Ghana's First Biometric System for Voting*, 4.

⁷³⁶ Ibid.

⁷³⁷ Ibid. Bishop Paul Bemile was in charge of the Peace and Justice unit of the Conference. He retired in 2015.

⁷³⁸ Diedong, 16.

Theologically speaking, the Church as a spiritual institution cannot and should not indulge in partisan politics, that is, the Church cannot identify herself with any political party or regime or actively campaign or give support to certain political ideologies or candidates over and against the others. This is because taking such a position will go against the Church's identity as a religious body and her role of working to uplift people in promoting the Kingdom of God on earth. It will also undermine the Church's credibility and neutrality on political matters. Thus, the Church cannot compromise her objectivity and impartiality by engaging in active partisan politics for by so doing will make it difficult for her to speak out prophetically in favour of peace and justice, and the practice of democracy and good governance. Nonetheless, the Catholic Church in Ghana closely monitors and supports the practice of democratic rule and good governance in Ghana through her active involvement in elections and the regular issuing of pastoral letters and communiques on democratic governance in the country because the Church believes that it has the mandate "to cooperate with ruling governments (and opposition parties) in the attempt to improve the quality of life of the people."⁷³⁹

Additionally, I opine that the Church's involvement in good governance is borne out of the fact that she desires and aspires to contribute her quota in helping guarantee the participation of all citizens in the governance of the country, and in promoting freedom, justice and peace that will guarantee progress and socio-economic development for all in the country.⁷⁴⁰ I argue that by so doing, the Church has contributed tremendously in helping to bring order, sanity and decorum to the body politics in Ghana and thereby helped the country and its citizens to enjoy peace and harmony, particularly in the periods before, during and after elections in Ghana.

⁷³⁹ *Ghana Bishops Speak Volume I*, 198.

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 233-234.

In 2016 also, the Bishops' Conference again came out with a comprehensive interfaith cooperation project for Ghana's elections of that year. This project, titled, "Forum for Actions on Inclusion, Transparency and Harmony (FAITH) in Ghana's 2016 Elections," was implemented by the National Catholic Secretariat of the Bishops' Conference from April 2016 to June 2017.⁷⁴¹ The project involved the bringing together of representatives from the Office of the National Chief Imam (ONCI), the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council (GPCC), the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission, Ghana (AMM), the Marshallan Relief and Development Services (MAREDES), the Catholic Mothers' Association (CMA) and the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Ghana (FOMWAG), to strategise towards free, fair, transparent and peaceful elections in Ghana.⁷⁴² According to Samuel Zan Akologo, representatives from these diverse religious bodies held high level dialogue and strategic meetings with eminent statesmen, engaged in the use of surveillance reports as basis for dialogue and information dissemination through community radio stations and used Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) to mediate election-related disagreements. I contend that these efforts contributed in no small way towards the deepening of democracy in Ghana and giving credibility to the electoral processes.⁷⁴³

In summary, I posit that as far as elections in Ghana from between 2008 and today are concerned, the Catholic Church has played a tremendous and significant role, sometimes alone but at other times with other Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), in ensuring peaceful, transparent, free and fair elections in Ghana. Thus, I contend that there is no

⁷⁴¹ Samuel Zan Akologo (Ed.), *Transforming Religious Differences and Experiences for Religious Cohesion and Democratic Governance: A Report on the Role of An Interfaith Platform in the 2016 Elections in Ghana* (Accra: National Catholic Secretariat, 2017), iv-v.

⁷⁴² Ibid.

⁷⁴³ Ibid., 1-2. The Bishops' Conference also monitored Ghana's 2020 elections but the report is yet to be published.

gainsaying the fact that these contributions of the Church have helped in very many significant ways to deepen the practice of democracy and particularly good governance in Ghana.

In May 2013, in the efforts to formalize and deepen the Church's contribution to the promotion and practice of good governance in Ghana, the Bishops' Conference launched the Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Office (CPLO) to facilitate contact and dialogue between the Church on one hand and Ghana's Legislature and Executive on the other hand.⁷⁴⁴ Among its core functions, the CPLO is tasked with arranging meetings of the Bishops' Conference with Ghana's Parliament during Parliamentary sessions and sittings and the attendance of the bishops and or their representatives in Parliament on important national occasions such as the Opening of Parliament, the presentation of the President's State of the Nation Address (SONA) and Annual Budget Sessions, etc.⁷⁴⁵ The CPLO is also charged with making formal submissions on bills and legislations before Parliament. These are usually written, but where possible, they are supplemented by oral presentation to the relevant Parliamentary Select Committee. There are many other important functions that the CPLO is expected to play. I contend that all these roles are in furtherance of the Catholic Church's contribution to the promotion of good governance in Ghana.⁷⁴⁶

⁷⁴⁴ National Catholic Secretariat. *Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Office: Effective Participation in Public Policy Development* (Accra: National Catholic Secretariat, 2013), 1. See also CPLO 2013, Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Office launched in Accra, accessed online at <https://www.ghananewsagency.org/social/catholic-parliamentary-liaison-office-luanced-in-accra-66345>, on February 21, 2021.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid., 2. The CPLO is also responsible for submitting written responses to national policy documents such as Government White Papers and Reports of Commissions as well as organizing policy dialogue meetings with key stakeholders to lobby for support on policy interventions. At the same time, it is to make informal contacts with Members of Parliament, Cabinet Ministers and Senior Civil Servants on all issues of national importance. The Office also conducts research on the likely impact of a policy on the poor and marginalized in particular and society in general by tracking a piece of policy through its developmental stages and informing the Church's position on a particular issue, including Policy Audits or Policy Impact Analysis. It also facilitates roundtable discussions for Civil Society focus groups and or MPS working on a particular piece of policy and networks or forms alliances with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) in order to maximize resources and capacity when working on a particular piece of policy. Other core functions of the CPLO include making responses to important events or

Since 2015, the CPLO has been accredited by Ghana’s Parliament to attend all Parliamentary sessions in an observer status, to make formal submissions on legislations and inputs into bills before Parliament and to give oral presentations to Select Committees and written responses to Government White Papers and Reports of Commissions.⁷⁴⁷ I posit that the work of the CPLO and the Government’s granting of a formal accreditation to the Office has officially formalized the collaboration between the Church and the Ghana Government in the area of good governance in the country. I posit further that through the work of the CPLO, the Catholic Church as part of civil society, now has an important avenue and platform to influence public policy for the common good in the areas of politics, economics, and other issues of social concern, and also to help shape legislative and policy developments in Ghana.⁷⁴⁸ I contend that this will further enhance the Church’s contribution to good governance in Ghana in the years ahead.

In her contributions to the advancement of good governance in Ghana, the Catholic Church in Ghana understands that governance must always aim at the service of authentic integral human development with due respect for the rights and dignity of every human person. Based on this understanding, the Ghanaian Catholic Church works assiduously to ensure that the principles which underpin the practice of good governance, and which promote authentic human development, namely, subsidiarity, the common good, integral humanism and justice, etc., are always upheld in the country. Thus, in reviewing theologically the Catholic Church’s partnership with the State of Ghana on good governance, I contend that the main principles that ground this

developments in the area of public policy and political issues or concerns, policy briefs of analyses of topical issues or policy and policy education to heighten citizens’ awareness about policy and provides information on available opportunities.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁸ Diedong, 17. The bishops have supported Ghana Government’s efforts to end illegal scale mining since the national campaign began in 2018 and today is supporting the “Green Ghana Project” intended to plant 10 million trees annually to protect the environment. I will elaborate further on this in Chapter five of this dissertation.

Church and State collaboration in Ghana are subsidiarity, the common good, integral humanism and justice.

In Ghana, the Catholic Church's approach to good governance in Ghana is one that also aims at and seeks to uphold the principle of *subsidiarity*. The Church thus applies *subsidiarity* as one of the main principles in championing the cause of good governance in the country. I contend that this is so because the Church in Ghana always advocates that good governance must respect the principle of subsidiarity which alerts those in authority to allow certain decisions to be taken at the lower level. I argue that rather than a top-down approach to issues of national importance, the Ghana Church teaches that a bottom-up approach should always be preferred.⁷⁴⁹ Thus, the Church believes that all citizens must be enabled to participate in the governance of the State and therefore supports all efforts aimed at decentralizing governance such as town hall assembly meetings, village durbars, etc.

The second principle with which the Catholic Church in Ghana pursues its advocacy on good governance in the country is the principle of the common good. According to the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, "Good governance wishes and intends to remain at the service of the human being at every level in order to attain the good of all people and of the whole person."⁷⁵⁰ The *Compendium* further teaches that "the common good involves all members of a given society; no one is exempted from cooperating, according to one's possibilities in attaining it through the constant ability and effort to seek the good of others as though it were one's own good."⁷⁵¹ I postulate that in the pursuit of the principle of the common good towards the promotion

⁷⁴⁹ Diedong, 8-9.

⁷⁵⁰ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 165.

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 167.

of good governance in Ghana, the Catholic Church in Ghana operates an open-door policy in regard to her education and health institutions where every Ghanaian, regardless of their religious, political or ethnic backgrounds, can secure or obtain admission to the Church's schools or access to healthcare services at the Church's healthcare facilities everywhere in the country. That is, in terms of the provision of education, healthcare and other socio-economic and development projects, no Ghanaian citizen or resident is discriminated against because the Church operates an open-door policy towards all citizens in these areas. I contend that the Ghana Catholic Church's open-door policy in the provision of these socio-economic amenities is grounded on three fundamental theological principles, namely, *imago Dei* (that is, the teaching that all humanity is created in the image of God), subsidiarity and the common good.

Regarding the principle of *imago Dei*, the Church in Ghana teaches that God created all people in His image and likeness and that it is part of the Church's mission to do all she can to help every Ghanaian citizen to live an existence worthy of someone created in the image of God. In their communique of 1999, the Bishops' Conference articulated this principle in a very clear manner when they taught that, "We believe that man is man precisely because he is spiritual and of flesh at the same time. We consider it our prophetic mission therefore to promote in as far as it is possible, justice, security, peace, education, health care and love in our country for all."⁷⁵² Thus, the Church's mission of integral human development is geared towards all without any discrimination due to the principle of *imago Dei*.

As regards the principle of subsidiarity, the Ghanaian Catholic Church in acknowledging that the Government alone cannot bear the burden of catering for every aspect of the country's socio-

⁷⁵² *Ghana Bishops Speak Volume I* (1999), 55).

economic development, participates fully in the provision of education, healthcare and other socio-economic infrastructure for all so that every citizen has equal opportunity of realizing their integral human development.⁷⁵³

Lastly, in reference to the common good, I contend that the Church's close involvement in the provision of education, healthcare, agriculture, and social welfare, among others, constitutes important ways through which she can contribute her quota to the common good of the people of Ghana so that all citizens can be helped as much as possible to live the dignity and honour with which God created them.⁷⁵⁴

Furthermore, and as alluded to earlier on, the Ghana Catholic Church also collaborates fruitfully with all other Religious Bodies in Ghana, including the Christian Council of Ghana, the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council, the Office of the National Chief Imam, etc., and also with Civil Society Organisations and institutions like the Civic Forum Initiative (CFI), etc., in seeking the common good of the Ghanaian public.⁷⁵⁵ I posit once again that all these collaborations on the part of the Church are geared towards contributing to the overall welfare of all citizens and advocating for the Government to always seek the welfare and common good of all Ghanaians.

The next principle guiding the Church's approach to good governance in Ghana is that of *integral humanism*. Integral humanism teaches that all human beings are creatures of God endowed with divine image and dignity and that each person has equal standing to claim that he or she is to be

⁷⁵³ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁵ The Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference has an annual one-day statutory meeting in May each year with the Christian Council of Ghana (membership includes Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist churches, etc.) and the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council to discuss issues of ecclesial and national importance. Members of the Conference also serve on religious organizations such as the Ghana Conference of Religions for Peace and Civil society organizations such as the Civic Forum Initiative (CFI). The bishops believe that these institutions can serve as important platforms for influencing Government policies for the common good and development of the people and thereby facilitating the practice of good governance in Ghana.

respected.⁷⁵⁶ In his 1967 encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*, Pope Paul VI emphasised that, “Development cannot be limited to mere economic growth. In order to be authentic, it must be complete and integral, that is, it has to promote the good of every person and of the whole person.”⁷⁵⁷ In support of this papal teaching, Diedong argues that the Church in Ghana believes that for good governance to be felt in the country, all economic, cultural, social and political policies must be geared towards enhancing the dignity and integral development of the citizenry.⁷⁵⁸

Diedong argues further that,

Government should not just be concerned with how much the nation is producing; but also, how its people are faring ... The citizen should be gauged by the indexes of satisfaction of material needs, reformed social structures that eliminate oppression, opportunities for learning and appreciating culture, cooperation for the common good and working for peace, acknowledgment of moral values and their transcendent source, the gift of faith and the deepening of unity and love.⁷⁵⁹

Over the course of the years, the Bishops’ Conference has sought to encourage successive Governments of Ghana to work for the integral development of all citizens through the regular issuing of communiques, pastoral statements and other documents addressing relevant issues of both national concerns and importance. In addition, the Conference has held and continues to hold periodic strategic meetings with Governments, Ministers and public officials, Parliamentarians and other national stakeholders to discuss issues of good governance and related matters in Ghana.⁷⁶⁰ Even at times, the voice of the Church’s hierarchy in their communiques and meetings with

⁷⁵⁶ Diedong, 11.

⁷⁵⁷ Pope Paul VI Encyclical, *Populorum Progressio* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1967), 14.

⁷⁵⁸ Diedong, 11.

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁰ In Ghana, the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference holds periodic and strategic meetings with the President, Government Ministers, Members of Parliament, etc., from time to time to discuss issues of grave importance to the country. At some other times too, it is the latter that seek audience with the Bishops’ Conference on issues of great national concern like elections, development projects, peace and conflict resolution, among others.

Government is the only voice that is heard on issues of justice, peace, development and prosperity on behalf of Ghanaians.⁷⁶¹

Beyond communiqués and meetings, I posit that the Church in Ghana also believes that it is part of her prophetic mission to contribute to the integral humanism of Ghanaians by carrying out socio-economic development projects in promoting justice, security, peace and love in the country. Accordingly, in their 1999 communique, the Bishops' Conference said, "We contend that politics is not outside our domain, neither is economics or agriculture, culture or science and technology. They all deal with man, and we are committed to the cause of man in all aspects."⁷⁶² The Conference added that, "For this reason, over the years, we have tried to commit the Church to every sector of the society ... through our deep involvement in formal and informal education, preventive and curative medicine, agriculture, social welfare, etc."⁷⁶³ By undertaking these projects, I contend that the Ghana Church is contributing significantly to the common good and integral humanism of all Ghanaian citizens and helping them as much as possible to live in the dignity and honour with which God has created them.

The fourth and final principle with which the Catholic Church in Ghana advances its commitment to good governance in the country is that of justice. According to Catholic social teaching, justice is defined as fidelity to the demands of a relationship which consists in living up to the demands

⁷⁶¹ *Ghana Bishops Speak Volume I*, 62-63.

⁷⁶² *Ghana Bishops Speak Volume I*, 55.

⁷⁶³ *Ibid.*, 55-56. Current statistics show that in terms of healthcare, the Catholic Church in Ghana operates over 40 hospitals and 100 clinics, 11 Healthcare Training Institutions (this) plus other specialist facilities. In terms of education, the Church runs more than 60 Senior High Schools, 61 Vocational and Technical Schools, 15 Colleges of Education, five University colleges and over 1,300 kindergartens, 2,020 Primary Schools, 957 Junior High Schools (JHS), making the Church second only to the Government in the provision of education in Ghana. Besides these, she owns plantations, orphanages, retreat centers, seminaries, etc. For more information on these statistics, see, Ghana Catholic Bishops Conference. *Catholic Diary and Directory*. Accra: Catholic Book Center, 2020. See also Damien Avevor, *Strengthening Church-State Partnership in Education*, 8. Information accessed online at <https://www.modernghana.com/news/415646/strengthening-church-state-partnership-in-education.html>, on June 17, 2021.

of one's relationship with God and neighbour and giving to each person what is due them. In the New Testament, Jesus sums up the requirement of justice as love of God and neighbour (Mk. 12:28-34; cf. Deut. 6:4-5; Lev. 19:18) and he also invites all his followers to take the side of the poor, to fight for their liberation and advocate justice to be done to them just as he came to do justice for all (Lk. 4:16-20; Matt. 25:31-45).⁷⁶⁴

Following the above understanding of justice, the Church's Social Doctrine teaches that governments have a right to exist only to the extent that they ensure that justice is done for all people, but most especially the weak and vulnerable members of society. For instance, in their 1986 Pastoral Letter, *Economic Justice for All*, the United States Bishops' Conference summarized Catholic teaching on government as follows: "the teachings of the Church insist that government has a moral function, namely, protecting human rights and securing basic justice for all members of the commonwealth."⁷⁶⁵ The US bishops added that, "While all people have responsibility for the common good, the government's special role is to guarantee the minimum conditions for rich social activity, namely, human rights and justice."⁷⁶⁶ Thus, for the US bishops, the primary responsibility of governments is that of securing human rights and justice for all in the absence of which no government has a right to exist. Articulating this teaching further, Jeffrey Mirus also postulated that, "It falls to government to secure justice, that is, to be a public power which protects the basic personal and property rights of its citizens. This is needed to protect those who are weaker against those who are strong enough to trample down on their rights. The basics of peace and

⁷⁶⁴ Tisha M. Rajendra, *Migrants and Citizens: Justice and Responsibility in the Ethics of Immigration* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 111.

⁷⁶⁵ US Bishops Conference, 1986 Pastoral Letter, *Economic Justice for All*, 122-123.

⁷⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 123. Also, John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris* (Vatican, 1963), PT # 60-62.

justice are required of any government which wishes to retain its claim to legitimacy.”⁷⁶⁷ To sum up on the use of the principle of justice, I reiterate that the Catholic Church in Ghana teaches that the securing justice for all citizens is a core function of every government because it is through justice that fundamental human rights are safeguarded by the State and the needs of its vulnerable members are catered for. Therefore, the Church always reminds the Government about this principle in advocating good governance in Ghana.

In support of the above teachings, I argue that Diedong is right when he posits that justice is an indispensable block for good governance and that in order to ensure the growth of a truly human community among the citizens of any nation, the government must ensure justice for all.⁷⁶⁸ Thus, in the effort to ensure justice for all, the government is duty-bound to honour the set of rights listed out in the Social Teachings of the Church. These rights include the right to live in a united family and in a moral environment conducive to the growth of the child’s personality, the right to work and make wise use of the earth’s material resources, the right to freely establish a family and to have to rear children through the responsible exercise of one’s sexuality, the right to religious freedom, etc.⁷⁶⁹

In applying the principle of justice in Ghana, I argue that through their communiqués and other pastoral statements, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference has regularly spoken about the need for the Ghana Government to uphold the principle of justice in governance, including the need to respect human rights and to guard against abuses against the environment. For example, in their 1999 communique, the Bishops’ Conference addressed the need for justice (and peace), the eradication

⁷⁶⁷ Jeffrey Mirus, *What is the Purpose of Government*, pages 1-2, accessed online at <https://www.catholicculture.org/commentary/What-is-purpose-government/> on August 25, 2021. Mirus’ teachings reflect Benedict’s teaching that the building of a just social order belongs to governments. See AM # 21.

⁷⁶⁸ Diedong, 12.

⁷⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

of poverty, the protection of the family, the aged, women, children, youth, education, media freedom and proper international relations, among other issues.⁷⁷⁰ I argue further that an in-depth review of the contents of the bishops' communiques over the years from 1965 to date further reveals that several of the contents of these communiques have dealt with the issues of justice, relating it to education, healthcare, service to the poor, peace and care of the environment, etc. Based on this, I posit that the Church's commitment to justice in Ghana is unquestionable.

In reviewing the Catholic Church's efforts in promoting good governance in Ghana, I posit that these efforts are in line with Catholic social teaching and have helped deepen the practice of good governance and democracy in Ghana. But at the same time, I contend that there are four significant challenges. Firstly, I argue that the top-down approach whereby it is almost always the members of the Bishops' Conference who write and or speak for and on behalf of the Church to address issues of good governance in Ghana seems to be overly clerical, and simply speaking, ineffective. This is because this approach gives the impression to the clergy, religious and laity that they should always wait for the Bishops' Conference as a body or individual bishops to write and or speak on every governance issue that comes up in Ghana before they do so. The consequence of this is that these other members of the Church have tended to become spectators rather than citizens who are actively involved in issues affecting good governance in Ghana and who ought to exercise their rights by speaking about governance issues in the country.

In order to address this challenge, I propose that the Bishops' Conference should encourage all members of the clergy, religious and laity to be more proactive and interested in issues relating to good governance in Ghana. One of the ways to achieve this is for the Conference to encourage and

⁷⁷⁰ *Ghana Bishops Speak, Volume II*, 59-67.

help the clergy, religious and laity to learn more about the Church's Social Doctrine, especially those relating to issues of social justice and good governance. Another way will also be to encourage the clergy, religious and laity to be abreast of and interested in the documents issued by the Conference on good governance issues and also collaborate with such State institutions like the NCCE, CHRAJ, Information Services Department (ISD), etc., in championing the cause of good governance, particularly at the local levels. I contend that by encouraging the clergy, religious and laity to learn more about the Church's Social Doctrine and show more interest in issues of good governance in Ghana, the Church in Ghana would be much more effective and efficient in her role of promoting good governance in the country more than the current situation where almost every issue relating to good governance is left solely to the Bishops' Conference to deal with.

The second challenge is that the Bishops' Conference's approach to issues of good governance in Ghana seems to rely too heavily on the preparation and issuing of communiques and other pastoral documents. While arguing that this approach is not bad in itself within the context of the vibrant media landscape of present-day Ghana where issues of governance are frequently taken up, discussed and publicized in the media, I contend at the same time that there are at least three factors that militate against this approach. The first one is that this approach is very much one-sided, namely, the bishops writing communiqués. Thus, the approach does not encourage the full participation and cooperation of the other members of the Church, particularly the laity, in contributing ideas to the Church's hierarchy in addressing issues of good governance in Ghana.

The low and or limited laity participation in helping the Church to address issues of good governance in Ghana has been acknowledged by the Bishops' Conference itself over the years. For example, during their Plenary Assembly in 2015, the Conference among others called for the intensification of the formation and education of the laity in Ghana to enable them to play their

role in the Church and in advancing the cause of good governance in the country.⁷⁷¹ In that year's communique, titled *The Laity in the Context of the New Evangelization*, the Bishops' Conference taught that, "The Church is not truly established and does not fully live, nor is it a perfect sign of Christ unless there is a genuine laity existing and working alongside the hierarchy (AG 21). That is why we call on the laity to show active support for the teachings, especially on temporal matters which is their proper domain."⁷⁷² Besides, while acknowledging that Catholics in Ghana today needed adequate instruction in the faith, the bishops postulated that,

It seems that the parish and our institutions are unable to do enough generally speaking to promote the faith, theological formation and deepening of the spirituality of the laity. Many of the faithful fail to make themselves available for these instructions in their respective parishes and institutions where these formation programmes are available.⁷⁷³

To help address the above-mentioned challenge, the bishops articulated that the laity in Ghana needed a significant spiritual and doctrinal formation and a better understanding of the Church's social teaching. According to them, "There is (therefore) the urgent need for a well-organised formation and education programme to meet the needs of the Lay Faithful."⁷⁷⁴

I posit that the bishops' statement above attests to the reality of the low participation and involvement of the Ghanaian Catholic lay faithful in good governance issues in Ghana, a reality which has similarly been acknowledged by other members of the Church, including the clergy.⁷⁷⁵

⁷⁷¹ In 2015, the Bishops' Conference devoted their annual Plenary Assembly to addressing issues relating to the vocation and mission of the laity in Ghana. For more, see *Ghana Catholic Bishops Speak Volume III*, 159-174.

⁷⁷² *Ghana Catholic Bishops Speak Volume III*, 160.

⁷⁷³ *Ibid.*, 161-162.

⁷⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 161-162.

⁷⁷⁵ Apart from the Bishops' Conference itself, some other members of the Church people have lamented the low participation of the laity in the Church's work in promoting good governance in Ghana. For instance, speaking at the 2017 Accra Archdiocesan Laity Easter Seminar, Simon K. Appiah, a Catholic priest-theologian and university professor, asked the laity to participate more fully and actively in the ministry of the Church and her priests and to allow themselves to be formed for this role. To do this effectively, he entreated the laity to make the effort to participate fully in Laity formation programmes to enhance their faith and to read and learn more about the teachings of the Church on doctrinal and social issues. Information accessed online at <https://secam.org/laity-in-ghana-urged-to-intensify-active-participation-in-church-activities>, on August 8, 2021.

There is thus the need to encourage more laity participation in addressing issues of good governance in Ghana through an effective programme of laity formation and education as suggested by the bishops above. I argue that one of the most effective ways to carry out this formation and education of the laity is to teach the laity and help them to understand that they are called to play an active role and mission in transforming the temporal order according to the values of the Kingdom of God such as love, justice and peace. Another way to do this is to train, support and motivate the laity to live by and apply the Catholic social teaching in their political, economic, business and social concerns in Ghana. I opine that by helping the Ghanaian Catholic laity to live their mission in this way will be in line with the teachings of Pope John Paul II who taught that, “Lay people are called in the Church to seek the plan of God by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering them to the plan of God.”⁷⁷⁶ Thus, in collaboration with the clergy and religious, the Bishops’ Conference should encourage and support the Church’s laity to pursue and demand social justice and the common good in Ghana.

The next challenge I see with the practice of issuing communiques, pastoral letters and memoranda to address issues of good governance and other relevant national issues is that this practice more often than not does not make the necessary impact or elicit the necessary positive response from the other members of the Church as intended by the bishops. This is because many of the clergy, religious and lay faithful are either not interested in these documents or are simply not bothered about what is emanating from the Bishops’ Conference. The reasons for this apathy or lack of interest are two-fold. One, some are of the opinion that the Bishops’ Conference should concern itself much more with purely “pastoral” issues and less with political and governance issues. Two, some also are of the view that the bishops’ communiques are often too lengthy, addressing too

⁷⁷⁶ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Christifidelis Laici* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998), no. 15.

many issues at the same time and that they simply do not have the time to read such lengthy scripts.⁷⁷⁷ These and some other reasons consequently do not help the communiqués of the Bishops' Conference to achieve their intended results or to make the expected impact of energizing the laity to support the Church's efforts at promoting good governance in Ghana.

To help address this challenge above, I postulate that one of the ways through which the Bishops' Conference can help all dioceses, parishes, priests, religious and laity to show a bit more interest in what the latter is saying in their communiqués and pastoral statements on good governance is to encourage the discussion of these documents at diocesan and parish seminars, workshops and other such fora after the communiqués have been issued. During these events, I propose that representatives of Government institutions which are mandated to deal with governance issues such as CHRAJ and NCCE among others could be invited to participate and share ideas. Another way of encouraging interest in the bishops' communiqués is that priests especially should be encouraged to include summaries of the contents of these communiqués in their homilies or sermons or otherwise, such summaries could be read separately on the Sundays following the publication of these communiqués. In addition, Church bulletins, websites, brochures, etc., could be asked to publish these documents or their summaries to enable many more members of the Church to have access to them and be abreast with their contents. I argue that the adoption of all or some of these measures will encourage a much more fruitful and active participation of the laity in the Bishops' Conference's work in promoting good governance in Ghana.

⁷⁷⁷ I worked with the Bishops' Conference as the Assistant Secretary General for five years between 2011 and 2016, and so I know from experience that most parishes and churches do not publicise the bishops' communiques while many priests, religious and laity do not show any interest in what the bishops have to say let alone publicise the bishops' comments on national issues. I argue that this lack of interest has to change quickly if the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference hopes to influence good governance in more successful ways in the years ahead.

The next and final reason regarding the ineffectiveness of the Bishops' Conference's approach to good governance in Ghana through the preparation and diffusion of communiques and other pastoral statements is that this approach often tends to exclude other practical approaches that could be adopted to pursue the same goal, such as collaboration with other Religious Bodies, Civil Society Organisations, policy think tanks and other stakeholders in advocating and promoting good governance in Ghana. Although I concede that there have been and still are some levels of bishops' engagement and collaboration with several of these above-mentioned bodies in addressing issues of good governance in Ghana,⁷⁷⁸ I nonetheless posit that such collaborations are often very few and far between, occurring mostly during periods of elections in Ghana which happen every four years. Thus, I contend that the Church in Ghana can do with a more enhanced collaboration with some of these bodies mentioned above on matters concerning good governance in Ghana in a more frequent manner than is currently the case to guarantee better results and impact.

The third challenge with regard to the Catholic Church's promotion of good governance in Ghana worth mentioning is that sometimes, some of the offices set up by the Bishops' Conference at both the national and diocesan levels to facilitate and promote the Church's efforts at advancing good governance are challenged in terms of staffing and logistics, that is, the needed trained personnel as well as resources, are often unavailable or else, inadequate. Consequently, such offices become ineffective in carrying out their responsibilities. Based on this, I argue that there is the urgent need for the Bishops' Conference to strongly support the start-up operations of such national offices like the Directorate for Justice and Good Governance, the Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Office,

⁷⁷⁸ The Catholic Bishops' Conference meets with the Christian Council of Ghana and the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council once a year in May to discuss both Church and national issues, and also occasionally when important national issues needing urgent attention crop up. The Conference also meets with CSOs, NGOs, policy think tanks, etc., when the bishops need further and better information and education on national socio-economic issues. I argue that these engagements are fruitful and need to be intensified more in advancing good governance in Ghana.

Caritas-Ghana, etc., to enable them to meet the expectations of the Church and the bishops in their work of promoting the practice of good governance in Ghana. Similarly, at the local level of dioceses and parishes where offices such as the Justice and Peace Commissions are mostly understaffed and underfunded, I suggest that dioceses and parishes should take the necessary steps to resource and revitalize these offices so that they can also continue to support and advance the Church's crucial work of promoting good governance in Ghana, particularly at the local level.⁷⁷⁹

The fourth and final challenge worth articulating here is that the Church's collaboration with the State in the promotion of good governance in Ghana suffers from occasional criticisms, and sometimes, strong vitriolic verbal attacks from the political elite in both ruling Governments and opposition parties in Ghana. These occur particularly when the Church's hierarchy dares to criticize certain policies being pursued by Government or certain positions taken by opposition parties on national issues and other issues of public interest. Thus, both in the past and even in the present, some politicians and political parties as well as their supporters from the camps of both Government and opposition parties alike have sometimes accused the Church of meddling in politics and told the Church to mind her own business by concentrating on her core mandate of preaching the gospel instead of "doing politics." For example, in 2012, Mr. Johnson Asiedu Nketsiah, then General Secretary of the ruling Government, said that the Christian Church in Ghana should take its Bible and the State its laws. He said this after the General Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana had issued a communiqué requesting Ghana's Electoral Commission to suspend all plans for creating forty-five new constituencies for the elections scheduled later that year.⁷⁸⁰ According to him, by issuing such a statement, the Church was

⁷⁷⁹ Diedong, 18.

⁷⁸⁰ Accessed online at myjoyonline.com/former-presbyterian-moderator-calls-for-ceasefire/#! on August 24, 2021.

engaging itself in politics and also doing the bidding of the opposition party, and therefore she should be called out for straying too far away into a territory which is not the Church's domain.⁷⁸¹

Similarly, in 2016, Mr. Samuel Koku Anyidoho, the Deputy General Secretary of the same ruling party, described the members of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference as "homosexuals" and "the Pharisees and Sadducees of our time" after the Bishops' Conference had issued a press statement to criticize the ruling Government and denounce its unilateral decision to host two former Guantanamo Bay prisoners in the country. Calling on the bishops to remove their cassocks and join politicians to carry out their political activities, Mr. Anyidoho threatened to insult the bishops even more should they continue to criticize the Government on the latter's decision to host the two former detainees in the country.⁷⁸²

My position in regard to the above challenge relating to the Church's involvement in Ghana's political discourses and issues of good governance in general is that while the Church in Ghana cannot in any way engage herself in partisan politics or actively support one regime against the other, the Church at the same time ought not shirk her God-given mandate, but as Benedict XVI teaches, the Church should continue "to help build up the (Ghanaian) society in cooperation with government authorities as well as public and private institutions engaged in building up the common good."⁷⁸³ Therefore, I opine that the Church in Ghana should never be afraid to continue

⁷⁸¹ Ibid.

⁷⁸² The two former Guantanamo Bay prisoners, Mahmud Umar Muhammed Bin Atef and Khalid Muhammad Salih Al-Dhuby, were accepted into the country in early January 2016. The Bishops' Conference, other Religious Bodies and several individuals and groups feeling that their presence in Ghana posed security threat plus the fact that Government failed to seek Parliamentary approval prior to their resettlement in the country, spoke to criticize the Government's decision. Mr. Anyidoho questioned why the Religious Bodies were up in arms against the Government's decision to accept the two Yemeni citizens since the Government stated that they posed no threat to the country. Information accessed online at peacefmonline.com/pages/politics/politics/201601/266594.php, on August 24, 2021.

⁷⁸³ Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, 81.

to speak out on all national issues in her quest to promote the common good and deepen the practice of good governance in Ghana. On the contrary, and regardless of the occasional criticisms and verbal attacks from some members of the political class in Ghana, I posit that the Church should continue her mission of preaching the gospel of salvation in advancing the principles of Kingdom of God in Ghana, a mission which I argue includes that of promoting the practice of good governance in the country.

In summing up my review of the Church and State collaboration on good governance in Ghana, I posit that the Catholic Church in Ghana applies the principles of subsidiarity, the common good, integral humanism and justice in her pursuit of good governance in Ghana. To enable the Church to become even more effective in her contributions to good governance in Ghana while applying these four theological principles, I opine that it is important that the Church's institutions mandated with this responsibility, notably the CPLO and Diocesan and Parish Justice and Peace offices, are well resourced to propagate the Church's message of good governance in the country. On the whole, I argue that the Church cannot sit unconcerned about the common good and integral development of the people of Ghana without failing in her divine mandate to help promote good governance in the country. Thus, I contend that the Church must continuously carry out her mission of evangelization in Ghana while collaborating with Ghana's Governments in promoting good governance in the country. Yet, at the same time, I caution that in undertaking this mission, the Church in Ghana must always be mindful of the fact that her task is not to engage in partisan politics or to replace politics or even to offer technical solutions to the various political and socio-economic issues facing Ghana. Rather, as a religious body, the Church's task is to act always in accordance with her gospel mandate "to build up society with government authorities and public

and private institutions that are engaged in building up the common good.”⁷⁸⁴ Consequently, I posit that the Church should not tire or be afraid of announcing the gospel or be deterred by occasional criticisms and other challenges, and whether welcome or unwelcome, she should continue to collaborate with the Ghana Government to promote good governance in Ghana while all the time, taking the necessary precautions never to get tainted with partisan politics in Ghana.

4.3 Brief Evaluation of Church and State Partnership in Education in Ghana

Historically speaking, from the turn of the twentieth century till today, the Catholic Church in Ghana has contributed greatly to both rural and urban education in Ghana by establishing schools and colleges across the country. From the early 1940s, the Catholic Church and the State of Ghana began to establish some form of relationship in the promotion of pre-tertiary education in the country, a relationship which has since then led to the rapid expansion and high degree of quality education in Ghana.⁷⁸⁵ In the current existing Church and State partnership in education in Ghana, Managers of Catholic (and other Christian) Education Units collaborate with District and Regional Directors of Education of the Ghana Government for the smooth running of Church-based schools in the public system. Also, the recruitment of school administrators, managers and school staff are done by the Boards of the Church-run schools while the Government provides infrastructure and pays the salaries of the school staff. This arrangement leaves the administration and management of the schools mostly in the hands of the Church which runs her schools according to the Church’s Christian ethos and principles.

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁵ Damien Avevor, *Strengthening Church-State Partnership in Education*, 12. Information accessed online at <https://www.modernghana.com/news/415646/strengthening-church-state-partnership-in-education.html>, on June 17, 2021.

In her collaboration with the State in the provision of education, the Catholic Church in Ghana believes that she has the right to provide education at all levels to all Ghanaians, particularly to those who desire to be educated according to the ethos and principles which guide the Church's Christian education. Accordingly, in the Bishops' Conference's communiqué of 2005, the bishops in articulating the role and contribution of the Catholic Church to education in Ghana, posited that,

the Church has to provide for its children an education by virtue of which their whole life will be inspired by the spirit of Christ. In the exercise of the functions in education, the Church is appreciative of every means that may be of service, but it relies especially on those which are essentially its own. Among the various organs of education, the school is of outstanding importance. The Church therefore has the right and the obligation to own schools so that parents who so wish may have the fullest liberty to choose Church schools for their children. The public authority whose duty it is to protect and defend the liberty of the citizens is bound according to the principles of distributive justice, to ensure that public subsidies to schools are so allocated that parents are truly free to select schools for their children in accordance with their conscience.⁷⁸⁶

With the above understanding, the Catholic Church in Ghana has sought to pursue the provision of education in the country in close partnership with Government for the benefit of all Ghanaian citizens since the 1940s. But unfortunately, because no formal partnership agreement and or policy document has ever been signed between the Church and the Government to guide this area of education management in the country all this while, the Church and State partnership in education in Ghana has often been beset with many teething challenges, including misunderstanding, confusion and lack of information on education policy issues, administrative bottlenecks, unhealthy bureaucratic practices and occasional political interferences in school administration and management, among others.⁷⁸⁷ As a result of these and other challenges within the Church and State collaboration in education in Ghana due principally to the absence of a signed policy

⁷⁸⁶ *Ghana Catholic Bishops' Speak, Volume III*, 5. Speaking on the Church's role in education, the Conference made references to Vatican Council II's Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, paragraph 6 to emphasize that the Church's role in education is part of the Church's mission aimed at integral human development.

⁷⁸⁷ Damien Aveyor, *Strengthening Church and State Partnership in Education*, 13-14.

document to regulate the partnership, the Catholic Bishops' Conference has consistently criticized the lackluster attitude of all successive Governments towards the signing of an official agreement to formalize this partnership. At the same time, she has often lamented the efforts of various successive Governments to sideline the Church on educational matters over the years.

Beginning from the 1980s till date, the Bishops' Conference has issued one communiqué after another insisting on the need for the Ghana Government to acknowledge the Church's partnership role in education management in the country and thereby involve her more in all education policy issues. For instance, in their 1980 communiqué, the Bishops' Conference said, "The Conference pleads for continued cordial relations between the Government and the Denominations on the basis of consultation, especially in areas where denominational principles cannot be compromised without the Denomination losing the *raison d'être* of their mission in our society ... the (Catholic) Church and other Religious Bodies ... need to continue the useful role that they have played in the field of Education in the country."⁷⁸⁸

Similarly, the Bishops' Conference in their 1984 communiqué mentioned the lack of a signed agreement on Church and State partnership in education and lamented how this was affecting quality education delivery in the country. Here, the bishops said, "We renew our appeal to get Religious Bodies involved more meaningfully in the education of our children. The problems with our Education System are more than those of finance and management ... We would hope that the Church and other competent religious bodies would be given full scope and freedom to play their natural role in handling the children for the nation. This involves the right to open, own and run schools in addition to those we already have."⁷⁸⁹

⁷⁸⁸ *Ghana Bishops' Speak, Volume I*, 161.

⁷⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

In their communiqué for 1994, the Bishops' Conference repeated similar sentiments as alluded to above when they postulated that,

We feel it our duty to point out that the diminishing influence of the Church in education is partly the cause of disillusionment of the present-day youth ... we are saddened to note that the management of schools by Church Units is completely left out in the whole exercise of decentralization being rolled out by Government. We call on the Government to reverse the visible trend of exclusion of the Christian Churches from education so that the Church can continue to play her part in this vital area and parents may be enabled to exercise their God-given right to choose the type of education they want for their children.⁷⁹⁰

From these statements above, I contend that it is evident that the Bishops' Conference believes that the lack of a signed document to regulate the Church's partnership with the State in education delivery and management is leading to their exclusion from education matters and hampering their contribution to the country's education and therefore, there is the need to rectify this situation.

It is important to note that in 1999, important major steps were taken by both the Church and the State to finally have a written down agreement on the Church and State partnership in education in Ghana to be signed by both parties. These steps culminated in the writing of an official letter by Mr. Ekwow Spio-Garbrah, then Ghana's Minister of Education, spelling out in considerable detail, the roles and responsibilities of the two bodies in the education partnership agreement. Unfortunately, this official letter from the Education Minister was not recognized as an "official" national policy document guiding Church and State partnership in education in Ghana a few years after he left office.⁷⁹¹ Thus, even though the collaboration between the Church and the State in

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid. From the 1990s till date, almost every single communiqué of the Bishops' Conference has addressed the lack of a signed policy agreement to regulate the Church's partnership with Government on education management in the country and the numerous challenges inherent thereof. Particular references can be made to the bishops' communiques of 1993 and 1995 in *Ghana Bishops Speak Volume I* and all communiques from 1997 to 2006 in *Ghana Catholic Bishops Speak Volume II*.

⁷⁹¹ Damien Avevor, 12, The letter of Mr. Ekwow Spio-Garbrah was titled, *The Right of Educational Units to Manage and Supervise Educational Institutions Established and Developed by their Respective Religious Bodies in Partnership with Government*, and was issued at the Ministry of Education Office, Accra, October 13, 1999.

education in Ghana continues to be guided essentially by the contents of this letter, the lack of its recognition as an official policy document on the Church and State partnership in education in Ghana has led to the situation where successive Governments have treated this partnership agreement in ways pleasing to them. Consequently, there persists as of today serious challenges relating to the Church and State partnership in education management in Ghana, resulting in weak collaboration and poor monitoring and supervision of pre-tertiary education in the country.⁷⁹²

Theologically speaking, I argue that there are three main factors accounting for the failure of Government to sign up to a partnership document to guide the Church's collaboration with her in education management in Ghana. First and foremost, I contend that the philosophy or ideology with which the Government approaches education in Ghana is different from that of the Catholic Church. I say this because while "Catholic schools are inspired by a supernatural vision, namely, to give students a formation that will make them good citizens of their country and the world while loving God and neighbour, the Government on the other hand, perceives education principally as an instrument for the acquisition of skills and knowledge for future employment and good standard of living."⁷⁹³ Consequently, it is seen that the model of education and style of instruction that the Church provides which includes education in prayer, spirituality and morality, and so on, more often than not differs from what the Government wants to offer in our schools. It is no wonder that this situation sometimes leads to clashes between the Church and Government in education delivery in Ghana. For example, in 2007, the Government of Ghana decided to do away with the

⁷⁹² Ibid., 13-14. Apart from weak collaboration and supervision of schools, other challenges include careless statements, ad hoc and sporadic measures and replacement of national educational interests with partisan manifesto agendas. The Bishops' Conference has raised these issues, particularly in their 2000, 2001, 2004, 2005, 2015, 2016 and 2018 communiques. Interestingly, although the manifesto of the ruling Government contains a promise to sign a policy agreement with Religious Bodies on education, as of today, there is no indication whatsoever that this is likely to be done in the near future, adding to the frustration of Churches in regard to their stake in education in Ghana.

⁷⁹³ Fosuaba Mensah Banahene, "Catholic Schools and Education in Ghana: Do We Have Catholic Schools in Ghana?", published in *Daily Graphic* (October 2013), pages 2, 5.

teaching of Religious and Moral Education (RME) in all schools, including those owned by the Church. This decision did not go down with the Bishops' Conference prompting the bishops to issue a strongly worded Press Statement directing all heads of the Church's schools in Ghana to make the teaching of RME compulsory at all levels and to begin classes every day with the teaching of RME. This move prompted the Government to retract her earlier directive.⁷⁹⁴

Secondly, I contend that owing to the fact that the Government adds to the infrastructural base of the Church's mission schools and also pays the salaries, remuneration and allowances of teachers and other staff of the mission schools, the Government assumes that it has the right to control or direct how Church schools should be run by her educational policies which the Church should only follow wholeheartedly and not question.⁷⁹⁵ This situation also often leads to occasional misunderstanding and clashes between the Church and the State on the educational front in Ghana.

Thirdly, we also have the challenge posed by power dynamics and interplay in education management in Ghana. That is, more often than not, Regional and District Directors of Education on the side of Government clash and compete with Educational Managers on the side of the Church for control over the administration of mission schools and authority on how best to implement Government educational policies at the various levels of education in the country. Invariably, these Directors are the ones who continue to frustrate the signing of any policy agreement that would formalize the Church and State partnership in education in Ghana for fear of losing some or all of their power and control. Speaking this issue of roles and power dynamics involving Regional

⁷⁹⁴ The Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference issued the Press Statement on the Teaching of Religious and Moral Education in Schools at a Press Conference held in Kumasi in 2007. For more, see <https://myjoyonline.com/on-religious-education-catholic-laity-support-bishops>, accessed online on August 26, 2021.

⁷⁹⁵ Banahene, *Catholic Schools and Education in Ghana*, 5-6.

Managers of Mission schools and District Directors of Education in 2006, Mr. Michael Nsowah, a former Acting Director of the Ghana Education Service (GES), said,

The partnership between the Ghana Education Service and the Religious Bodies will have to be reviewed. There is the need for adjustments. The functions of the District Directors of Education on one hand and those of Unit Managers on the other hand need to be redefined. When these steps are taken, it will remove all areas of overlapping duties which have often brought about strained relationships between District Directors and some Regional Managers.⁷⁹⁶

From these pieces of evidence above, I contend that there is more than sufficient evidence to show that the lack of a formal policy document to formalize the Church's partnership with the Ghana Government in education management and the latter's lack of cooperation, support and seriousness in getting a formal policy document approved and signed to regulate and guide this education partnership in particular, is largely responsible for the serious challenges bedeviling the Church and State partnership in education in Ghana today. Thus, I contend that in order to tackle these challenges named above so as to improve monitoring, supervision and quality of education in Ghana, the time has come for the Government, first and foremost, to give the right recognition and acknowledgement to the Bishops' Conference and other Religious Bodies as major stakeholders in education management in Ghana, and secondly, to resume urgently the necessary processes and engagements that will lead finally to a written down and signed policy document to regulate the Church and State partnership in education in the country.

In summing up on the discussions on the Church's education partnership with the State, I posit that I am in full support of the Bishops' Conference's repeated calls for a signed policy document to guide the Church's education partnership with the State because I believe that the current unfortunate situation of lack of a formal policy document to guide this partnership continues to

⁷⁹⁶ Damien Aveyor, *Strengthening Church and State Partnership in Education*, 10.

hamper quality education delivery in Ghana in terms of lack of supervision, weak controls and poor management in schools, among others. I therefore opine that all efforts must be made, but particularly on the part of Government, to expedite the necessary actions towards the penning down and signing of an official partnership agreement with the Church on education management in Ghana so that these two bodies can continue to collaborate more meaningfully and fruitfully in providing quality, affordable and accessible formal education to all Ghanaian citizens, especially at the pre-tertiary level. I contend that this move will strengthen further the existing cordial relationship between the Church and the State of Ghana in the two other areas of healthcare and good governance and also bode well for the new model of collaboration which I am proposing in this work, namely, Church and State partnership in environmental care in Ghana.

4.4 Conclusion

In concluding my review of the three existing historical collaborations between the Ghana Catholic Church and the State of Ghana in healthcare, good governance, and education, I am of the opinion that despite the challenges inherent in these above-mentioned existing collaborations between the Church and the State, Ghana and the citizens of Ghana are the greatest beneficiaries of these existing historical Church and State collaborations. This is because of the fact that these collaborations have contributed greatly to promoting the common good and integral development of the people of Ghana. Thus, I am convinced that it is worth the while for the Ghana Catholic Church and the State of Ghana to continue to collaborate on all these areas and other future areas of collaboration to enhance further the common good and integral development of all Ghanaians. It is based on this same conviction that I am arguing in this work that the time has come for the Church and the State to consider as a matter of urgency, another important area for collaboration, namely, the care of the environment in Ghana. Thus, in the context of the current global attention

and focus on the need to care for and save the earth, our common home,⁷⁹⁷ I contend that the time is more than ripe for the Catholic Church in Ghana to collaborate with the Government of Ghana in the care of the environment. I contend further that this new proposed model of Church and State collaboration in the care of the environment in Ghana which I am advocating in this work, will help Ghana greatly in dealing much more effectively with both her current and future ecological challenges. The theological principles which I am suggesting in this work to guide the above collaboration are the common good, stewardship, solidarity, care of creation and integral ecology, In Chapter five, the next chapter of this dissertation, I shall discuss in greater detail the contents of this Church and State collaboration in the care of the environment in Ghana which I am proposing in this work. These contents which are four policy initiatives covering the Church and State collaboration on the care of the environment, are the annual celebration of *Africa Environment Day*, the observance of a monthly National Sanitation Day (NSD), an annual *Arbor Week* celebration and an annual *World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation* celebration. In addition, Chapter five shall contain some useful recommendations on how this proposed collaboration can be publicized and enacted into law as a national policy to ensure their success and sustainability.

⁷⁹⁷ See LS # 1-2, 13-14.

CHAPTER FIVE

BUILDING A NEW MODEL OF CHURCH-STATE COLLABORATION IN THE CARE OF THE ENVIRONMENT IN GHANA: PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the world today, there is very little doubt regarding the reality that the planet Earth is faced with a serious environmental crisis. As has been established already, especially in Chapters one and two of this work, the signs of the serious environmental crisis in today's world include among others the pollution of air, water and soil, rising sea levels, melting snow caps, deforestation, desertification, loss of natural habitats and biodiversity and increased competition for dwindling and limited resources.⁷⁹⁸ Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator affirms the reality of the global ecological crisis in our world today when he posits that “there are multiple signs of the environmental crisis in the world and consequences that demonstrate human ecological transgressions.”⁷⁹⁹ Pope Francis also argues that as a result of the damages that human beings are causing to the environment across the world today, “The earth our common home is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth.”⁸⁰⁰ Thus, there is more than enough evidence to support the argument that serious ecological crisis is happening across the globe, a situation which calls for concerted efforts of all people on earth to tackle and resolve as the current pope has urged us to do in his encyclical, *Laudato Si'*.⁸⁰¹

⁷⁹⁸ Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, *Religion and Faith in Africa: Confessions of an Animist* (New York: Orbis Books, 2018), 107.

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁰ LS # 21. In the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis articulates in a very extensive and profound way the current global ecological crisis. Refer especially to Chapter 1 of this work. In his book, *Religion and Faith in Africa: Confessions of an Animist*, Orobator reviews the pope's encyclical, and posits that when Pope Francis says that we are hurting the earth, he is right even though he is not a scientist. Orobator quotes the Report of the Lancet Commission on Population and Health which stated that pollution of the air, water and soil and in workplaces is the largest cause of diseases and death in the world currently, and that in addition to death, the economic cost from environmental damage runs into millions of dollars. See also Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator, *Religion and Faith in Africa: The Confessions of an Animist* (New York: Orbis Books, 2018), 107-108.

⁸⁰¹ LS # 3, 14. Pope Francis argues in his encyclical that since the environmental challenges affect all, all must be part of the dialogue and conversation on finding common solutions to address them.

In this final chapter of my work, I shall examine four of the major environmental challenges facing Ghana and the role of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in addressing these challenges.⁸⁰² Flowing from this examination, I shall postulate that despite the efforts of the Government of Ghana and her agencies and institutions in dealing with these environmental challenges, the State has not succeeded in effectively resolving these ecological crises facing the country. Based on this position, I shall argue that the Government needs the support of all individuals and groups, including Civil Society Organisations, Faith-Based Organisations like the Catholic Church, and other stakeholders to help her deal effectively with the environmental crises in Ghana. In particular, I shall postulate that as an established religious body in the country, the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference has the institutions, the organisational structure, the resource capacity and moral credibility to collaborate with the Ghanaian Government in the campaign on the care of the environment in Ghana. Based on this position, I shall propose that just as there are existing historical collaborations between the Church and the State in the areas of healthcare, good governance and education in Ghana as discussed in the previous chapter of this work,⁸⁰³ there should also be a close collaboration between the Church and the State in the care of the environment. I shall posit that this new model of Church and State collaboration in the care of the environment is the best way forward for addressing the current environmental crisis facing Ghana.

Additionally, in articulating my proposal for a new model of Church and State collaboration in the care of the environment in Ghana, I shall postulate that this collaboration should follow a well-

⁸⁰² The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the Government of Ghana institution responsible for the protection and management of the environment in Ghana. Its mandate includes among others to co-manage, protect and enhance the country's environment and seek common solutions to global environmental problems. See Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology, *EPA Strategic Plan 2011-2015* (Accra: Ministries: Assembly Press, 2011), vii, 1-4.

⁸⁰³ In Chapter four of this work, I have examined the current existing partnerships between the Catholic Church and the State of Ghana in some considerable detail. These partnerships in the areas of healthcare delivery, education management and good governance are all contributing towards the common good of the people of Ghana.

mapped-out theoretical and policy framework. I shall develop the content of this policy framework which I am proposing to cover the following four practical ecological policies, namely, *Africa Environment Day* celebration, *Arbor Week* celebration, *National Sanitation Day* (NSD) and *World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation*.

In the conclusion, I shall posit that if the contents of these four proposed ecological policies are adopted and implemented in Ghana through a close collaboration between the Church and the State, they will go a long way not only to deepen and strengthen the three current existing partnerships between the Church and the State in healthcare, education management and good governance, but also more importantly, they will help Ghana in resolving the current environmental challenges facing her. Besides, this collaboration will also help the Catholic Church in Ghana immensely to fulfil her mission on the care of the environment, a mission which constitutes a significant aspect of the Church's pastoral care and solicitude in Ghana.

5.1 Examination of Four Significant Environmental Challenges in Ghana

Ghana, like the rest of the world, is also faced today with many serious environmental challenges, including the pollution of air, water bodies and lands, deforestation, desertification, bush burning, indiscriminate disposal of waste, mining, etc. In examining the current environmental challenges confronting Ghana in her article, *Religion and the Environment in Ghana*, Elizabeth Amoah argued that, "Some markets and centers of economic activities especially in the cities and towns are full of rubbish heaps. A lot of waste is generated daily without proper means of disposal. There is plastic waste everywhere, the drainage systems are not working, emitting offensive odour ... all sorts of used vehicles are imported to the country which release poisonous gases into the

atmosphere.”⁸⁰⁴ According to Amoah also, “... farming and other commercial activities are diminishing rich forest resources. Both legal and illegal mining (*galamsey*) activities are degrading the land and polluting rivers which are slowly becoming harmful for human habitation.”⁸⁰⁵ Amoah contended further that there is noise pollution at marketplaces, lorry stations, school campuses, churches, mosques, etc., while filth is seen everywhere.⁸⁰⁶ As a result of these environmental problems, she postulated that due to their irresponsible attitude to the environment, Ghanaians were creating more problems for themselves, including flooding in rainy seasons, cholera and guinea worm infections.⁸⁰⁷ In sum, Amoah articulated that the improper disposal of waste, noise, water and air pollution, illegal small scale mining and bad farming practices, etc., constitute some of the main ecological challenges in Ghana, a situation which according to her was posing health hazards to both the citizens of Ghana and the country’s environment.

In this dissertation, I contend that the four major environmental challenges facing Ghana currently are deforestation, pollution (water, air, land), land degradation or desertification and illegal artisanal small-scale mining. Speaking about deforestation, the Environmental Protection Agency estimates that out of the 8.3 million hectares of high forest in Ghana in the early 1900’s, only 1.6 million hectares remain now.⁸⁰⁸ According to the Agency, “Ghana’s forest cover has been declining at an average rate of 1.7 percent between 1990 and 2005, which amounts to about 70,000 hectares annually.”⁸⁰⁹ The Agency mentions further that “the underlying causes of deforestation

⁸⁰⁴ Amoah, *Religion and the Environment in Ghana*, 34-35.

⁸⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁸⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁸⁰⁸ Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology, *EPA Strategic Plan 2011-2015* (Accra, Ministries: Assembly Press, 2011), 5.

⁸⁰⁹ *EPA Strategic Plan 2011-2015*, 5.

in Ghana are expansion of land for plantations (especially cocoa, rubber, coffee, palm oil) as well as logging, most of which is illegal, besides firewood exploitation and forest fires.”⁸¹⁰

With regard to land degradation or desertification, the EPA also estimates that about 69 percent of the total land area of Ghana is prone to severe or very severe erosion, especially in the north. It lists the main causes of land degradation as unsustainable farming practices, removal of vegetation cover and deforestation.⁸¹¹ Also, according to the Agency, it published the national action programme to combat drought and desertification, including reforestation activities and promotion of the use of liquefied petroleum in 2002. Yet, not much has changed in terms of efforts to halt degradation and desertification in the country since then.⁸¹² Further, the EPA mentions that Ghana has a rich biodiversity but laments that this rich biodiversity is currently being threatened in many areas of the country leading to the loss of important ecosystems and habitats as a result. It lists the factors accounting for the loss of biodiversity as including but not limited to the loss of forests and wetlands as well as climate change.⁸¹³ In addition, the EPA states that there is loss of fish diversity as a result of overfishing, especially by industrial boats.⁸¹⁴ Thus, for the Agency, poor farming techniques, tree logging and removal of vegetation cover are some of the factors causing ecological crisis in Ghana which are leading to land degradation or desertification, and subsequently, the loss of biodiversity in the country.

With reference to pollution, the Environmental Protection Agency also articulates that there is pollution involving Ghana’s waters and air as well as noise pollution. Concerning water pollution, the Agency mentions that a lot of water bodies in Ghana, especially in river water close to human

⁸¹⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹¹ Ibid., 5-6.

⁸¹² Ibid.

⁸¹³ Ibid., 6.

⁸¹⁴ Ibid.

settlements, are experiencing high levels of contamination due to human activities.⁸¹⁵ On air pollution, they mention that air pollution is being experienced especially in urban centers, nearby dense roads and around industrial centers. According to them, air pollution in Ghana is causing health problems to many people but particularly complaints of noise pollution.⁸¹⁶ Touching on pollution occurring at the coastal zones of Ghana also, the Environmental Protection Agency mentions that Ghana's coastal zone is experiencing coastal and marine pollution.⁸¹⁷ According to the Agency, "this is because the marine and coastal areas of Ghana are under pressure as a result of urban development, intensive agriculture, industrial development, salt production, mining and quarrying."⁸¹⁸

Lastly, with respect to illegal small-scale mining, it is worthy to note that the scale of illegal artisanal small-scale mining in Ghana has grown in size and significance because of its great contribution to employment, wealth creation and the economy of Ghana as a whole. Yet, despite these contributions, illegal small-scale mining in Ghana continues to pose a lot of environmental challenges, including the destruction of the environment, the pollution of air, water bodies and noise pollution, as well as negative health hazards and social impact, including drawing school children away from formal education, etc.⁸¹⁹

Over the course of the years, the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, like Elizabeth Amoah and the Environmental Protection Agency, has also examined the various environmental challenges

⁸¹⁵ Ibid.

⁸¹⁶ Ibid.

⁸¹⁷ Ibid.

⁸¹⁸ Ibid.

⁸¹⁹ For more information on the negative impact of small-scale mining in Ghana, see James McQuilken and Gavin Hilson, "Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining in Ghana: Evidence to Inform 'Action-Dialogue,'" in *Country Report 2016* (International Institute for Environment and Development, London), 28-29. See also, Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, *Ecclesia in Ghana*, 157.

facing Ghana in their various communiques and pastoral statements and documents.⁸²⁰ In their 1997 Pastoral Congress document, *Ecclesia in Ghana*, in particular, the Bishops' Conference in reflecting on the topic, *The Church and the Environment*, postulated that Ghana was facing a lot of ecological challenges which needed to be tackled immediately. The Conference grouped the environmental problems in Ghana into two main categories, namely, resource-specific problems and location-specific problems. According to the Conference, resource-specific problems include ecological issues affecting the land and water resources as well those affecting the coastal zone while location-specific problems are the ecological crises related to industrial and mining activities and human settlements.⁸²¹

In their examination of the resource-specific problems, the bishops stated that these included land degradation and water pollution. According to the bishops, land degradation includes both the degradation of soils through erosion leading to the loss of structure and fertility, and degradation of vegetation through deforestation and overuse.⁸²² They posited that “the two problems are inter-related and represent the most serious environmental problems facing the country in terms of their economic impact and the number of people they affect.”⁸²³ The bishops mentioned further that,

In Ghana, loss of soil fertility is extremely rapid once the vegetation has been cleared irrespective of soil type. Previously, the long fallow periods of traditional farming systems allowed for the regeneration of organic matter. However, the recent decline in the fallow period in many parts of Ghana has serious consequences for the maintenance of soil organic matter and consequently, for land degradation.⁸²⁴

⁸²⁰ In Chapter two of this work, I have examined extensively the communiques and pastoral statements of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' statements dealing with the environmental challenges in Ghana. These statements can be found in their three-volume document, namely, *Ghana Bishops Speak Volume I*. Takoradi: St. Francis Press, 1999, *Ghana Bishops Speak Volume II*. Takoradi: St. Francis Press, 2006, and *Ghana Catholic Bishops Speak Volume III*. Accra: St. Kizito Press, 2017, as well as in *Ecclesia in Ghana*, the bishops' 1997 Pastoral Congress document.

⁸²¹ Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, *Ecclesia in Ghana: On the Church in Ghana and Its Evangelizing Mission in the Third Millennium* (Takoradi: St. Francis Press, 1997), 155-156.

⁸²² *Ibid.*, 156.

⁸²³ *Ibid.*

⁸²⁴ *Ibid.*

According to them, “Loss of vegetation results from land clearing for new farmlands and the practice of using fire to clear fallow lands prior to cultivation.”⁸²⁵ In addition, the bishops taught that, “Land degradation occurs as a result of selective logging for timber and the extraction of firewood, charcoal and poles. Besides, over-grazing in savannah woodlands, coupled with bushfires lead to reduction or elimination of valuable browse species and nutritious grasses.”⁸²⁶ Thus, for the Ghanaian bishops, land degradation in Ghana occurs as a result of erosion, a situation which is reflected in declining soil fertility and soil physical deterioration as well as localized areas of soil salinity. Besides, overgrazing has also led to vegetative degradation in both rangeland and forests leading to deforestation.⁸²⁷

In the same document, the Bishops’ Conference similarly mentioned water pollution as another example of a resource-specific problem in Ghana. According to the bishops,

Water use in Ghana is virtually unregulated so there is little if any effort to conserve this resource. Deforestation and reduction in vegetative cover, coupled with cultivation close to river and stream banks have significant impact on rivers. The uncontrolled discharge of waste water also poses significant threats to human health in urban and rural areas. The major pollutants are human and animal excreta, though untreated industrial and mining effluents are of localized importance. Water-borne and water-related diseases such as guinea worm, typhoid, diarrhea, dysentery, malaria, schistosomiasis and onchocerciasis are common in rural areas. Aquatic weeds also affect water supplies in some areas.⁸²⁸

Here, the bishops teach that because water use in Ghana is virtually unregulated, in addition to the fact that many people farm close to river bodies and discharge animal and human excreta to the available sources of water, most of the water bodies in the country were becoming contaminated

⁸²⁵ Ibid.

⁸²⁶ Ibid.

⁸²⁷ Ibid.

⁸²⁸ Ibid., 156-157.

and unsafe for human use, hence, posing real health risks to people. Thus, for the bishops, there was the urgent need to regulate water use in Ghana in order to check water pollution in the country.

In their discussions on the location-specific issues in Ghana, the Bishops' Conference stated that these environmental challenges included ecological problems related to coastal and marine resources as well as mining and industrial activities.⁸²⁹ On coastal zone and marine resources, the bishops said,

The coastal zone is of particular environmental concern, because it is the most densely populated part of the country with a high concentration of urban and industrial centers. Coastal cities and towns are grappling with human and industrial wastes generated, the destruction of coastal wetlands and the exploitation of mangrove resources due to the demand for fuelwood for fish-smoking enterprises.⁸³⁰

Addressing the issue of pollution posed by industrial and other human activities, the bishops explained that, "Air, water and noise pollution caused by industrial and mining activities are becoming increasingly significant and the quantity has increased over the years."⁸³¹ According to the bishops, the main polluters of the air are the textile, food and beverage, petroleum refining, mining and processing industries.⁸³²

Additionally, the bishops mentioned the practice of mining as another significant environmental hazard in Ghana due to its negative effects on lands, water bodies and forests. They stated that, "Mining and its related activities cause serious environmental problems if these are not properly controlled. These include land degradation and devastation, soil degradation, deforestation and pollution of water and air."⁸³³ Further, the bishops lamented the increasing spate of mining in the

⁸²⁹ Ibid., 156.

⁸³⁰ Ibid., 157.

⁸³¹ Ibid.

⁸³² Ibid.

⁸³³ Ibid.

country and the fact that it was depriving local communities of their farmlands when they posited that,

There has been an upsurge in the establishment of mining projects, especially gold mining. The Government has therefore put in place appropriate mechanisms to assist in reducing the adverse effects of mining activities on the environment. However, the issue of land use conflict between mining operations and farming is becoming increasingly important.⁸³⁴

From the foregoing discussion, I reiterate my earlier position that there is sufficient evidence to argue that today, Ghana, like the rest of the world, is facing several environmental challenges, with the four major ecological challenges in the country being deforestation, land degradation or desertification, pollution (water, noise and air) and illegal small-scale mining. Thus, based on the above evidence of environmental crisis in Ghana from the teachings Elizabeth Amoah, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, I contend that what is urgent for Ghana today is to discuss and also explore the best way forward in dealing with these environmental challenges. Here, I posit that a review of the efforts of Government and State institutions in dealing with these environmental challenges will be of prime importance in determining what course(s) of action ought to be taken in addressing these environmental challenges going forward.

5.2 Reviewing the Role of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in Addressing Environmental Challenges in Ghana

In Ghana, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the Government institution which is tasked with the management, protection and enhancement of the environment in the country. Since its establishment in 1994, the Agency has taken several steps to lay a firm foundation to address both current and future environmental problems facing the country. For example, in pursuit of its

⁸³⁴ Ibid.

mandate specified above, the Agency has formulated a national environment policy specifically for the mining sector and also developed environmental guidelines and regulations to control mining activities during exploration, mining and decommissioning. In these guidelines, mining companies are expected to submit a two-year Environmental Action Plan (EAP) and a three-year rolling plan for subsequent years in addition to annual environment reports. An environmental audit report prepared by Government departments is also to be presented.⁸³⁵ In this way, I contend that an enabling environment is being established to encourage mining companies to be innovative and thereby become more environmentally efficient.

Furthermore, in an effort to reduce the direct negative socio-economic impacts of mining and to address the deprivations suffered by local populations, the EPA has also helped the Ghana Government to establish a Mineral Development Fund (MDF) to alleviate some of the environmental problems affecting the local population because of mining activities and to support institutions in the mineral sector, specifically mining and mineral processing related projects.⁸³⁶

Additionally, Ghana also has a National Environmental Policy and Action (NEPA) Plan that is set out in detail in the Environmental Action Plan (EAP). This Action Plan is intended to ensure improvement and maintenance of a high quality of life and to maintain ecosystems and ecological processes as well as the sound management of natural resources and the environment, among others.⁸³⁷ The EPA is tasked with ensuring that the National Environmental Policy and Action Plan set out in the Environmental Action Plan are delivered successfully through an integrated environmental planning and management as well as through effective and consistent application

⁸³⁵ *Ecclesia in Ghana*, 160.

⁸³⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸³⁷ *Ibid.*

and enforcement of environmental laws and regulations.⁸³⁸ Yet, in spite of these efforts, I posit that over the years, the EPA has not been able to implement successfully the above-mentioned Environmental Action Plan for Ghana and to enforce the laws and regulations governing the care of the environment in the country in an effective and consistent manner. As the Catholic Bishops' Conference has had cause to point out in many of their past and recent communiques, the factors responsible for the EPA's inability to execute its mandate successfully are multifaceted. These factors include politics as well as the lack of resources, personnel and support from political authorities.⁸³⁹

In summary, I contend that these above-mentioned challenges affecting the EPA in the discharge of its constitutional mandate of safeguarding and protecting the environment of Ghana gives sufficient enough indication that the care of the environment in Ghana cannot be left solely in the hands of the State and its Agencies if it is to be effective and successful. Thus, I posit that the State needs the support of all stakeholders, including Civil Society Organisations and Religious Bodies like the Catholic Bishops' Conference, to be able to properly safeguard, protect and care for the environment of Ghana.

Over the course of the years, the Catholic Church in Ghana has contributed in her own small ways to the care of the environment in the country through regular ecological teachings of the Bishops' Conference in communiques and other pastoral statements as well as through practical environmental policy initiatives such as the Church's *Arbor Day/Week* celebrations. More recently, the Church's contribution to the care of the environment in Ghana has also been done through her case study on land grabbing in Ghana and the Bishops' Conference's project on

⁸³⁸ Ibid.

⁸³⁹ Ibid.

electronic waste.⁸⁴⁰ My argument is that even though these ecological teachings and practical ecological policy initiatives of the Bishops' Conference are laudable, they have to a large extent, not been implemented successfully to achieve their set goals and objectives due to several factors, including apathy, lack of publicity, resources and follow-ups on these policies, among others.⁸⁴¹ For these reasons, I contend that since it is evident that both the State of Ghana and the Catholic Church in Ghana have not succeeded much in their own unique and individual attempts at resolving the numerous environmental challenges that Ghana faces, the time has come for the two bodies to begin to come together to collaborate on the care of the environment in Ghana in order to ensure better outcomes and results. I contend that such a collaboration will not only help in strengthening the already existing partnerships between the Church and the State of Ghana, but it will also more importantly, be a new model of collaboration between the two bodies geared towards the common good of the people of Ghana in the area of the care of the environment.

5.3.0 Building A New Model of Church-State Collaboration in Environmental Care in Ghana: My Proposals

As posited above, I reiterate my stance here that a Church and State collaboration in the care of the environment is the best way forward for Ghana to deal with the current ecological crisis facing Ghana today. This is because I believe that in addition to strengthening the existing bond of

⁸⁴⁰ For more information, refer to Chapter two of this work where I have examined extensively the teachings of the Catholic Bishops Conference and some of their practical contributions to the care of the environment in Ghana through such ecological policy initiatives such as *Arbor Week* celebration, E-Waste management, etc.

⁸⁴¹ From my experience in working with the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference as Assistant Secretary General from 2011 to 2016, I know that the bishops' communiques are not widely read by many Catholics who subsequently do not get to know what the bishops are talking about. Besides, since there is the lingering perception that the *Arbor Day/Week* celebration is for school children to plant trees, a number of Catholics are not interested much in this celebration and others like them. Furthermore, despite their consistent teachings and concern on the care of the environment, there is no single diocese in Ghana today that has an ecological policy as part of their overall diocesan pastoral plan. I argue that this lack of policy, apathy and negative attitudes have to change if the Church's ecological policies and initiatives in Ghana are to make any meaningful impact in the country now and in the future.

collaboration between the Church and the State, such a collaboration in environmental care would achieve better results and outcomes through a more aggressive publicity on ecological initiatives, the coordination of efforts and the sharing of resources and personnel. Besides this, I also contend that a Church and State collaboration in the care of the environment in Ghana will guarantee more and better participation of Ghanaians in joint ecological initiatives and policies that would be proposed, formulated and implemented by the two bodies than has been the case with the individual ecological initiatives of the two entities over all these years.

Towards the goal of formulating a Church and State collaboration in the care of the environment in Ghana, I posit that there is the need to fashion out a well-thought-out theoretical and practical framework that will serve as a policy document to guide the successful implementation of the proposed Church and State partnership in the care of the environment in Ghana. Based on this, I propose the following four environmental policy initiatives or policies as well as their contents to constitute the new model of Church and State collaboration in the care of the environment in Ghana in this work. These four policy initiatives are an annual celebration of *Africa Environment Day*, an annual *Arbor Week* celebration, a monthly *National Sanitation Day* (NSD) and an annual celebration of *World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation*. I shall proceed now to present the contents of these proposed policy initiatives one after the other, beginning with the celebration of the *Africa Environment Day*.

5.3.1 *Africa Environment Day* Celebration

The *Africa Environment Day* is celebrated annually on March 3 each year across Africa. The Day was established by the Africa Union (AU) in 2002 as a way of raising awareness of the pressing

environmental challenges facing the African continent.⁸⁴² In 2012, the Africa Heads of State Summit at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, decided to rename the day as *Wangari Maathai Day* in tribute to the late Kenyan Nobel Peace laureate's green legacy and commitment to good governance and peace.⁸⁴³ I postulate that it was a very significant act for the leaders of the African continent to dedicate the *Africa Environment Day* on March 3 to Wangari Maathai and to celebrate her memory through an annual continental event geared towards the care of the environment. I postulate further that the celebration of this day in memory of Wangari Maathai is not only an acknowledgement and endorsement of the ecological ideals that Maathai pursued through her Green Belt Movement (GBM), but also more importantly, an invitation to all Africans and African countries to embrace Maathai's ecological teachings and to put into practice, her teachings on ecological care as one of the surest ways of ensuring and enhancing the care and protection of the environment in Africa.

As mentioned earlier on in Chapter three of this dissertation, through her Green Belt Movement, Wangari Maathai not only encouraged tree planting as one significant means of protecting the environment from damage, but she also called attention to the dangers posed by unregulated illegal mining across the African continent through her teachings. On the latter subject, Maathai stated that unregulated mining constitutes a desperate scrambling for the resources of the earth and that this practice leads to the dehumanization of the persons involved, a dehumanization which occurs "when people search for riches in the mud, pits, mines and rivers ..."⁸⁴⁴ Thus, based on both the practical ecological initiatives of Maathai and her teachings on the environment, I posit that the

⁸⁴² Information on *Africa Environment Day* accessed online at <https://sdg.iisd.org/events/africa-environment-daywangari-maathai-day-2021/>, on May 12, 2021. The Africa Union is the organization of all the 53 countries in African. It was formerly called the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) from the time it was established in 1963.

⁸⁴³ Anne Munene, "Prof. Wangari Maathai: A Nobel Peace Prize Winner with a Big Heart for the Environment" in Elias Omondi Opongo & David Kaulemu (Eds.), *Catholic Church Leadership in Peace Building in Africa* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2015), 185.

⁸⁴⁴ Maathai, *Replenishing the Earth*, 20-21.

celebration of *Africa Environment Day* in Maathai's memory offers a single unique opportunity for all countries in Africa, including Ghana, to highlight the ecological practice and ideals which Wangari Maathai embodied through her Green Belt Movement and teachings to encourage all Africans to contribute their quota to the care of the environment on the continent and beyond. Thus, I postulate that the celebration of the *Africa Environment Day* should be a time when the most important ecological teachings of Maathai are highlighted to remind all Africans, and Ghanaians for that matter, on the need take a better care of the environment in Africa.

Flowing from above position, I opine that it is important to highlight some of the most important ecological teachings of Wangari Maathai. I shall mention three of these. One, Maathai taught that the pollution and degradation of the earth also harms human health, and according to her, "in degrading the environment, we degrade ourselves. On the contrary, in healing the earth and loving the earth, we love ourselves."⁸⁴⁵ Two, Maathai taught that the wrong notion of seeing the resources of the earth as unlimited and so always craving for more of the earth's resources should be done away with to save the earth. This is because according to her, the incessant craving for the earth's resources was a sign of psychological and spiritual weakness.⁸⁴⁶ Three, Maathai taught that to save the earth, there was the need for all people to view the earth, currently the only planet capable of supporting human habitation, with awe and wonder and receive it with respect and gratitude.⁸⁴⁷

These three ecological teachings of Maathai have correlates also in Catholic social teaching. First and foremost, on the link between ecological degradation and human degradation, Pope Francis

⁸⁴⁵ Ibid., 16-17. Maathai argues that the physical destruction of the earth extends to humanity too, for if the environment is wounded where the water is polluted, the air is filled with soot and fumes, the food is contaminated with heavy metals and plastic residues, etc., it hurts the health of human beings and injures them at the physical, psychological, and spiritual levels.

⁸⁴⁶ Ibid., 45.

⁸⁴⁷ Ibid., 59, 66-67.

teaches in *Laudato Si'* that a true approach to the ecological crisis in the world is one which is also a social approach, and which integrates questions of justice in debates on the environment “so as to hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor”.⁸⁴⁸ This is because for the pope, humanity is “faced not with two separate crises, one social and the other environmental, but with one complex crisis which is at once both social and environmental.”⁸⁴⁹ Secondly, in regard to Maathai’s teaching that natural resources are limited and so the insatiable craving for the earth’s resources should be done away with, Pope John Paul II teaches similarly in *Sollicitudo rei Socialis* that natural resources are limited and some are non-renewable and therefore we should not treat them as inexhaustible but use them in a way that will guarantee their availability in our time and for future generations.⁸⁵⁰ Thirdly and lastly, on viewing the earth with awe, respect and wonder as one solution towards the care of creation, Pope Francis like Maathai has likewise explained that nature is a constant source of wonder and awe because it continues to reveal the divine, and therefore, humans must always learn to contemplate nature not only to discover God’s will but even more importantly, to use this contemplation as an invitation to care and protect creation.⁸⁵¹

In this dissertation, I posit that the above-mentioned teachings and other teachings on the environment by Maathai (and also by Catholic social teaching) should be the ideals that are highlighted, not only in Ghana, but also across the African continent on this day which is dedicated to her and celebrated in her memory. I contend that by so doing, the peoples of Africa will not only come to appreciate better the important contributions of Maathai to the cause of global environmental care but above all, will also be inspired and motivated by Maathai’s personal and

⁸⁴⁸ LS #49.

⁸⁴⁹ LS #139.

⁸⁵⁰ SRS # 34.

⁸⁵¹ LS # 85.

unique example to contribute their own quota to the care of the environment in both their respective countries on the African continent and beyond.

Additionally, I propose that as a fitting tribute to Wangari Maathai in whose memory the *Africa Environment Day* is dedicated today, tree planting exercises should and must always be part and parcel of the celebration of this day while at the same time, the dangers posed by illegal small-scale mining across the African continent and particularly in Ghana, should also be highlighted.⁸⁵²

Today in Ghana, as elsewhere on the African continent, the celebration of *Africa Environment Day* is virtually unknown by most citizens and so the needed attention on its ecological objectives in respect of the care of the environment, are almost non-existent. I contend that in order to reverse this trend to celebrate the day in a fitting manner, there is the need for the State to involve the Church in the planning, publicity, organization and actual celebration of the day to make it more successful. I contend that when the Church is involved in this initiative and thus collaborates with the Government in the celebration of the day's activities, there will be more publicity and better participation brought to bear on the celebration, not only from the members of the Church but also from other citizens of the country who will be encouraged by the Church to join in the activities marking the day. I opine that this will then enable many more citizens to contribute their quota to environmental cleanliness in general and tree planting exercises in particular on this day.

⁸⁵² Anne M. Clifford, "Trees, "Living Symbols of Peace and Hope": Wangari Maathai & Ecofeminist Theology" in Jame Schaefer (Ed.). *Confronting the Climate Crisis: Catholic Theological Perspectives* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 2011), 339. During her lifetime, Maathai mobilized women to plant thirty million trees in fifteen countries in Africa over a span of three decades. This monumental contribution of Maathai to the care of the environment won her the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004, becoming in the process the first African woman and the first environmentalist to receive this prestigious global award. With Africa's current population estimated at over one billion people, one can only imagine how many millions of trees would be planted annually in Africa if the exercise of tree planting is always included in the celebration of the *Africa Environment Day* each year. Information on Africa's current population estimated at over 1.3 billion and making it the second most populous continent in the world after Asia, accessed online at worldometers.info/world-population/africa-population, on May 12, 2021.

Additionally, I postulate that a Church and State collaboration in the celebration of the *Africa Environment Day* is the way to go in Ghana because since the day happens to fall just four days before the celebration of Ghana's Independence Day on March 6, the celebration of the *Africa Environment Day* could well be factored into both the public activities that are planned for marking the country's independence as well as the religious activities which are often associated with the celebration of Ghana's Independence Day.⁸⁵³ By celebrating the day this way, I argue that Ghanaians will not only be contributing to the fulfilment of the dreams and aspirations of the African continental leaders for establishing the *Africa Environment Day*, but more importantly, they will also be able to clean their cities and towns for a befitting celebration of Ghana's Independence Day three days after.

In terms of concrete activities and practical proposals for the celebration of this day, I propose that with the Independence Day celebrations of Ghana serving as an important background, Members of Ghana's Parliament as the people's representatives in the House of Legislature, should discuss the *Africa Environment Day* on March 2, the eve of the celebration. This will serve as a demonstration of the country's commitment to the ideals of the day and also as a prelude to the following day's activities, not only that but this will also be an important means of giving the needed publicity, encouragement and invitation to all Ghanaians to join in the following day's exercise. After the discussions by the Members of Parliament, I propose that the mass media in the country, that is, both the traditional media and the social media, should give the much-needed publicity to the discussions of the parliamentarians and the day itself.⁸⁵⁴ I argue that by so doing,

⁸⁵³ Ghana's Independence Day celebration usually includes cultural events and religious services on the weekend before the celebration itself. Most times, Prayers and Interdenominational services are organized by the various Religious Bodies at the national, regional and district levels. Such services are often attended by political appointees and Government representatives as well as religious and traditional leaders and the general populace.

⁸⁵⁴ In Ghana, debates held on the floor of Parliament are often telecast live by the State media such as the Ghana Television (GTV) and Radio Ghana and also by private media houses in Ghana such as Joy 99.7 FM and Citi Radio

this will greatly help to ensure that the message of tree planting and care of the environment in general which the celebration of the *Africa Environment Day* is all about, goes far and wide to all Ghanaians. The publicity by the media must emphasise the point that it is the civic and patriotic duty of all citizens to contribute their quota to the sanitation and environmental cleanliness of the country in helping build a greener and better Ghana.

Additionally, by way of further encouraging and motivating citizens and ensuring that as many Ghanaians as possible turn up for the activities lined up for the day's celebration, I also propose that it would be ideal for the President of the Republic to address the nation on the eve of the *African Environment Day*.⁸⁵⁵ I argue that this will not only show his own personal commitment and that of the country to the African cause in regard to the celebration of the *African Environment Day*, but more importantly, I opine that by so doing, he will also demonstrate good leadership example that will encourage fellow citizens to also participate in the day's activities. Beyond this proposal, I posit that it would also be ideal for the Bishops' Conference to issue a pastoral statement to commemorate the Day. The pastoral statement of the bishops should aim at helping all citizens to understand the rationale behind the institution of the *African Environment Day* by the leadership of the African continent while stressing the need for all citizens to welcome it as part of their civic and national duty. It should also encourage Ghanaians to participate actively and fully in the day's planned activities as their own personal contributions to the care of the environment in Ghana, the continent and the world as a whole.

97.3 FM, among others. There are also reporters from many media houses accredited to Parliament who report proceedings on the floor each day.

⁸⁵⁵ In Ghana, the President addresses the nation on important issues of national and global interest from time to time. For example, during these days of COVID-19 pandemic, the President has addressed the nation on several different occasions, spelling out measures being taken to address the pandemic. For more, <https://www.moh.gov.gh/address-to-the-nation-6-pres-akufo-addo-on-covid-19/>. I argue that the President can use a similar platform to talk about the *Africa Environment Day* each year to whip up citizens' interest on the importance of participating the day's activities.

On the day itself, that is, March 3, I propose that the Catholic Church, other Religious Bodies, and recognizable groups, including Civil Society Organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations and Fun Clubs, among others, should play leading roles in organizing clean-up and tree planting exercises in and around their localities and vicinities while all school children, from the Basic Schools to the Tertiary institutions, should participate in tree planting exercises around the country. In addition, the Church should encourage all political, religious and traditional leaders in the various cities, towns and villages also to come out and play leadership roles in the exercise. When this is done, I contend that it will greatly motivate and encourage the rest of the citizenry to participate actively and fully in the day's exercises.

Lastly, I posit that for these proposed activities to be successfully implemented every year, they must be legislated in law and followed through on March 3 each year. I remain convinced that when the country follows through with these proposals above, the celebration of the *Africa Environment Day* will be very successful and will achieve its intended objectives. My conviction is based particularly on the fact that Ghana marks her Independence Day on March 6 each year, that is, three days after the celebration of the *Africa Environment Day*. Thus, I argue that if the activities of the *Africa Environment Day* are planned well and incorporated into the activities marking Ghana's Independence Day, there will be an added incentive for all citizens to want to participate in the day's activities. By participating actively in the day's activities, I opine that citizens would have contributed their quotas towards the care of the environment in Ghana and thereby preparing the grounds also for a befitting celebration of the country's Independence Day.

5.3.2 *Arbor Week* Celebration

The celebration of *Arbor Day* (now *Arbor Week*) has taken place in Ghana (formerly Gold Coast) since the mid-1920s. Specifically, in 1925, Sir Gordon Guggisberg (1919-1927), then Governor of

the Gold Coast, instituted an “Arbor Day” to encourage originally the planting of palm trees across the country.⁸⁵⁶ Later, the planting of neem trees replaced the planting of palm trees with the intention of creating avenues and parks to serve as some sort of national afforestation venture.⁸⁵⁷ Unfortunately, between the late 1960s and the late 1970s, interest in the celebration of *Arbor Days* began to wane considerably so that the day became virtually “unknown” by the early 1980s. In the mid-1980’s, the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference decided to adopt and re-institute the annual *Arbor Day* celebration and to use the day to encourage school children to plant trees. Following the adoption of the *Arbor Day* celebration by the Catholic Church, all school children in Catholic pre-tertiary schools in Ghana were encouraged to plant a tree each on the first Friday of June each year, a practice which has continued till today.⁸⁵⁸

In 1997, the Bishops’ Conference realizing that interest and participation in the *Arbor Day* celebration among Catholic faithful also had waned gradually and considerably due mostly to lack of interest and publicity, called for the re-introduction of the “Arbor Days”. In the communiqué they issued that year, the Conference stated that, “By way of demonstrating our commitment to the regeneration and preservation of the environment, we hereby institute the first full week of June of every year as *Arbor Week*, to be observed as the Church’s sanitation and environment week.”⁸⁵⁹ In this way, the Bishops’ Conference decided not only to re-introduce the “Arbor Day” celebration but also to expand its scope by making the first full week of June each year, the

⁸⁵⁶ The planting of palm trees (scientific name, *Arecaceae*) has numerous economic and business benefits, including the use of these trees for palm and cooking oil, brooms, baskets, palm wine and sleeping mats. It is scanty and unclear why the colonial Government of Sir Gordon Guggisberg encouraged the planting of palm trees on *Arbor Days* in Ghana. But it seems to me that the prospects of the economic benefits from the planting of neem trees may have encouraged and motivated many Ghanaians to plant palm trees on these days. It is thus of little surprise to me that palm trees are dotted almost everywhere across Ghana.

⁸⁵⁷ History of *Arbor Day* celebration in Ghana was accessed online at <https://www.modernghana.com/news/347969/bishop-calls-for-protection-of-environment.html>, on May 12, 2021.

⁸⁵⁸ *Ghana Bishops Speak*, 280-281.

⁸⁵⁹ *Ghana Bishops Speak, Volume II*, 42.

Church's *Sanitation and Environment Week*. This decision was to enable not only Catholic school children, but also all Catholic faithful in Ghana, to participate in the exercises earmarked for the week for improving sanitation and protecting the environment of Ghana. I contend that by instituting the *Arbor Week* celebration to replace the one-day *Arbor Day* celebration, the bishops were not only recalling a historical environmentally friendly precedent, but they were also extending the motive of the day's celebration from only a tree planting concern to cover the total care for sanitation, health and the environment of Ghana. I contend further that this was a step in the right direction and much in line with the ecological care concerns of Catholic social teaching.

In this work, I am proposing the following theological ideas be followed each year to mark the celebration of the *Arbor Week* as a national exercise and a collaboration of the Church and the State. I posit that if these proposals are followed, it will ensure the successful implementation of the *Arbor Week* celebration and contribute meaningfully to the care of the environment in Ghana.

1. *Theological Concept of the Arbor Week Celebration*

By theological concept, I am referring to both the theoretical and practical foundation or basis for the celebration of the *Arbor Week*. Here, I propose that the African theological ecological teachings and the Akan traditional ecological wisdom and ethic⁸⁶⁰ should serve as the principal foundation for the celebration of the *Arbor Week* in Ghana. Specifically speaking, I propose that the following four concepts should be at the heart of the celebration of *Arbor Week* in the country. These concepts

⁸⁶⁰ In Chapter three of this research, I examined extensively the theological teachings of African theologians and Akan ecological wisdom and ethic. I used these teachings including the concept of God as creator, the concepts of cosmic common good, cosmic harmony as well as Akan ecological practices such as sacred days, sacred groves and taboos, etc., to argue that these concepts offer important resources that can be used in the quest for ecological care today.

are the African understanding of God as creator, the cosmic common good, cosmic harmony and the Akan indigenous practice of sacred groves.

With reference to the concept of God as creator, among Africans in general and Ghanaians in particular, God is believed as the creator of all things, both human and non-human creation, whom He protects and sustains. Based on this belief, Africans and Ghanaians for that matter, accept that they are related closely to non-human creation which are regarded as an essential part of God's creation and as such, human beings owe a duty of care and stewardship to the non-human creation.⁸⁶¹ I posit that this understanding of God as creator among Africans and Ghanaians provides an important ecological ethic that must be emphasized as an important concept of the *Arbor Week* celebration in Ghana. This is because this concept leads to the acceptance on the part of the human creation that the non-human creation is not just there for consumption and exploitation, but also meant for the care and protection by humans as God's creation.

The second theoretical framework which I equally propose must form an important part of the theological foundation for the celebration of the *Arbor Week* in Ghana is the concept of the cosmic common good.⁸⁶² As Osuji rightly postulates, in Africa, "the idea of communal life is intrinsically connected to the concept of the common good wherein individuals advance their interests in such a manner that is both consistently respectful of other people as well as other things, and also mindful of fostering the common good of the community."⁸⁶³ The cosmic common good prohibits irresponsible exploitation of resources of nature and human beings and rather promotes deep respect and balance between various things.⁸⁶⁴ Based on this, I contend that if the concept of *Arbor*

⁸⁶¹ Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion, Second Edition*, 49-50.

⁸⁶² Osuji, *Laudato Si' and Traditional African Environmental Ethics*, 187-189.

⁸⁶³ *Ibid.*, 188

⁸⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Week celebration in Ghana is inclusive of the African understanding of the cosmic common good, it will assist in helping most, if not all Ghanaians, to desist from heedless exploitation of the environment and rather embrace their relationship to the environment and the proper management of its resources.

Thirdly, I posit that the concept of the *Arbor Week* must incorporate the African concept of cosmic harmony in which creation is seen as “a network of relations and interactions among beings and non-beings, that is all members of the ecosystem including the Supreme Being, the gods, the Spirits and the deities.”⁸⁶⁵ As Osuji again argues regarding the concept of cosmic harmony, among Africans, “the well-being of a person consists in keeping in harmony with the cosmic totality.”⁸⁶⁶ Based on this, I propose that the *Arbor Week* celebration must incorporate the concept of cosmic harmony among creation to help all Ghanaians to embrace the need for the total well-being of all creation, including the non-human creation.

In Ghana, the Akan have a saying that, *Onyame wo biribiara ho hia, na nyimpa dasanyi nntum nntse n'abodze nyinara ase*. This saying literally translates that, “God has a purpose for all of His creation, and that human beings cannot always comprehend all God’s purposes in creation.” I argue that this Akan saying is an invitation to all people to exercise the responsibility of care towards all created things of God and not to exploit or abuse any part of creation since God has a purpose for each created thing even when human beings do not often understand or appreciate why certain created things exist in the world. I propose that using this Akan saying as an important theological foundation, the Church should teach and encourage all citizens of Ghana on the need to live in good relationship with everything in the cosmos, including the gods, the Spirits, other

⁸⁶⁵ Ibid., 191.

⁸⁶⁶ Ibid.

deities and non-human creation. In her liturgical practices, but especially, the celebration of the Eucharist, the Church brings together some basic elements of creation such as bread, wine, water, incense, flowers, etc., and she prays in thanksgiving to God for these gifts of His and work of human hands.⁸⁶⁷ Arguing that in this way, God, human beings and non-human creation are brought together and united in one cosmic harmony, I posit that the Ghanaian Church should use her liturgy of the Eucharist and the other liturgical celebrations to teach about cosmic harmony in ways akin to how the Akan use their saying alluded to above to teach the need for cosmic harmony.

Last but not the least, I contend that the Akan indigenous concept of sacred groves whereby some portions of the forests were reserved for biodiversity, but which has today almost become a thing of the past, should be revisited. Thus, I contend that it would be a good idea if the exercise of tree planting associated with the *Arbor Week* celebration is framed in the language of a return to the Akan concept of sacred groves. Here, it may be emphasized by the Church that just as the trees in the sacred groves were not cut down for any other purposes, so also the trees that would be planted during the *Arbor Week* celebration should be considered as “sacred” and thus not to be cut down for any other purposes. To communicate this teaching effectively, I propose that the Church should reference the Akan concept of sacred groves to teach that beyond serving economic and business purposes, trees have value in themselves, including giving glory to God and conveying God’s message to us as Pope Francis teaches in *Laudato Si’*.⁸⁶⁸ Based on this, the Church should insist that just as the sacred groves were and still are considered sacred among the Akan of Ghana since they serve mostly as places reserved for religious ceremonies and observances, so also all citizens should view the trees they plant during the *Arbor Week* celebrations as “sacred”, that is, planted to

⁸⁶⁷ During the Mass, this prayer of blessing is said during preparation of the gifts to thank and praise God for gifts of creation and also work of human hands. The entire cosmos participates in a single act of worship.

⁸⁶⁸ See LS # 31-32.

give glory to God, and so not to be cut down for economic and other related reasons. I argue that by teaching in this manner, it will help to ensure that most of the trees which are planted during the *Arbor Week* celebrations, even if not all, are protected and preserved from any indiscriminate logging.

2. Objectives of the *Arbor Week* Celebration

By objectives, I am referring to the goals, aims and purposes that the celebration of the *Arbor Week* is intended to achieve. Here, I propose the following objectives for the *Arbor Week* celebration in Ghana: -

- a. To re-awaken and conscientize all Ghanaians on their religious and moral obligation and responsibility as stewards of God's creation for the proper care of Mother Earth.
- b. To assist all citizens to see the need to complement the efforts of Government, Churches, NGOs and other stakeholders and individuals on the care of the environment, and by encouraging them to participate in concrete measures being undertaken by these and other bodies and individuals to protect the environment and promote good health.
- c. To step up environmental awareness educational programmes in schools, churches, towns, villages and other communities.
- d. To plant trees to protect Ghana's virgin forests, sanctuaries of nature and sacred groves and to develop gardens, parks, avenues, etc., in the various communities and localities.
- e. To identify and embark on possible practical solutions or actions to solve the environmental problems identified in various communities and towns.
- f. To advocate and seek for the enforcement of policies and laws governing the sustainable use and management of natural resources in the country.

- g. To help citizens to examine and judge for themselves their lifestyles regarding consumption patterns and sanitary practices and the state of their immediate surroundings to help them take remedial measures if their practices are contributing to ecological crisis.⁸⁶⁹
- h. To thank God for the gift of creation as well as intercede for other pressing local, national and world needs, particularly as related to the care of the earth during the week's celebration.

3. *Guidelines for the Arbor Week Celebration*

In terms of guidelines for the celebration of the annual *Arbor Week*, I propose that there should be a theme, time duration, specific activities and practical projects that can serve as monument of every year's celebration of the *Arbor Week*. As regards themes, I argue that it is absolutely necessary that an appropriate theme is chosen for each year's celebration of the *Arbor Week* as the theme will serve to guide the Week's celebration as well as focus attention on the objectives of the celebration. Possible themes for the Week could range from God as creator to integral ecology, stewardship and care of creation, and so on. For a start, I would like to propose the following five themes. 1. *The Earth, God's Gift to Humanity: A Resource and Responsibility*. 2. *Stewardship and Care of Creation in the Light of the Church's Ecological Tradition*. 3. *Integral Ecology: A Call to Live in Right Relationship with God, Humanity and Non-Human Creation*. 4. *Linking Akan Ecological Wisdom and Ethic with Christian Ecological Teachings in the Context of Ghana: Prospects and Challenges*. 5. *Collaborating for Effective Environmental Care in Ghana: The Role*

⁸⁶⁹ Here, I opine that the leadership of the Catholic Church in Ghana must use her ecological teachings in their documents to invite the Ghanaian public to do an introspection of their lifestyles and ask themselves questions on the amount of food they eat and or waste, water they use, electricity and energy they consume, etc., I posit that this will help people see if there is some need for some adjustments so as to live simple and moderate lifestyles.

of Government, Religious Bodies, Traditional Authorities and Other Stakeholders. From these main themes listed above, I propose that sub-themes could also be drawn.

In terms of duration, since it is an *Arbor Week* celebration, the duration should be one week-long or at least five days. The celebration can be launched on the first Friday or Saturday or Sunday of June each year or any other day closest to the celebration of *World Environment Day* which falls on June 5 every year. But regardless of whichever day is chosen to begin the celebration, the important thing is that the programme should last for a week or at least five days.

With regard to the activities marking the *Arbor Week*, I propose that they should include talks, symposia, debates, drama and musical concerts, etc., on the care of the environment as well as education on good health and sanitation practices. I propose further that as much as practicable, these activities must be organized in every community or by two communities in joint action wherever is deemed more practical and will ensure far-reaching results. Other practical and concrete activities like tree planting, clean-up exercises and erosion control measures and so on can be undertaken by all communities to remedy any environmental problems in such communities and for the general improvement of the surroundings, while individuals must do likewise within their own homes and immediate environs.

By way of projects, I also propose that it would be ideal for the tree planting exercises of the *Arbor Week* celebration to be focused on the development of woodlots, gardens, parks and avenues on school and Church compounds and other community plots and sites. These sites could be associated with particular years and could be visited in five, ten, twenty years to celebrate how they have grown and developed. In addition, families, small groups and individuals could be encouraged and assisted with seedlings to develop afforestation or other projects in their localities for their own good and the common good of the country.

4. *Organizing and Monitoring Committees*

Here, I suggest that every community should form organizing and monitoring committees whose members will ensure that the *Arbor Week* is planned, organized and celebrated in a fitting way. Members of such committees should be committed to the ideals of the *Arbor Week* celebration and drawn from the political, religious and traditional leadership of the various communities and localities. They should also include those who are experts in environmental issues and concerns as well as environmental activists and advocates. The role of these committees should include not only planning, organizing and monitoring the celebration of *Arbor Week* in the communities, schools and churches, but also evaluating the Week's activities after they had occurred to document the lessons learnt from the celebration and to factor them into the following year's celebration in order to sustain the campaign on the care of the environment and ensure good results each year.

5. *Publicity of the Arbor Week Celebration*

As far as publicity is concerned, the various media platforms in Ghana, including the electronic and print media, TV and radio FM stations, the state and private newspapers as well as religious tracts available in Ghana, should all be used as much as possible to bring sufficient publicity on the celebration of the *Arbor Week*. In addition, it would be good for leaflets with literature on environmental care, as well as billboards, posters, banners and other related publicity materials to be made and put to good and effective use. Besides, the Church can and should actually lead the route marches and environmental campaign walks, etc., that would be undertaken by members of the communities and by schools, with *Arbor Week* Tee shirts, banners, placards and other related items to bring more attention to the Week's programmes. I argue that if these proposals are implemented, there will be sufficient publicity to raise awareness about the Week and thereby

elicit interest among the citizenry on the need to participate in the activities celebrated in the Week and to contribute their quota to the care of the environment in Ghana.

6. *Day of Prayer and Fundraising*

The second Friday, Saturday or Sunday which will be the eighth day (or fifth or final day) of the celebration should be observed as a *Day of Prayer and Thanksgiving* for the gift of creation. At the service or worship on that day, intercessions should be offered for a healthy environment, good health, good weather, abundant rainfall and harvest, and protection from storms, drought and floods and for any other local, national and international needs. Also, fundraising through donations and special collections could be taken during the Week but especially on this final day to build up funds for the local community's use on its *Arbor Week* celebrations and other ecological initiatives aimed at protecting the environment.

In addition, to promote the celebration of *Arbor Week* as a national affair that will be celebrated by all Ghanaians like its predecessor *Arbor Day*, I argue that it will be of much importance for the celebration to be stipulated in law and guided by law. Towards this end, I propose that a bill on the celebration of the *Arbor Week* should be prepared with inputs from all major stakeholders on the environment, including Religious Bodies like the Catholic Bishops' Conference, to be passed into law by Ghana's Parliament. I contend that this should not be too difficult to do since both in the past and in the present, the Church has either by her own initiative contributed ideas to or been invited to contribute ideas to some bills and legislations being considered before Ghana's Parliament.⁸⁷⁰ In this way, the *Arbor Week* celebration will not only have the backing of law and

⁸⁷⁰ In 2013, the Bishops' Conference wrote to Ghana's Parliament to request of them to hasten slowly with their consideration of a national bill on the use of Genetically Modified crops and foods (GMOs) in Ghana. The Plant Breeders Bill was suspended subsequently and not passed into law because of the bishops' intervention. See *Ghana Catholic Bishops' Speak, Volume III*, 94-97. In the area of healthcare also, the Conference worked with the Parliamentary Select Committee on Health to get Parliament's approval for the *Memorandum of Understanding*

thus enjoy the support and patronage of all Ghanaians, but more importantly, it will ensure continuity in the years to come since when it is legislated, its celebration will be mandatory and thus, it will be difficult not to celebrate it annually unless the law governing it is amended as such.

In summary, it is important to note that as of today, Ghana's total population is estimated at about 30 million with the Catholic population estimated at around three million according to the 2010 Population census.⁸⁷¹ This being the case, I argue that if the Church's *Arbor Week* celebration is supported and adopted by Government and made into a national agenda as was the case at the very beginning of its history, many more Ghanaians than only the Catholic population of the country will be encouraged to join in the efforts to plant trees and protect the environment during such occasions. Flowing from this, I argue further that if the *Arbor Week* celebration becomes part and parcel of the national agenda and plan for the care of the environment in Ghana, it can reasonably be estimated that at least more than three million trees will be planted each year to protect and safeguard the country's environment.

Finally, I contend that when these proposals above are implemented, all Ghanaians, irrespective of their ethnic, political or religious persuasions, will come to see in the celebration of the *Arbor Week* an expression of a common and universal concern, a concern about the care of the land on which they live. Based on this conviction, I argue that they will join forces to protect the environment in Ghana and safeguard it as a common heritage both during and after the annual *Arbor Week* celebration.

Between the Ghana Health Service and Christian Health Association in December 2013. See also *Memorandum of Understanding Between the Ghana Health Service and the Christian Health Association of Ghana*, Accra, 2006 & 2013.

⁸⁷¹ According to the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), Ghana's population in 2010 was 24,658,823 million. The report indicated that Ghana's population increased by 30.4 percent over the 2000 population figure of 18,912,079. Also, it is estimated that Ghana's population will increase to over 31 million in this year's census. Information accessed online at https://statsghana.gov.gh/gsscommunity/adm_program/modules/downloads/, on May 12, 2021.

5.3.3 *National Sanitation Day (NSD)*

The Government of Ghana introduced the *National Sanitation Day (NSD)* in November 2014 to be carried out on the first Saturday of every month throughout each year.⁸⁷² On this day, all Ghanaians were to take part in cleaning their surroundings and planting trees around their communities as their personal contribution to the care of the environment and environmental cleanliness. The day was also to be used to educate the populace on waste sorting and disposal techniques with the aim of improving the poor sanitation and environmental quality and health of the country.⁸⁷³

Since 2018, it has been observed that even though there is high level of community awareness of the model, there is low participation in the exercise by citizens, resulting in its ineffectiveness to make any meaningful impact on improved sanitation and environment in the country. According to Justice Mensah, the factors responsible for the ineffectiveness of the NSD exercise to achieve its objectives include apathy, inadequate logistics, politics and poor attitudes of the populace.⁸⁷⁴ I contend that in order to address these and other challenges associated with the effective celebration of the *National Sanitation Day*, it is important for the Government to involve Civil Society Organizations and Religious Bodies like the Catholic Bishops' Conference in the organization and implementation of this exercise as this will ensure effective and better participation and outcomes

⁸⁷² Justice Mensah, *Effectiveness of National Sanitation Day as a Community-Participatory Approach to Improving Environmental Sanitation in Edina Traditional Area, Ghana*, Environmental Quality Journal, 2. Accessed online at https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/MEQ-02-2019-0042/full/pdf?casa_token, on May 12, 2021. Justice Mensah works with the Directorate of Academic Planning and Quality Assurance, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana.

⁸⁷³ Ibid., 3-4.

⁸⁷⁴ Ibid., 15-16. Justice Mensah also argues that the NSD created the impression that duty towards environmental improvement could be deferred only to the end of the month. Besides, the lack of consultation of citizens prior to the start of the policy did not help much. Accordingly, he proposes that community-based structures such as traditional authorities, youth organisations, and religious organisations, among others, should also be involved more closely if the policy is to be effective and successful in the years ahead.

that will lead to improved environmental quality and health for sustainable development of the country.

With specific reference to the Catholic Church in Ghana, it is worth noting that in 2015, that is, just a year after the Ghana Government introduced the NSD, the Bishops' Conference welcomed the idea of dedicating the first Saturday of every month for citizens to clean the country and plant trees to save the environment. In their communiqué for 2015, the bishops describing the NSD policy as timely and laudable, also appealed to all Catholics in particular and all Ghanaians in general to participate actively in it as their Christian obligation and civic responsibility.⁸⁷⁵ In subsequent years, the Bishops' Conference has equally voiced their support for the policy in several of their communiqués and other documents.⁸⁷⁶ Yet, I contend that in spite of this clear evidence of the Church's support for the NSD policy, there is little evidence to show that Catholic faithful actively and fully participate in the NSD exercise in Ghana. Thus, I posit that beyond her support for the exercise, the Church should do more to collaborate with the State to ensure the success of the NSD policy by mobilizing her network of dioceses, parishes, institutions and groups and associations to ensure better outcomes of this exercise in close collaboration with the State.

Fortunately, there seems to be some strong indications among some of the Church's groups and societies regarding their preparedness to support the efforts of the Church and the State in their pursuit of the environmental care agenda of the country. For instance, at the end of their 9th Re-Union Conference held in Accra, members of the Noble Order of the Knights and Ladies of Marshall resolved among others, to pursue the agenda of the care of the environment in Ghana in

⁸⁷⁵ *Ghana Catholic Bishops Speak Volume III*, 166.

⁸⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 179. In these statements, the bishops asked all Ghanaians to undertake these exercises more frequently and religiously.

support of the efforts of both the Church and the Government.⁸⁷⁷ Among others, the group resolved that they will undertake all the necessary measures at their disposal to contribute their quota to the management and conservation of the environment in Ghana. To achieve this, they said that,

We undertake to take necessary measures to contribute to the management and conservation of the environment based on agreed plan of action. In this regard, we call on all our Local Branches (Councils and Courts) to formulate action plans in their areas that will deal with issues relating to the degradation of the environment. We endorse Government's determination to continue the fight against illegal mining (*galamsey*) and environmental degradation. Accordingly, we call on the Government and all State Agencies to enforce the requisite laws on the environment. On our part, we pledge to work with other societies and groups in combating crimes against the environment ... We also call on the Church and our respective Governments to consider the social, economic, and environmental dimensions in our development efforts.⁸⁷⁸

I contend that the statement above shows a clear support of the society for the Ghana Government's efforts towards the care of the environment, a strong appeal for the enforcement of environmental laws in the country as well as a positive resolution to work with the Church and other Church societies and groups in the care of the environment towards the overall development of the country.

I contend further that this is a positive sign worth emulating by the other groups of the Church as part of their efforts to support both the Church and the State in regard to the care of the environment in Ghana. Thus, as far as I am concerned, I have no doubt in my mind that the *National Sanitation Day* policy is a laudable idea that can contribute immensely to the various efforts being made in Ghana by both the Church and the State and by other groups and individuals towards the care of the environment in Ghana. Yet, at the same time, I contend that to make this policy work even

⁸⁷⁷ The Noble Order of the Knights and Ladies of Marshall is an association within the Catholic Church in Ghana. Members come from different fields including politics, business, academic, etc. Their 9th Re-Union Conference was held at the University of Ghana, Legon-Accra, from July 27 to 29, 2018, under the theme, "Management and the Conservation of the Environment: *Laudato Si'* and the Implication for Human Development, The Role of the Marshallan." It was addressed by Monsignor Bernard Munono, a staff member at the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development at the Vatican in Rome in the stead of Cardinal Peter Turkson, its President.

⁸⁷⁸ *Communique issued by the Noble Order of the Knights and Ladies of Marshall at the End of Its 9th Re-Union Conference* held at the University of Ghana, Legon, from July 27-19, 2018, 1.

better and become much more efficient and effective, it is urgent and critical to tackle the challenges of low patronage and lack of interest in the NSD exercise among the Ghanaian public by giving the policy a fresh theoretical and practical framework that will encourage and motivate most, if not all citizens, to see it as a cause worthy of their attention, support and participation.

To achieve the above objective, I postulate that the suggestion of Elizabeth Amoah concerning how Europe used religion to address her sanitation problems in the 1920s and 1930s. In her article, *Religion and the Environment in Ghana*, Amoah explains that when Europe faced ecological problems in the 1920s and 1930s, European ministers of religion went through their Scriptures and teachings, and came up with the catchy phrase, “cleanliness is next to godliness,” which helped the European continent to deal with their environmental problems following the two world wars.⁸⁷⁹ Through the Christian Church’s efforts and the use of this phrase, the citizens of Europe came to believe that to be physically clean and to have a clean environment was a godly act, and this ultimately helped them in many ways to overcome the continent’s environmental challenges at the time. Thus, I contend that faced with the current ecological crisis in Ghana, religion in general and Christianity in particular, must come to the rescue of Ghana and help the country to deal with her current environmental challenges. Towards achieving the above-mentioned objective, I support Amoah’s call that faith communities and Religious Bodies in Ghana, together with their institutions, should not only help create awareness among their members on the need to take care of the environment through teachings and organizing seminars and workshops on ecological care

⁸⁷⁹ Amoah, *Religion and the Environment in Ghana*, 44. I have already referenced the history of this phrase in this work. For more, refer to “Cleanliness is indeed, next to godliness,” accessed online at phrases.org.uk/meanings/cleanliness-is-next-to-godliness.html, on September 9, 2021.

and clean-up exercises, but further to these, they should also encourage the Government to enforce laws regulating the use of the environment in Ghana.⁸⁸⁰

Additionally, I also suggest that the Christian Church should examine critically the broad understanding of the concept of religion found in the Akan Traditional Religion and relating this to the teachings of the Sacred Scripture on the care of the Earth, come up with an ecological teaching that will help all citizens of Ghana, but especially those who may not profess the Christian faith, to welcome the idea of the care of the environment as encapsulated in the NSD exercise. Here, I opine that Amoah's teaching on the Akan concept of religion will be most useful. According to Amoah, in the indigenous Akan worldview, "religion is generally about *ahoto*, an Akan word that stands for the well-being of individuals, the community and the entire universe."⁸⁸¹

In articulating further the concept of religion in the Akan traditional understanding, Amoah explains that other Akan words such as *nkwa* (holistic and comprehensive life) and *asomdwee* (peace, literally "calmness and coolness within the ear") also convey the concept of religion in Akan traditional understanding just as the concepts of mercy, healing and good relationship.⁸⁸² According to her, all these diverse concepts embodied in the understanding of religion among the Akan, depends to a large extent on a healthy environment.⁸⁸³ Hence, for Amoah, "in the traditional Akan religion, there is an interrelationship between nature and the well-being of people, and total well-being is possible only in an environmentally friendly context."⁸⁸⁴ From the concept of religion in the Akan understanding and its relations to the environment as found in the teachings of Amoah,

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁸¹ Ibid., 30.

⁸⁸² Ibid.

⁸⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁸⁴ Ibid., 30-31.

I argue that it is clearly evident that in the Akan traditional religion, one cannot consider oneself as religious when one is not environmentally conscious or friendly.

It is significant to note that the above broad concept of religion among the Akan of Ghana is similarly found in the teachings of the Christian Church. It can be argued that the concept of religion as inclusive of the care of the earth is also a thoroughly Christian and or Catholic concept. In his 1990 *World Day of Peace* Message, Pope John Paul II, for example, taught that, “Christians realise that their responsibility within creation and their duty toward nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith.”⁸⁸⁵ By teaching in this way, Pope John Paul II underscored the fact that for the followers of the Christian faith, the care of creation is not something peripheral to their faith convictions, but on the contrary, it is an essential aspect of their faith and practice of religion. This teaching of Pope John Paul II above was re-echoed by Pope Francis also in his encyclical, *Laudato Si*, when he stated that “it is good for humanity and the world at large when believers better recognize that their ecological commitments stem from their faith convictions.”⁸⁸⁶ With this, I posit that if this broad understanding of religion is adopted and promoted for the celebration of the NSD in Ghana by the Catholic (Christian) Church, it will go a long way to encourage, inspire and motivate many more Ghanaian citizens to participate fully and actively in the activities of the NSD, and by so doing, contribute to the care of the environment in Ghana.

With reference to State involving the Church more closely to implement the *National Sanitation Day* policy more effectively in Ghana, I suggest that the Government should meet with the Church’s hierarchy and leaders of the other Religious Bodies to discuss how the Church can

⁸⁸⁵ John Paul II, 1990 *WDP Message*, # 12.

⁸⁸⁶ LS # 64. See also LS # 85. Here, Pope Francis quotes the teaching of Brazilian Bishops’ Conference to emphasise that nature as a whole manifests God and is also a locus of God and that since the Spirit dwells in all creation, Christians are therefore called to care for creation as a Christian duty and responsibility.

support the Government's ecological efforts with regard to this policy. In addition to this, I propose that the State should collaborate with the Church and other stakeholders to enact a bill covering the NSD policy in Ghana into law since at the moment, there is no law backing the policy. I argue that such an engagement will help all Ghanaians, including members of the Church, to embrace the NSD as a policy that is owned by both the Church and the State. On the part of the Catholic Church in particular, I suggest that individual bishops could write circulars to remind all Catholics and indeed all citizens about the NSD on the Sunday before the first Saturday of the month when this exercise takes place. These circulars could be read at masses and incorporated into parish announcements and bulletins with the aim of encouraging all Church societies and groups to take active part in the exercise. Besides, individual bishops could engage with political, traditional and other religious leaders in their local dioceses and communities to see how best they can all collaborate together in support of this policy through their own example of full and active involvement and participation in this exercise.

In Ghana today, I contend that it is a reality that while "many Ghanaians seem to be serious about religion and link spiritual dimension with other aspects of life, they seem to care less about sustaining the environment which is an integral part of religion."⁸⁸⁷ Based on this fact, I posit that by involving the Church more closely in the NSD exercise in Ghana, the Church in Ghana will be able to teach and encourage her members and even non-members to understand that cleanliness and the practice of good sanitation are part and parcel of the Christian religion and the exercise of the Christian faith. In doing this, the Church can borrow something from Akan cultural and traditional wisdom and teachings on health, cleanliness and care of the environment expressed most succinctly in some of the Akan wise sayings. These sayings include the following four. One,

⁸⁸⁷ Ibid., 34, 36-37.

the Akan say, “*S3 idua noho ye dzen d3n ara, onntum nnsow wo asaase fi mu*” (literally, “A plant however healthy, cannot dwell in contaminated soil”). Two, the Akan say, “*Onnyi de es3e esutsen onam enam ntsi*” (literally, “Do not pollute a river for the sake of a mudfish”). Three, the Akan say, “*S3 epa okoto a, gyae nsu wo n'amona no mu ama etum epa fofor*” (literally, “When you trap a crab, leave the water in the hole to trap another”). Finally, the Akan also say, “*Otwe yew no homa s3 egya to haban mu a*” (literally, “An antelope is deprived of its lair when the bush is on fire”). These and other Akan phrases were intended to conscientize the Akan people on the need for the care of the environment and maintain balance in the ecosystem. I argue that using these and other wise Akan sayings, the Catholic Church in Ghana would be able to encourage Christians and others to support the ideals of the NSD towards the care of the environment in Ghana. Besides, she will also be able encourage her both members and even non-members to see and understand that their participation in the NSD exercise as part of their civic duties. I posit that this will ensure a more and better participation in the exercise by both Church members and even non-members.

In summary, I reiterate my conviction here that the *National Sanitation Day* celebration is a good national policy that can help the citizens of Ghana to clean their surroundings, plant trees and engage in other ecological initiatives aimed at saving the environment of Ghana. At the same time, I also argue that in order to make this policy more successful and effective in achieving its goals of helping to save and protect the environment of Ghana, it will be worthwhile for the State to involve the Church more closely in its planning, organization and implementation.

5.3.4 *World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation*

The annual *World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation* was instituted by Pope Francis in August 2015 to be observed on September 1 each year.⁸⁸⁸ The Day offers individual believers and communities an opportunity to renew their personal participation in their vocation as custodians of creation, to thank God for the marvelous works that He has entrusted to our care, to invoke His help for the protection of creation and His mercy for the sins committed against the world in which we live.⁸⁸⁹ Currently, the day is observed in Ghana only by the Catholic Church with creation prayers at Mass, reflections on the care of the environment and other Church-based ecological events. I argue that with a Church and State partnership on the celebration of this programme each year, the celebration of *World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation* in Ghana can offer an opportunity for national ecumenical events as a sign for believers to work together on the care of the environment as well as a pathway for many other Ghanaians to participate in other events aimed at the care of the environment in Ghana.

In pursuit of the proposal which I am making for the celebration of the *World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation* as a Church and State event or policy, I propose that a national ecumenical or interdenominational service should be organized on this day. In Ghana today, interdenominational, and ecumenical services involving the different Religious Bodies often take place on memorable national occasions such as Ghana's Independence Day celebration on March 7 and the inauguration of Presidents, among others.⁸⁹⁰ Besides, the Catholic Church, the Christian

⁸⁸⁸ This information on *World Day of Prayer for Care of Creation* accessed online at <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/world-day-of-prayer/>, on May 12, 2021. *The World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation* was adopted from the Ecumenical Patriarch of the Orthodox Church of Constantinople for use in the Catholic Church by Pope Francis in August 2015.

⁸⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁰ Ecumenical programmes also take place during memorial services and state burials for former Heads of State, Ministers and other State officials as well as when Ghana suffers from natural disasters such as flooding, etc.

Council of Ghana and the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council hold an annual joint ecumenical service on the first or second Friday of May each year to pray for the needs of the State and the Christian Church.⁸⁹¹ Thus, I posit that these precedents for bringing together the different Religious Bodies in Ghana for both national and ecclesial events can help inform and guide the ecumenical services which will be organized on this day as well.

Moreover, I contend that on the global stage also, we have many examples of different religious bodies and leaders working together to achieve a common goal, including the care of the earth. For example, in June 2002, Pope John Paul II and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew signed the *Common Declaration on Environmental Ethics* to promote the care of the environment across the globe while Pope Francis' adoption of the Orthodox Church's practice of observing September 1 each year as "Creation Day" for the Catholic Church. By their examples, I posit that these global religious leaders have amply shown that different Religious Bodies and leaders can come together to pursue joint ecumenical actions of global importance, including the care of the environment. I posit that these examples should therefore motivate the Catholic Church in Ghana to rally together all the other Religious Bodies as well as the State to support this event.

Based on the above precedents, I suggest that the Bishops' Conference should engage with all other Religious Bodies in Ghana, including the Christian Council of Ghana, the Ghana National Pentecostal Council, the National Association of Charismatic Churches, the Association of African Spiritual Churches, etc., to obtain their support and collaboration for this proposed event which is to be seen as being of crucial importance as far as Church and State collaboration in environmental care in Ghana is concerned. Significantly, there is currently an on-going ecological campaign in

⁸⁹¹ For more, see *Ghana Catholic Bishops' Speak, Volume III*, 139.

Ghana, dubbed “Green Ghana Project,” expected to plant about five million trees each year to which many individuals, groups and Religious Bodies, including the Catholic Church, have pledged their support.⁸⁹² I argue that this campaign offers a unique opportunity for the Catholic Church to bring together all the different Religious Bodies to support the ecological care agenda of the Government of Ghana both through this campaign, and also through the ecumenical service of prayer I am suggesting for this day.

By way of concrete recommendations on activities to celebrate this day, I propose that the joint ecumenical service should involve three main events, namely, prayers of thanksgiving and intercession for the gift of the Earth, confession of sins committed against the earth, and a prayerful reflection or talk on the care of the earth. I propose further that the prayer reflection on the care of the environment should emphasize the point that the fruits of the earth and natural resources are for the benefit of all, but humanity needs to make responsible use of them as good stewards. I propose further that the reflection must encourage all citizens to change their negative attitudes to the environment and put more efforts into ecological care. Besides, I also suggest that all citizens must be motivated by the prayer reflection to accept that it is their responsibility to play their respective roles to green up and clean up the country. They must be invited through the prayerful reflection on the earth on this day to continue to pray and work towards renewing the Earth as God’s gift to us through the guidance of the Spirit who is God’s agent for the renewal of the Earth.

⁸⁹² On the Ghana Government’s, “Green Ghana Project”, the Catholic Church has promised to plant one million trees every year. Other churches like the Methodist Church, the Church of Pentecost, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, etc., have likewise pledged to do the same. The support of these Christian churches in Ghana to the project attests to their recognition of importance of tree planting and environmental care in general. Information accessed online at newswatchgh.com/editorial-christian-churches-support-for-green-ghana-project-apt, on September 16, 2021.

In summary, I contend that the celebration of the *World Day of Prayer for Creation* as a national event in Ghana through a joint interdenominational and ecumenical programme can be successfully organized because even though Ghanaians belong to different religious beliefs, traditions and practices, they also acknowledge that what unites them is the fact that they are basically one people sharing the same land. Thus, I posit that all Ghanaians, whether or not they belong to different Christian denominations or are even traditional believers, accept God as Creator and believe that He has endowed all human beings with wisdom and knowledge to take good care of the Earth and to live in harmony with all other creatures. Based on this, I postulate that a Church and State celebration of the *World Day of Prayer for Creation* can offer the whole country an important occasion to thank God for the gift of the land we share as well as the opportunity to confess our sins against the misuse and abuse of the land. Besides, the Day could be used by all religions in the country to emphasize that God holds us responsible and accountable as stewards of His creation and to make their adherents understand that they have a religious and moral obligation and responsibility to take good care of the Earth.

Finally, I reiterate my suggestion here that instead of the current situation where the celebration of the *World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation* is a purely Catholic Church affair in Ghana, the day must be adopted by the State and rather seen as a national day of importance during which all Ghanaians will come together to pray in thanksgiving to God for the gift of the land that God has endowed the country with, to confess sins committed against the use of the land and to reflect on earth-care and what citizens can do individually and collectively to take a better care of the land. I contend that this can only become a reality when the Catholic Church begins to work closely with the State as well as the other Religious Bodies in the country to ensure that the celebration of the day is not simply a Catholic Church affair as is the case currently, but a national one which is

backed also by legislation. In all, I argue that through a Church and State collaboration in the care of the environment, the annual celebration of the *World Day of Prayer for Creation* in Ghana as a national event is possible and ought to be greatly considered as one important means for the care of the environment in Ghana.

5.4 Some Recommendations for the Church-State Collaboration in the Care of the Environment in Ghana

In Ghana today, there is some evidence to suggest that there is renewed consciousness regarding the current environmental situation in the country as many citizens are now becoming more aware of the damage being done to the environment and discussing possible solutions to remedy the situation. To a very large extent, I contend that this growing eco-consciousness in Ghana is borne by the fact that the current President of Ghana, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo Addo, has made the care of the environment one of his topmost priorities.⁸⁹³ I posit that this emerging eco-consciousness among Ghanaians is a positive thing that ought to be encouraged and deepened. I posit further that all Ghanaians need to be encouraged to accept that the current ecological situation in the country can be reversed through a better management and more rational and judicious use of the natural resources of Ghana. In addition, I propose that all citizens must be motivated and educated to change their poor habits, lifestyles, behaviours, mentalities and value systems towards the environment and adopt new attitudes that consist of judicious and prudent use of the resources

⁸⁹³ In his Presidential Inaugural Address on January 7, 2016, he urged all Ghanaians to recognize the degradation of the environment and work hard to protect Ghana's water bodies, forests, land and oceans. Accessed online at <http://www.mop.gov.gh/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/INAUGURALADDRESSBYPRESIDENTNANAAKUFO-ADDO.pdf>, on May 12, 2021. The President followed this call for ecological care with his first State of the Nation Address on February 21, 2017, and Independence Speech on March 6, 2017, and as recently as 2020 in his State of the Nation Address also. Currently, there is also a national crusade to deal with illegal small-scale mining ("galamsey") in Ghana which is destroying the land, water bodies and forests of the country. This campaign, code-named "Operation Halt II", has further raised the consciousness of most Ghanaians about the need to protect the environment from destruction.

of the environment. I posit that this education will be the responsibility of both the Church and the State to undertake together through the new model of Church and State collaboration in the care of the environment which I am proposing in this work.

Furthermore, I propose that when the blueprint policy document on the collaboration between the Ghana Catholic Church and the State of Ghana in the care of the environment covering the four policy initiatives which I have outlined above in this work is put in place, the following recommendations must be followed in order to ensure their successful implementation: -

One, the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference should engage the societies, groups and associations of the Church on the subject of the care of the environment. These engagements should discuss various ways through which the various dioceses, parishes, outstations and societies can best implement the policy document guiding the Church and State collaboration in the care of the environment as a practical demonstration of the Church's own pastoral commitment to ecological care in Ghana.

Two, through her Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Office (CPLO), the Bishops' Conference should engage with the Parliament of Ghana and its Select Committee on Environment, Science and Technology on the possibility of enacting the necessary law (s) to cover the Church and State collaboration in environmental care. This engagement between the Bishops' Conference and the Parliament of Ghana should also consider how the Church and the State can collaborate more closely in the implementation and enforcement of existing laws and by-laws regulating the environment in Ghana now and in the years ahead.

Three, the Bishops' Conference should also engage the Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation, the Ministry of Information and the media on publicizing this Church

and State collaboration in the care of the environment and encouraging all citizens to embrace it as the best way forward for the care of the environment in Ghana.

Four, the Bishops' Conference should network closely with other Faith-Based Organisations, NGOs, CSOs, think tanks and other identifiable groups as well as traditional authorities, the youth and other individuals who are or may be also interested or involved in activism and advocacy on ecological care concerns in Ghana to seek their support for this Church and State collaboration in the care of the environment in Ghana.⁸⁹⁴

5.5 Conclusion

In concluding this chapter, I postulate that the theoretical foundation for the four above-mentioned practical ecological policies within my proposed Church and State collaboration in the care of the environment should be the selected principles within Catholic social teaching and African theological traditions. Specifically speaking, from Catholic social teaching, I opine that the principles of the stewardship and care of creation, intergenerational solidarity and integral ecology should be the main principles which are highlighted to ground these four proposed practical ecological policies.

As explicated earlier on in this dissertation, stewardship and care of creation is the principle that teaches that God has entrusted into the hands of humans the duty and responsibility for the safeguarding, protection and care of God's creation. In this principle, the duty of humans in relation to the non-human creation "to till and keep" the garden of the earth as the Book of Genesis teaches (Gen. 2:5). Pope Francis explains in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, that the duty of "tilling" entails

⁸⁹⁴ In Ghana today, there a number of NGOs, CSOs and other groups whose members are working on environmental care issues in the country. These groups include the Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Development (CIKOD), Friends of the Earth - Ghana, the Center for Environmental Citizenship and Initiatives (CECI, Ghana), etc.

cultivating, ploughing and working while that of “keeping” means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving.⁸⁹⁵ The principle affirms that while humans can use the resources of the earth for their maintenance and benefit, they also owe the divine duty of caring for the earth. With this in mind, I posit that in the four above proposed practical ecological policies within the Church and State collaboration on the care of the environment in Ghana, the principle of stewardship and care of creation must always be borne in mind by both the Church and the State and indeed, all Ghanaians as they seek to safeguard, protect and care for Ghana’s environment through the implementation of the four proposed policy initiatives I have proposed above.

In regard to the principle of intergenerational solidarity, Catholic social teaching emphasizes that the resources of the earth are for the benefit of both the present generations of humans and future generations of people. Therefore, the principle postulates that in using the earth resources, care must be taken not to exhaust them. In effect, it teaches that humans should use the resources of the earth in such a way that will guarantee their availability for present generation as well as future generations of humans. I argue that in the implementation of the four policies outlined above, the principle of intergenerational solidarity must be an important guiding principle not only for the Church and the State who are the partners in this collaboration, but also for all Ghanaians in their contributions to the care of the environment in Ghana.

The last principle in Catholic social teaching that grounds the four proposed practical policies is that of integral ecology. Integral ecology teaches that humans have a close and vital relationship with God, with others and with creation. It affirms the fact that there is a vital link between natural ecology and the social dimensions of human life, that is, the way humans treat the environment

⁸⁹⁵ LS # 67.

reflects the way they treat each other and vice versa. According to this principle, ecological degradation leads to human degradation. Conversely, the care of the earth leads to the care of humans, in particular, the poor and vulnerable. I contend that in the implementation of the four ecological policies mentioned above, the principle of integral ecology should be considered as paramount. This is because it will help motivate and encourage Ghanaians to view their relationship with God, with others and with creation in a more positive light as a necessary condition to guarantee peace and harmony in society while safeguarding the environment of Ghana from harm and further ecological damage.

With regard to African theological traditions and Akan ecological wisdom and practices, I propose that the following concepts should be used to guide the four practical ecological policies in the Church and State collaboration in the care of the environment in Ghana. These are the African concepts of God as Creator, the close interconnection between humans and non-human creation, cosmic harmony and cosmic common good. In addition to these, the Akan concepts of sacred groves and sacred days should also be considered.

With reference to the concept of God as creator, I postulated that among Africans in general and Ghanaians in particular, God is believed as the creator of all things, both human and non-human creation, whom He protects and sustains. Based on this belief, Africans and Ghanaians for that matter, accept that they are related closely to non-human creation which are regarded as an essential part of God's creation and as such, human beings owe a duty of care and stewardship to the non-human creation. I proposed that in the implementation of the four practical policies, and particularly the *Arbor Week* celebration, the African concept of God should be highlighted. This is because this concept will help all Ghanaians to accept the fact that the non-human creation is

not just there for consumption and exploitation, but also meant for their care and protection. Such an attitude will inevitably help them to care for and protect the environment in Ghana.

Regarding the close interconnection between humans and non-humans, I explained that the concept of the close interconnection among beings and non-beings flows from the belief that all reality comes from God and is animated by the Spirit and that human beings have a duty to care for and protect creation to ensure their continuous existence and survival, and thereby guarantee their own survival and flourishing. Here too, I opine that if the four practical ecological policies I have proposed above in this chapter as forming the contents of the Church and State collaboration on the care of the environment in Ghana are grounded in this African concept, it will go a long way to help all Ghanaians in the care of the environment in Ghana.

Concerning cosmic harmony, I articulated that in the African religious worldview, the human person and the cosmos have a vital connection and that both influence and depend on each other, in this way, avoiding human exploitation of nature. Hence, in support of Orobator's argument, I contended that the African concept of cosmic harmony goes deeper than that of *stewardship of creation* in the Judeo-Christian tradition. This is because unlike stewardship in the Judeo-Christian tradition which is one-dimensional whereby human beings care for creation and no more, the African concept of cosmic harmony emphasises mutuality, interdependence and solidarity whereby human beings care for the environment and the latter in turn cares for human beings. I contend here also that the concept of cosmic harmony must be used to ground the policies within the Church and State collaboration on the care of the environment as I have outlined here above.

Lastly, regarding cosmic common good, I have explained that even though its theological formulation is Western, first proposed by Daniel P. Scheid, as Peter Osuji has rightly argued, the concept itself offers a good description of African theological ecological tradition as it reflects the

idea of communal life among Africans wherein individuals advance their interests in ways that are respectful of the interests of other human beings as well as the environment. Among others, the cosmic common good provides an ethical code that prohibits people from taking more than they need from nature. This subsequently prevents “irresponsible and unlimited exploitation of resources and human beings, thereby leading to cosmic harmony.”

In reference to Akan ecological wisdom and ethical practices, I proposed the concepts of sacred groves and sacred days should be used as important foundation for these policies. On the concept of sacred groves, I contended that the Akan indigenous concept of sacred groves whereby some portions of the forests were reserved for biodiversity, but which has today almost become a thing of the past, should be revisited. With specific reference to *Africa Environment Day* and *Arbor Week* celebrations, I mentioned that it would be a good idea if the exercise of tree planting in these celebrations is framed in the language of a return to the Akan concept of sacred groves. I postulated that just as the trees in the sacred groves among the Akan were not cut down for any other purposes, so also the trees that would be planted during these celebrations should be considered as “sacred” and thus not to be cut down for any other purposes. If this is accepted and done, it will help greatly in the care of the environment in Ghana.

Lastly, on sacred days, I argued that in the celebration of the National Sanitation Day and also the *World Day of Prayer for Creation*, the Akan indigenous concept of sacred days should be highlighted to help Ghanaians to understand the need to give rest to human labour and the natural environment as well. In a nutshell, I posit that these four African concepts and Akan indigenous ecological wisdom and practices are important resources within African and Akan theological traditions that can help contribute to the quest to save the environment of Ghana from its current ecological crisis.

In the end, I remain very optimistic that if these recommendations above are legislated into law and documented as a national policy and implemented annually, the outcomes will greatly help the State of Ghana in tackling the current and future environmental challenges in Ghana and enhance the care of the environment in the country today and in the years ahead.

CHAPTER SIX

GENERAL CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have offered in Chapter one, a historical and theological overview and analyses of modern Catholic social teaching on environmental care as contained in papal and ecclesial documents from the time of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* issued in 1891 to the time of Pope Francis' ecological encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, published in 2015. From these theological and historical overview and analyses, I have argued that from very humble beginnings, Catholic social teaching has developed gradually and progressively in its engagement with the subject of the care of the environment and has since the 1970s been very consistent in addressing this subject for some time now. I have argued further that in its ecological teachings, Catholic social teaching has also consistently applied the principles of stewardship and care of creation, the earth as a common good, the universal destination of good, intergenerational solidarity and integral ecology, etc., to ground these teachings.

In Chapter two, I articulated that like the global Church, the Catholic Church in Ghana also does not view the care of the environment as peripheral to the Church's faith witness but on the contrary, considers the care of the environment as an essential aspect of her pastoral care and mission of evangelization in Ghana. Consequently, I articulated that due to the great importance that the Ghanaian Catholic Church attaches to the subject of the care of the environment, the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference (GCBC) which constitutes the Church's hierarchy in Ghana, has over the years since 1965 addressed the subject of the care of the environment in their various communiqués, pastoral statements and pastoral letters using the principles articulated in the Catholic social teaching. Besides ecological teachings, the Bishops' Conference has carried out

some practical ecological initiatives in Ghana, namely, *Arbor Day/Week* celebrations, the *Bishops' Report on Land Grabbing in Ghana* and *Project on Electronic Waste Management*, among others.

Furthermore, I have argued that while both the Ghanaian Catholic Church and the Ghanaian Government have endeavoured to protect and safeguard Ghana's environment over the years through various ecological programmes and practical initiatives, it is evident that neither the Church nor the Government has succeeded much in their individual efforts aimed at dealing with the ecological challenges facing Ghana. In light of the fact that there are three already existing historical collaborations between the Catholic Church and the Government of Ghana in the areas of healthcare, good governance and education through which the two bodies work together to promote the common good and integral development of the entire Ghanaian citizenry, I argued in Chapter four that the missing link in the close collaboration between the Catholic Church and the State as of today is the area of the care of the environment. In order to help address this missing link, I proposed that the time has come for a closer collaboration between the Catholic Church and the Government of Ghana in the care of the environment. I argued that this collaboration is particularly urgent today, not only in light of the increasing ecological crisis in Ghana as elsewhere in the world, but also in light of the teachings of Pope Francis in his ecological encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, in which the Roman pontiff calls for dialogue and joint actions among all peoples of the world and all stakeholders towards resolving the world's current ecological damage.⁸⁹⁶

In Chapter five of the dissertation, I advanced my proposal for the new model of Church-State collaboration in the care of the environment in Ghana by articulating both theoretical and practical policy framework based on Catholic social teaching and African theological traditions as

⁸⁹⁶ LS # 3, 14, 21.

constituting the contents of this proposed collaboration. I offered four practical ecological policy initiatives to form the contents of this Church and State collaboration on environmental care in Ghana. These policies are the celebration of *Africa Environment Day* on March 3 each year, the celebration of an annual *Arbor Week* on or around June 5, the celebration of a monthly *National Sanitation Day* (NSD) and an annual celebration of the *World Day of Prayer for Creation* on or around September 1. I argued that if these practical policy initiatives on the care of the environment are legislated into law and implemented jointly by the Ghana Catholic Church and the Government of Ghana, they would not only represent a positive response of the Ghana Catholic Church to the call of her global leader for dialogue and collaboration on the care of the earth, but more importantly, they would offer the most viable practical approach and option for the care of the environment in Ghana both today and in the future.

Additionally, I argued that my proposal for a Church and State collaboration in the care of the environment in Ghana which is based on Catholic social teaching and African theological ecological traditions, the latter of which I have discussed extensively in Chapter three, will not only add one more model to the already existing historical Church and State collaborations in Ghana, but it will strengthen further the already existing partnership between the Church and the State of Ghana for the advancement of the common good and integral development of Ghanaians. Besides, I posited that the lessons learnt from the three existing Church-State partnerships will help guide this new model of Church and State collaboration in environmental care in Ghana and the fact that the care of the environment is dear to many Ghanaians will motivate and encourage them to rally in support of this collaboration which I am proposing here in my dissertation.

Finally, I wish to state here that I do not claim in any way imaginable that the proposal I am making here in this dissertation for a new model of Church and State collaboration in the care of the

environment in Ghana based on Catholic social teaching and African theological traditions is the only option available for resolving all the environmental challenges confronting Ghana today. Indeed, I argue that there may be several other approaches to tackling the current environmental challenges facing Ghana, including, for example, the role the academia, media, environmental NGOs, etc., can play in the care of the care of the environment in Ghana. Yet, in view of the focus of this dissertation which is on Church and State collaboration in environmental care in Ghana, I have not examined these above-mentioned and other similar approaches that can be used to help address the current and future ecological crisis in Ghana. I leave these and other approaches to future research to explore them. This notwithstanding, I remain convinced that in the face of the current environmental challenges confronting Ghana today, a Church-State collaboration in the care of the environment in Ghana based on Catholic social teaching and framed on the four practical ecological policies which I have outlined here in this dissertation offers the most viable approach for safeguarding and protecting Ghana's environment from ecological damage now and in the future. I argue that this proposal is doable, practicable and worth considering.

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