

Christianity and Environmental Protection Policy

An analysis of the *Laudato Si'* Manifesto and some of the responses to
it

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Abstract

This study analyses *Laudato Si'*'s response to the current global environmental crisis and some of the key critiques of the document. It focuses on both the practical and spiritual solutions prescribed by the document for Christian churches and everyone of goodwill and examined the different arguments and claims to the document. It also examines how critiques help improve the concerns of the document. The study made use of one of the four major qualitative research methods: textual analysis, which is more constructive and interpretive. The analysis uses information from both the main text (*Laudato Si'*) and other Christian texts and individual responses to answer the research questions. The analytical construct was derived from existing theories and practice, previous research, and the knowledge of the researcher. The conclusion was drawn about the document's proposal, inferences from the Christian and scientific conceptual model of the environment and climate, and responses from churches and critics. The analysis shows that *Laudato Si'* has developed earlier Christian church teaching on global environmental challenges in a more holistic way. It reveals human irresponsible behavior at the root of the environmental crisis from environmental degradation of all sorts that have inflicted harm to the natural environment, leading to a huge climate crisis. Christianity has a major role to play in the process of change through its influence on human behavior and human attitude. It also reveals that Christians must play a stronger role by taking necessary and quick action in the process to fight climate change, cultivate greater care for the environment to effect change on the earth. The prescribed solutions seem to be a requirement for a sustainable solution.

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Chapter One

1.0 General Introduction

1.1 Problem statement

The *Laudato Si'* (Praise be to You) document is the second encyclical of Pope Francis, published in 2015 and titled –on care for our common home. It is an overview of the present environmental crisis in general and climate change from the Christian perspective. This document likens the earth to a common home of every human being, and to a sister with whom humanity share its life, and as a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace humanity. According to the document, the earth cries out because of the harm inflicted on her by humans through our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. She also faces a global environmental deterioration. The inspiration for writing the *Laudato Si'* document came from saint Francis of Assisi which the Pope acknowledged and present him, who is also much loved by non-Christians, to be the patron saint of all who studies and work in the area of ecology. According to the Pope, Saint Francis of Assisi showed the church as well as non-Christians the inseparable bond between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace. This implies that an integral ecology calls for openness which transcends the language of mathematics and biology to the heart of what he refers to as what it is to be human.

Humanity however seems to have lost sight of any other meaning of their natural environment other than what it serves for their immediate consumption and use. The natural environment has been gravely damaged by human irresponsible behavior, and there is the destruction of the biological diversity of God's creation; degradation of the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, stripping the earth of its natural forests, and destroying its wetlands, its land, its air, and its life, to which the Pope considers as a sin against ourselves and God. As a result, there is a tragic consequence of unchecked human activity due to ill-considered exploitation of nature. Today, human beings no longer approach nature and the environment with an openness to awe and wonder; they no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in their relationship with the world. Their attitudes have become that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, who are unable to set limits on their immediate needs (*Laudato Si'*, 2015). Scientific evidence has shown that climate change is a principal consequence of this environmental destruction, which is mainly by anthropogenic factors

(Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005; IPCC Special report, 2018; 2019). The Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) refers to this climate change concept as the state of the climate that can be identified (e.g., using statistical tests) by changes in the mean and/or the variability of its properties, and that persists for an extended period, typically decades or longer. This implies any change in climate over time, whether due to natural variability or as a result of human activity. It is predicted to have devastating global effects leading to massive loss of human lives through coastal flooding, emerging health challenges, and increased suffering for the poor, particularly in developing countries coupled with weak adaptive capacity, which has already begun (Adger, 2003; Eriksen, Klein, Ulsrud, Næss, & O'Brien, 2007; Agrawal, 2008; Bizikova, Kuriakose & Bachofen, 2009; IPCC, 2018, 2019). Many efforts to seek concrete solutions to this environmental crisis have proven ineffective, not only on the part of powerful opposition but also because of a more general lack of interest. According to Pope Francis, obstructionist attitudes, even on the part of believers, range from denial of the problem to indifference, nonchalant resignation, or blind confidence in technological solutions.

Several scientists, philosophers, theologians, and civic groups have all enriched the church's thinking on these questions which has been echoed by Pope Francis in his *Laudato Si'* document. Other churches and Christian communities outside the Catholic circle – including other religions as well – have expressed deep concern and offered valuable reflections on these disturbing issues. According to Pope Francis, the urgent challenge to protect the natural environment (our common home) involves a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development to resolve the tragic effects on the lives of the world's poorest. This is a change that young people are demanding today, to which they wonder how anyone would claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the suffering of the excluded (*Laudato Si'*, 13). There is therefore a need to look at the spiritual roots of these environmental problems, which need not only technological solutions but much more a change of humanity, without which the actors would be dealing only with symptoms (*Laudato Si'*, 2015).

Taking into consideration the above point of view, this study is set to analyze the *Laudato Si'* document concerning how it responds to the problem and how the document has been

received by the Christian churches and believers. It will be guided by the following research questions:

1. What does the document prescribe as a solution to the environmental problems for the Christian churches and everyone of goodwill?
 - a. Which are the practical solutions proposed by the document?
 - b. What are the spiritual solutions and approaches to target the environmental crisis?
2. What are the key critiques of the document?
 - a. What are the different arguments and claims to the document?
 - b. How do the different critiques relate to the context and issues in the *Laudato Si'* document?

1.2 Material

This study made use of both primary and secondary data to provide an appropriate response to the above questions. These primary data is the *Laudato Si'* document itself which gave insight into the issues to respond to research questions one, and the secondary data is comprised of other documents about the *Laudato Si'* focusing on claims, arguments, and critics to the *Laudato Si'* to help respond to question two.

1.2.1 Primary data

In the context of this study, the primary data source is the *Laudato Si'* (Praise be to you) document titled – On Care for Our Common Home, published on the 24th of May 2015. The document is comprised of 184 pages and 246 paragraphs, Author by Pope Francis and it is focused on the environment and human ecology. This material is downloaded online directly from laudatosi.com/watch. The document is made up of six chapters which include the following:

Chapter one explains what is happening to our common home (27 pages); chapter two present the gospel of creation (26 pages); chapter three unveils the ecological roots of the ecological crisis (21 pages): chapter four presents an integral ecology (15 pages): chapter five presents lines of approach and actions (24 pages); chapter six presents an ecological education and spirituality (27 pages).

1.2.2 Secondary data

Secondary data sources for this study comprised of materials downloaded online, relevant to the research questions. The search for this online data was done following the keywords in the research topic. This involved principally responses to the *Laudato Si'* document, different churches and individual opinions on the *Laudato Si'* document, the different perceptions of the authority of this document from various actors, the policy actions taken by different churches in response to the *Laudato Si'* document, various compromises made in response to the document. It also included issues between religion and the natural environment; the connectivity of different aspects of the environment with Christianity; the evolution of environmental issues within the Christian church; the contribution Christianity makes in national and global policy.

1.3 Method

This study made use of one of the four major qualitative research methods: textual analysis, which focused on topics, claims, and arguments of the text(s). A qualitative research method is an approach that involves the use of more words than measures by number in data collection and analysis (Bryman, 2008). It is a research strategy of reasoning according to the research outcome, and it is more constructive and interpretive. With this approach, the qualitative researcher does not always subscribe to all the mention factors.

1.3.1 Research design

This is the conceptual structure within which the research was carried out, and it helped to guide the arrangement of ideas for data collection and analysis. It used proper and specific methods in ways that are relevant to the specific research issue, to provide a framework for data collection and analysis (Bryman, 2008). This study is designed to analyze the content, structure, and functions of the messages contained in the text.

1.3.1.1 Qualitative analysis

The analysis gathered information from both the main text (*Laudato Si'*) and other Christian texts and individual responses to the *Laudato Si'* to answer the questions. The researcher used analytical constructs, or rules of inference, to move from the text to answer the research questions. The two domains, the text(s) and the context are logically independent, and the conclusion is drawn from one independent domain (the text) to the other (context) (White &

Marsh, 2006). The analytical construct was derived from – 1) the existing theories or practice; – 2) the experience or knowledge of the researcher; and – 3) and previous research (Krippendorff, 2004). Some scholars suggest using a model of communication to determine the focal point for the inferences. Therefore, the conclusion was drawn about the communicator, the text, the situation surrounding its creation – including the socio-cultural background of the communication – and or the effect of the message. For example, characterizing the communicator (the Pope); inferences from Christian and scientific conceptual model of the environment and climate; and responses from churches and critics.

The content analysis process involved reading through the text (*Laudato Si'*) to gain a general understanding of the text and to explore the content according to Thai, Handschuh & Decker (2008), and an iterative content to develop meanings (White & Marsh, 2006; Kohlbacher, 2006). The data was broken down into themes and sub-themes for analysis and reporting. In the evaluation stage, the assumption made from this approach is that reality could be interpreted in various ways and the understanding of reality is a function of the subjective interpretation of the content of the text (*Laudato Si'*). Verification was done through the application of concepts linked to qualitative tradition in reporting findings, which also test the trustworthiness of the research.

1.4 Structure of the study

This study is structured into six chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 General Introduction

Chapter 2 Literature review

Chapter 3 An Analysis of the *Laudato Si'* Manifesto on the environment

Chapter 4 Key Critiques of *Laudato Si'*

Chapter 5 Discussion

Chapter 6 General Conclusion

The introduction gives an insight into the background, the statement of the problem, the research questions to be examined, material, and method, and the aim of the study.

The literature review is centered on two major headlines: – the relationship between religion and environmental protection, and – the contemporary Christian churches and environmental protection.

Chapter three gives an analysis of the *Laudato Si'* document, which includes an analysis of how the document responds to the present environmental problem. This has to do with both the practical and spiritual aspects of the crisis, and an approach to blend the Christian perspective with that of the non-Christian world which are a part of our global society. This is done based on the research questions and sub-questions. It follows the order below:

3.1.1 Introduction

3.1.2 Analysis of the document base on research question 1

3.1.2.1 Analysis base on sub-question 1.1

3.1.2.1 Analysis base on sub-question 1.2

3.1.3 Analysis of the document base on research question 2

3.2.3.1 Analysis base on sub-question 2.1

3.2.3.1 Analysis base on sub-question 2.2

Chapter four presents the different arguments and claims to the key issues of the *Laudato Si'* document within the context of the present ecological crisis.

Chapter five discusses the critiques concerning the issues in *Laudato Si'* and their relevance and strength. It reconciles the critiques and claims with the ideas of the document concerning the study objectives.

Chapter six gives a general conclusion of the analysis, This comprises a summary of the answers to the study questions.

1.5 Aim of the study

This study aims to critically analyze the Pope's (2015) *Laudato Si's* response to the global environmental crisis and how the document has been received by the Christian churches and critics.

Conclusion

This introductory chapter presents a background of the study which attempts to explain the what, the how, and why of the research topic, and the major problem underlying the study, followed by the research questions. The problem is that of climate change caused by global warming which is a challenge for the global environment today with undeniable effects on humanity. Dialogue on the issue has mainly been with political, scientific, and economic language and it is beginning to experience the language of faith. A brief explanation of the research material and method for the realization of the study including the data collection instrument is also given. The structure and outline of the project followed a general introduction that made up chapter one of the study; literature review which examines two major aspects and will make up chapter two; an analysis of the *Laudato Si'* document concerning how it responds to the present global environmental problem, and this made up the chapter three; general conclusion and key recommendations made up chapter four. The study aims to analyze the *Laudato Si'* document on the environment in how it challenges the Christian church and the Christian perception of it. The scope and limitation of the study define the extent of the subject matter including the features, tasks, and outcome of the research.

Chapter Two

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter contains a review of the literature in line with the study objectives, to help give a wide understanding of the issue from existing relevant research and debates as it concerns this study area. It helps reveal the state of research in this study area and the existing gaps in the existing research, to help address those gaps. In this regard, environmental change has increasingly become a key global issue over the past two decades as a result of the unprecedented unfolding of events in the natural environment. The change in environmental scenarios has raised concerns and caused environmental protection to become a very popular word in public discourse today. Scientific reports point to human cause to this global environmental change, particularly the climate, and has brought humanity at the center in addressing the situation.

Christianity which constitutes a base of what society considers as culture, including human perception, interpretation, and understanding of reality, influences human behavior significantly (Hiagbe, 2015). Christianity as a religion has a great influence on anthropogenic attitudes and influences the way humans relate to the environment (Taylor, 2016). Moreover, good environmental policies are also tied to certain Christian values. However, several assessment reports demonstrate a strong link between religion and the environment with regards to addressing current global environmental issues.

Christianity as a religion has provided moral inspiration for historically notable partnerships that focus on environmental conservation and sustainable development (Bhagwat, Ormsby & Rutte, 2011). There is increasing importance in religious peoples' perception vis-à-vis the environment and the science of nature. Understanding this perception and position of the Christian church in environmental conversations is important for a proper analysis of the present crisis and in addressing the issues of this study.

This literature review is centered on two major headlines: – the relationship between Christianity and environmental protection, and – the contemporary Christian churches and environmental protection. It explores the relationship between Christianity and the natural environment, including what they share and the evolution of environmental issues within the

Christian church. It also explores the contribution of Christianity in national and global politics and policies. The theoretical framework for this study is presented in this chapter, which helps to explain the why of the research problem. The chapter equally defines the terms and concepts used in the study as they apply in the context of the study.

2.2 Definition of terms and concepts

Christianity

This is an Abrahamic monotheistic religion that is based on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth and holds the belief that Jesus is the Christ. An understanding of Christianity recognizes Jesus as a Jew, who lived and kept the feast and other religious rituals of Judaism (Cunningham, 2017). In Christianity, it is believed that Jesus of Nazareth is the messiah, he died and rose from the dead which reveals his identity as the messiah (Wilson, 1999). Henriksen (2019, p.1) conceive Christianity to be “a cluster of practices that when taken together, appears as a distinct historically and contextually shaped mode of being in the world”. This cluster of practices constitutes the relationship between Christian traditions, the communities that the tradition constitutes, and the individuals who themselves appropriate the tradition (Henriksen, 2019).

The environment

The term environment refers to nature. this comprises of the natural landscape including all its human and non-human features, that together make up its characteristics and processes. It includes the notion of wilderness that has not been altered by human activities. It also implies ‘surroundings’ which includes all other entities that surround an individual, element, object, or system, with which they interact.

Environmental protection

It is the practice of protecting the natural environment by taking necessary protection measures to conserve natural resources and the existing natural environment, and to repair damages caused to the environment. This activity is carried out by individuals, organizations, and governments. Measures for the protection of the environment varies from country to country but the goal stays the same.

Policy

Colebatch (2009) defines policy as an idea that flows in the way we organize our life and the practice of the way we are governed. It is used in both analysis and practice by public officials, elected representatives, activists, experts, and journalists, to shape the organization of public life. It is also used in private organizations, including churches and other religious organizations to organize their affairs and be able to conduct themselves orderly within their organization. Activists and environmental advocates can create a policy on issues like global warming and environmental justice (Colebatch, 2009). This implies that the policy helps to give direction and define our course of action.

Environmental policy

This is the result of activity by concerned people to draw attention to a range of things that are happening, including air pollution, soil erosion, deforestation, and forest degradation, and to organize them as part of the problem called the environment that demands a new approach. (Colebatch, 2009). This is carried out by concerned people both inside the government machinery and outside it.

Laudato Si'

It is the second encyclical letter of Pope Francis, the present Pope of the Roman Catholic Church, released on the 24th of May 2015 and titled “On care for our common home”. It is an official letter from the Vatican that deals with some aspects of the Catholic teaching concerning the present environmental crisis and to clarify, amplify, condemn, and or promote one or several issues. This letter is addressed to all Christians and men of goodwill to act regarding the issues addressed in the document.

2.3 The relationship between Christianity and environmental protection

There are diverse perceptions about Christianity concerning the environment. This section examines the link between Christianity and the protection of the environment and what they have in common. It also examines how Christian teachings and beliefs support and advocate for the protection of the environment, the role that Christians play as humans in an environment to ensure its conservation and preservation. It also involves the historical evolution of environmental protection within the Christian setting, to help establish the basis for this study.

From the perspective of environmental problems, the science of the environment indicates that human factors contribute greatly to the adverse effects on the environment. However, some Christian groups believe that change in the natural environment is natural and design by God to occur and man's input has little effect on this 'godly' agenda (Branton, 2006; Piefer, Ecklund & Fullerton, 2014). These groups refer to Bible prophecies to support their stance on the end-time scenario of climate change. According to some scholars, this kind of idea (a godly agenda) plays a role in fuelling and or promoting human ill-exploitative action on the environment.

Christianity and environmental protection are widely seen to be compatible (Bauman et al., 2011). The first book of the bible – Genesis, derived its meaning from a Greek word which means "origin", and in Hebrew, it means "in the beginning" (Genesis1:1). This first book of the Bible describes the earth's creation from the beginning, including the heavens, plants, animals, and men and it constitutes the Christian foundation for environmentalism and environmental protection. As a result, the Christian perspective of environmental protection is one that has to do with the preservation of the divine creation.

The biblical story of creation (Genesis 1) also portrays humanity as stewards of the earth by giving power and authority to guard and keep the earth, which is seen from the Christian perspective as a command. The above Genesis narrative reveals that God created the heavens and the earth as a dynamic functional entity, with all the creations that dwell in it, including the oceans, soils for plants and trees (Genesis 1:11). The text constitutes the Christian doctrine that governs its perspective of the earth and the need to look after it, thus the interest in environmental protection for the wellbeing of God's creation. It is on this basis that Pope Francis refers to environmental destruction as a sin against God in his *Laudato Si'* document (2015).

According to bible texts (Genesis 1:1; John 1:1-5), God is the creator of all things, both in the heavens and in the earth, and all creations are in Him. Psalm (23:1-2) for example, shows how God's generosity provided a good life in nature. Christ's teaching in Mathew (6:26-30) also shows God's providential care for all creatures. The above implies that if Christians need to care about God and what He cares about, then they also need to care about nature as God's

creation. Moreover, Christian churches hold the belief that the whole of creation is saved in Christ and he is the maker of everything that lives in creation (Mwambazambi, 2011).

Christianity as an important contributor to environmental protection portrays Christ as the source of life for all of creation, and that life of Christ is expressed through his creation (Mwambazambi, 2011). As far as God is the Creator of the world and humanity is at the center, it is strongly believed by theologians that man and nature have a theological foundation. However, the dominion and protection of God's creation involve all aspects of human life including the natural environment as well. As a result, Christians are called upon to provide control and encourage associations to care for the environment, by inspiring, informing, and allowing people to improve on their quality of life without compromising the lives of future generations.

Christianity and nature movement is seen to have gain prominence because of the growing concerns over global warming. Relating Christian beliefs directly to environmental attitudes seems too simplistic (Wardekker et al., 2009). Some scholars have argued that the negative relation between Christian beliefs and pro-environmental attitudes is often small and maybe a result of political and moral conservatism rather than religion itself. Christian theologians on the one hand are called to continuously re-examine the behavior of people concerning God about concern for the environment and environmental protection.

To expand on the relationship between Christianity and environmental protection, this section explores the place of environmental protection in Christianity and the contemporary Christian churches and environmentalism. It also shed light on the important role Christianity plays in the rise of environmentalism globally, and the evolution of nature and Christian-related thinking.

2.3.1 Environmental protection in Christianity

Christian pro-environmental groups championed the early global environmental movement in the United States for the protection of the wilderness environment. That led to the creation of the first national park (Yosemite and Yellowstone national park in the United States) (Taylor, 2005). After this move in the United States, other countries began supporting and creating national parks and nature reserves in other places around the world. Moreover, there are many calls from individual Christians and Christian theologians for the church to consider the

protection of the environment in which people live as an important part of their mission (Mwambazambi, 2011). These calls are viewed as part of the struggle for the restoration of the creation of God.

Christian concern for environmental issues emerged in the 1950s which is often termed as “stewardship” or “creation care” (Odey, 2014). The Christian church urges Christians to be realistic and constructive in their vision of what the future could and should look like while being firmly rooted in the good news of the Christian faith. This is because the survival of the human body is primarily dependent on nature and the environment. Christian churches and Christianity are not only seen to save souls but also bodies, thus the relationship between Christianity and environmental protection.

Christianity is an organized religion that is at the base of what is identified as culture; perception, interpretation, and understanding of reality, therefore it constitutes that which people organize their lives to those that adhere to it (Hiagbe, 2015). Linn White refers to Christianity as the most anthropocentric religion the world has known and alleged that it is the fusion of Western Christianity with technology that has proved so devastating in its environmental effect (Southgate, 2017). Christianity and Christian beliefs have been very resilient in the public space of our global society today (Golo & Yaro, 2013). Chidester, (1987, p. 4) reaffirms that Christianity as a religion is not simply concerned with the meaning of human life, but much more it is an engagement with the transcendent powers, forces, and processes that human beings have perceived to affect their lives.

A robust Christian affirmation that human life remains a part of God’s creation is seen by French (2008) to cover up the privileges given to human life due to human’s intrinsic values over animals, plants, and the rest of nature. He argues that the rise of modern science, with its mechanistic account of the non-human natural world, is a major factor in focusing Christian thinking around humanity’s fundamental separation from nature due to its distinctive rationality, agency, and subjectivity. In African traditional religious thought and ritual, nature is sacred, and anthropologists have recognized for a long time that members of traditional agrarian societies view nature as inherently spiritual and subject to mysteries (Olupona, 2009).

Christianity as a religion influences human behavior to a significant extent. According to science, human behavior is significantly related to environmental degradation, and that portrays Christianity as an unavoidable factor in environmental protection endeavors (Fredericks & O'Brien, 2011). However, it does not cancel the fact that conversation about environmental issues begins with science (*Laudato Si'*, 2015). Christianity therefore may either facilitate or hamper sustainable development projects, depending on the resonance of Christian traditions with the values of granting/funding bodies (Johnson & Snyder 2011).

The values in Christianity and Christian practices powerfully transmit and significantly overlap with moral reflection, a phenomenon that is termed “environmental ethics” (Steffen, 2007). Christianity as we know it also contributes significantly distinctively to the environmental ethic of care for nature as presented by many environmental ethicists. Steffen (2007) stated that “religious affirmations dispose and even explicitly direct persons to act in ways that conform to religiously constructed ideals of behavior”. This is evidence of the way religion in general tries to reconstruct the environmental narrative. Christianity as a religion is so powerful in the above regard.

Moreover, Christianity's concern in sustainable development has its historic roots in what is seen as the “social question” or “the modern social problem” in the last three decades of the nineteenth century (Odey, 2014). During that time, the “ecological question” joins the social question, and the language of sustainability emerged and was first used in the ecumenical movement (Odey, 2014). On the other hand, sustainable development in the Christian context has been provoked by a continuous unpleasant transformation of nature. Christianity and Christian beliefs have the power to construct rational ethical systems and direct moral injunctions to one another in the moral community. It can also assume responsibility for evaluating meaning in what they do and who they are as relational partners with others (Steffen, 2007).

Sustainability in the above context is applied to society and not to the natural environment. The continuous transformation of nature is integrally connected to an unending transformation of society which leads to environmental degradation (Odey, 2014). The above transformation process is seen by the above author as that which works for the benefits of modernity. Regarding the above phenomenon, the Christian church feels the burden and is therefore

obliged to play a role in the fight against global warming. Christian motivation stems from the divine responsibility to care for the earth and God's creation.

If we consider Johnson & Snyder's (2011, p. 133) definition of religion which says, "Religion is a set of values related to practices that help negotiate relationships with those both inside and outside particular communities". We can consider that an enormous problem as the degradation of the natural environment must be recognized from the outside as one having both a scientific and religious dimension, which scientists do acknowledge. This is evident in open letters to Christian and religious communities, appealing for their collaboration in the preservation of the earth's environment (Fredericks & O'Brien, 2011).

As a primary duty, Christian Environmental Movement Organizations (CEMOs) are involved in the process of advocacy for the environment. They examine how theological frames and religious affiliation, on the one hand, and environmental interest, on the other, shape the formation of information exchange. CEMOs do this through joint action ties within the Christian environmental social movement. They also sort to understand the impacts of religion, particularly Christianity, on joint mobilization, which may be a key to understanding the potential efficacy of CEMOs (Ellingson, Woodley & Paik, 2012). CEMOs focus on fomenting broad attitudes and lifestyle changes and seek to provide individuals with an ethical framework by which to view nature, as opposed to relying on secular environmental rationales (Ellingson et al., 2012).

However, environmental degradation raises a complex set of questions on how contemporary people, especially in developed societies live. The first natural response is directed to scientists and researchers, who can bring out quantifiable data. The above data can help to support claims about how the natural world operates, and human activities concerning the natural environment, including possible solutions (Fredericks & O'Brien, 2011).

Steffen (2007) claims that within the conceptual bailiwick resources of religion, Christianity can allow the development of attitudes of respect and positive regard for the environment. According to him, such attitudes cannot be clearly understood by more traditional ethics routes of deontology, contractarianism, or utilitarian consequentialism for example. The idea of stewardship is a precursor of sustainability and sustainable development discourse, which puts widespread responsibility on individuals and groups (Golo & Yaro, 2013). This same

idea of stewardship was flagged in the Brundtland report (Our Common Future, WCED, 1987) on sustainable development.

Some scholars have argued that even though Christianity advocates for ethical and moral values towards environmental protection, it may not necessarily translate into action due to widely varied underlying attitudes of different Christian traditions towards environmental conservation (Bhagwat et al., 2011). Some other scholars however believe that the success of Christianity-development partnerships depends on the socio-political context within which it finds itself. Christian ideas are in most cases relevant to development thinking and can therefore play a vital role in sustainable development (Bhagwat et al., 2011).

2.3.2 The Christian foundation of environmental protection

Environmental protection, in general, has been a source of sporadic, yet recurring controversy in global and national politics. This has accompanied a major concern for conservation dating back to as far as the administration of Theodore Roosevelt in the United States, culminating with the environmental movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s (Jelen & Lockett, 2014).

The theological and ethical foundations for religious environmentalism were laid down in the 1970s by mainline protestant and catholic leaders (Schaefer, 2009). Theologians and writers then developed the three major environmental ethics (stewardship, eco-justice, and eco-spirituality) which is in use today (Ellingson et al., 2012). Stewardship ethics emphasizes the biblical mandate for humans to take care of the earth, the eco-justice ethic combines environmental and religious concerns about inequality and helping the marginalized. While the eco-spirituality ethic focuses on reorienting humans to see their place as one part of a larger, pantheistic creation (Ellingson et al., 2012).

In environmental justice, Golden Walker (a scholar) outlines three forms of injustice: distributive, procedural, and injustice of recognition. The distributive implies the unequal allocation of environmental burdens. For example, the climate change burden will disproportionately fall on the poor, women, colonized, and other marginalized groups (Brox, 2016). According to Mwambazambi (2011), the goal of environmental protection is to support the health of humankind and the animal kingdom. However, the threat of climate change challenges this goal, but something can be done to respond to this current environmental crisis that has become a global issue today.

Nature on the other hand has intrinsic values, outside of its usefulness to humans, and all life forms have evolutionary destinies, and they can be allowed to flourish and fulfill these destinies (Taylor, 2005). The prominent Norwegian philosopher, Arnes Naes (b. 1912) coined the above notion of intrinsic value as ‘Deep Ecology’ in 1972. According to Taylor (2005), Arnes Naes invented that notion to contrast what he considers to be ‘shallow environmentalism’ – which is environmental concern rooted only in concern for humans. Deep ecology (or thoughtful environmentalism) is the belief that today’s environmental problems are symptomatic of deeper problems in our society, and this belief can play a role in solving these basic problems (Reed & Rothenberg, 1993). The above implies a recognition that some lands might be preserved not just by developing methods of sustainable forestry, but simply for their own, giving that nature values itself independent of human needs (Reed & Rothenberg, 1993).

However, many ecological scientists have argued that ecological threats should be considered as genuine natural and global security threats. The aim is to ensure that policies of environmental protection and climate change stabilization are understood as genuine top national priorities (French, 2008). The reason for that is because middle and long-term economic well-being is a function of ecological well-being and stability (French, 2008).

Biodiversity, on the one hand, is far greater than just species count and includes the genetic diversity within each species and a large range of ecosystemic systems through which species inter-relate (Fredericks & O’Brien, 2011). Governments and societies have for a long time maintained the importance of ecological sustainability but have allowed other priorities to regularly trump environmental concerns (French, 2008). These priorities of ecological sustainability lie in the economy, and nature is considered as a powerful force to drive it. The major reason why nature is considered as a superpower is the fact that all goods and services of the world’s economies are derived from its environmental resources, food chains, and energy flow (French, 2008).

Moreover, as humans seek to live following behavioral ideals and to educate themselves into habits of disposition that conform to character ideas, they tend to express their anthropocentric stance (Steffen, 2007). Anthropocentrism (human-centeredness) values nature exclusively in terms of its usefulness to mankind, and this idea is firmly grounded in western

religion and philosophy (Taylor, 2005). Many deep ecologists believe this human-centeredness must be rejected if there must be sustainable management of the natural environment. However, ecologists currently have no widely-agreed upon ways to define and measure genetic and ecosystemic diversity which is a sign of further uncertainty (Fredericks & O'Brien, 2011).

Many Protestant communities around the world consider the Christian faith and the value of the gospel as a possible spiritual resource for various movements. For example, the protestant community in South Korea used the Christian faith to build a strong culture to help them fight Japanese imperialism, as a direct response to military rule (Haigbe, 2015). As a result, people's understanding of God and Christ directly reflected their immediate social and economic context. Christ became the center of their culture and practice in their liberation fight for social justice peace (Haigbe, 2015)

There have been various movements working to influence change in religious faith systems as well, by channeling religious perspectives on global issues. Religious Environmental Movement Organizations (REMOs) is one of them, and have focused on bringing religious perspectives, beliefs, and constituencies into work on environmental issues. They also function as Social Movement Organizations (SMOs) and have promoted faith-based approaches to environmentalism. These SMOs are "collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity, and acting partly outside constitutional or organizational channels, to challenge extant systems of authority" (Ellingson et al., 2012).

2.3.3 The dynamics between Christianity and environmental protection

In the introduction of the Encyclopaedia of Religion and Nature, Taylor (2005) defines "Nature Religion" in contemporary terms as any religiosity that considers nature to be sacred and worthy of reverent care. Regarding the above, some scholars have kindled the wilderness religion and called for an establishment of national forest preserves that helped to set the stage for the National Park movement, the Biosphere Reserves, and World Heritage sites that we see today.

The above move preceded the establishment of the world's first national park (California's spectacular Yosemite Valley) by the American President Abraham Lincoln (Taylor, 2005). The understandings and resources of Christianity as religion helps inform and engage

environmental belief and actions. It also has a great influence on political orientations that often inform these environmental beliefs and actions (Sherkat & Ellison, 2007). Christianity and the Church are an important segment of most societies, particularly globally. It implies that any meaningful move(s) made or able to be made towards the struggle for environmental protection, must find a way to incorporate Christianity as a powerful partner (Peifer et al., 2014).

Various theorists have argued that religion's function is the legitimation of social hierarchy (Marx), the establishment of "moral community" and social solidarity (Durkheim), the acceptance of death (Malinowsky), the orientation of individuals amidst the complexity of the symbolic order (Geertz) or the negotiation of what it means to be human (Chidester) (Berry, 2011). Environmental pragmatists on the other hand also prefer that when religious values are translated into the public space, they should be transmogrified into something more digestible (Johnson & Snyder, 2011). However, some theorists argue that Christianity as a religion ought to conform or re-confirm to scientific information with regards to the present environmental crisis (Bauman, 2011).

Fredericks & O'Brien (2011, p. 44) propose that Christianity and ecology should adopt a balanced and dialogical approach to science. It is because science has important vital perspectives as well as unavoidable limitations that must both be faced realistically. However, they stressed that science should not be treated as a simplistic source of answers regarding the fact that scientific methods emphasize the importance of continual correction and insight rather than unquestionable acceptance of expertise.

The plan of God for humanity is to know Him through the world of matter (*Laudato Si'*, 2015). This kind of picture of God's plan motivates Christians to see themselves as one with people who feel and have deep respect and admiration for the natural world. Christians are therefore called upon to champion the course for environmental protection, especially in the global South, to fulfill their role as collaborators of God in the work of creation (Mwambazambi, 2011). Christianity as religion provides the consciousness of being concerning nature, in nature, with nature, under nature, above nature, of nature, and for nature (Steffen, 2007). Humanity is, therefore, capable to construct rational ethical systems, direct

moral injunctions to one another in the moral community, and assume responsibility for evaluating meaning (Steffen, 2007).

2.4 Contemporary Christian churches and environmentalism

This section examines present-day church teachings vis-à-vis the environment and environmental issues. It also examines environmental concerns within the Christian church circle and the perspective with which they approach environmental issues. This section is meant to share some insight into the contemporary perspective of the Christian church regarding concern for the environment.

The Christian church views the common good of society as that whose value is about attaining an ultimate end of the human person and the common interest of the whole of creation. It manifests the duty to care for the earth's environment which is an indication of the church's concern for environmental protection. Most ecological advocates within the Christian church stick to the principle of stewardship of nature and that nature should be revered. The Christian church, therefore, places environmental ethics on the stewardship concept; thus, it takes upon itself the responsibility to monitor the management and upkeep of nature (Bhagwat et al., 2011).

Aside from having intrinsic value, it is believed that nature also provides a source of spiritual truth (Taylor, 2005). Contemporary Christian movements like evangelism and Pentecostalism, and neo-Pentecostalism/charismatic, are oriented towards expansion. They place a high value on wealth creation and prosperity, as a good deserving life and as the benefits of salvation here on earth (Golo & Yaro, 2013). These Christian movements refuse and dislike a life of poverty and hardship. However, this kind of church orientation seems to pose a challenge to sustainability and environmental protection.

Moreover, Faith-based and non-governmental organizations have been a major channel via which the Christian church has made enormous contributions to environmental conservation and sustainable development. It has been possible principally through partnerships, though faced with some challenges in differences in world views, identity conflict, attitudes, and behavior of other religious groups that may not favor the conservation course (Bhagwat et al., 2011).

Some scholars argue that even though religion advocates for ethical and moral values towards environmentalism, it may translate into action due to the widely varied underlying attitudes of different religions towards environmental conservation (Bhagwat et al., 2011). Others believe that the success of religion-development partnerships is dependent on the socio-political context within which they (faiths) find themselves. That notwithstanding, Religious ideas are most of the time relevant to development thinking and can therefore play a vital role in sustainable development (Bhagwat et al., 2011).

Within the Christian perspective, humans are considered as caregivers, responsible for taking care of the earth, and are answerable to God for the role they play as earth's stewards. In Ghana, Christians, Islamic, and African traditional religions in their respective beliefs consider humans as an entity that does not own the earth. Their belief system considers the earth to belong to what Golo & Yaro (2013) refers to as "ultimate reality". This perception calls for a set of religious and moral duties towards the earth's environment, which is another way religion and Christianity, in particular, demonstrate concern for the environment.

Even though faith groups can provide public support in environmental conservation and sustainable development, secular conservation and development organizations have greatly enhanced linkages with these Christian church organizations (Bhagwat et al., 2011). It is a powerful approach to enhance the church's effect in that regard. One method they use to achieve that is the establishment of strong working relationships with faith groups, leaders, and adherents, with a focus on the common ground between the ethical and moral values of these organizations. It is done through the identification of synergies between their different programs. The Church in that regard has provided moral inspiration for historically notable partnerships that focus on environmental conservation and sustainable development (Bhagwat et al., 2011).

The following sub-sections present today's view and interpretation of the Christian church towards environmental concern. An understanding of the Christian church and her resources can help inform and engage her beliefs and actions towards environmental concern and protection. It also has a great influence on political orientations that often inform environmental beliefs and actions (Sherkat & Ellison, 2007).

2.4.1 Contemporary Christian churches

Contemporary churches refer to the new Pentecostal and Charismatic church movements and their style of pushing the gospel of Jesus Christ. There has been a lack in the relationship between these contemporary Christian church movements and social and environmental actions in the past decades (Anim, 2020). This is primarily because the concern for the natural environment and social actions have not been a priority within the circle of these church movements as their focus has been on man's spiritual transformation. The value orientation of these contemporary Christian movements has a relationship with their concern for the environment and how they view nature. However, the trend is beginning to change in recent years with the growing concerns for environmental action and social justice.

The gap in their relationship with the environment is a result of their spiritual orientation which is centered on evangelism and winning souls for heaven with less concern for economic development as an integral part of the Gospel. This kind of orientation which cares more about the world after now has played a major role in their concern on global environmental and social issues in this present world (Anim, 2020; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2020). The focus on the Holy Spirit as a defining factor in their theology reduces their concern for mundane things (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2020). These contemporary Christian movements at the same time embrace otherworldly beliefs and are beginning to advocate for 'worldly' solutions to environmental problems (Smith & Veldman, 2020).

Because God delights in human flourishing, Faith must always have a developmental agenda. The survival of mankind is dependent on the extent of care for creation (Genesis 1:28-29). This implies the continued existence of creation, including the human species, depends on the proper care of the resources made available from creation by the divine initiative (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2020). This implies that the meaning of "exercising dominion" over every living thing is to take responsibility to care for them for the sustenance and wellbeing of all of creation.

There is a general concern that segments of the public, irrespective of religious affiliation, do not accept the validity of global warming research (Evans, 2011). The perspective of godly dominion over nature is considered by scholars to limit the earth under man's direct control and exploitation. This perception is said to be more pronounced in the circles of today's Christian church movements, which is considered to somehow dampens their concern for the

environment in terms of care (Ronan, 2017). However, this kind of perception is an important dialogue partner in raising questions and challenges on environmental issues.

It is argued that religious beliefs and perceptions need to comply with scientific information regarding the environmental crisis and thus must re-organize themselves around an assertion of what is natural (Bauman, 2011). The idea is considered important according to some scholarly view because science tends to play the role of providing certainty and hope where religion once did but seem to no more do. For example, Bauman (2011) considers science as a body that provides the kind of security that was once provided by religion, and religion has become a point from where critical doubt could be developed about contemporary society. The relationship between religious beliefs and human behavior significantly affect environmental concern (Fredericks & O'Brien, 2011). That makes religious beliefs and perception an important factor in present-day environmental challenges.

2.4.2 Environmental concern in the Christian context

Environmental concern has to do with appropriate actions to minimize or prevent and monitor, adverse effects on the environment following certain laws. However, there is a diversity of views when it comes to climate change in the Christian churches and this is due to how it affects their different value orientations and ideologies and views of the world (Parton et al., 2015). Some Christian groups are less likely to believe while others are more convicted in the occurrence of climate change or that human activities contribute significantly to it. This affects how they channel support for the climate course and environmental protection. Lynn White's thesis reveals a lot about these differences in environmental concern within the Christian church and among Christian groups.

Other groups like the evangelicals and the non-evangelicals, and those outside the Judeo-Christian tradition, are at the extreme of environmental concern. The Catholics are in the middle ground between the above extremes of denial to support the kind of environmental policies to fight climate change (Taylor, Wieren, & Zaleha, 2016). According to Parton et al. (2015), religious factors are indirectly causal than spurious regarding climate change. On the other hand, environmental concern is not a superficial, fleeting issue-specific phenomenon as some scholars like DeHaven-Smith have suggested (Xiao & Dunlap, 2007). However, conscientiousness has a significant positive association with environmental concern (Hirsh,

2010). The different dimensions of environmental concern remain ambiguous despite the long and wide research on environmental attitudes and beliefs (Xiao & Dunlap, 2007).

In the analysis of Lynn White's (1967) *Issues of Science* theory by Djupe & Hunt (2009, p. 670), they argued that environmental concern could be improved if the views of Judeo-Christian institutions and or organizations are rejected in public discourse. According to White's thesis, Judeo-Christian views do not promote empathy for the environment. This implies, "Judeo-Christian religion has an inherently negative effect on environmental concern" (Djupe & Hunt, 2009). They present White's (1967) argument in regards to the present ecological crisis as a direct result of a social consciousness built upon Judeo-Christian beliefs that humanity has dominion over nature. White's thesis shows that Judeo-Christian belief gives room for humans to exploit nature as they want, even without considering the consequences of nature. White's thesis also claims that Judeo-Christian belief portrays man as a creation (in God's image) who has supreme power over nature and is supposed to use nature as he deems fit (Djupe & Hunt, 2009).

According to White's thesis, Christians who adhere more closely to the literal biblical viewpoint have lesser concern for environmental actions. This is an important issue when it comes to overall public opinion on the environment due to the large number of Christians associated with evangelicalism and evangelical churches. Religious conservatism as well as Christian religious institutions undermine support for environmental protection (Djupe & Hunt, 2009). White emphasizes that religion hinders pro-environmental behavior, and the greater the church attendance, the less pro-environmental attitudes present (Taylor et al., 2016). It implies that the more committed Christians are to the Judeo-Christian religion the less concerned they become for the environment.

The above implication seems to be quite different from *Laudato Si'* that expresses a deeper concern and care for the environment, regarding the environment as our common home, and a mother and sister. That also indicates an observable change in the Christian-environmental approach which is a big lesson from Christian church authority, calling on both Christians and non-Christians to show deep concern for the natural environment. However, that does not make White's thesis controversial – it is idealist, contextless, and seems to imply that ideas shape society, and not material and technological conditions.

In the second half of the twentieth century, environmental awareness grew and intensified and brought concern about the role religion can play in nature (Taylor, 2005). This role involves religion promoting environmentally sound behavior. The Judeo-Christian tradition, notably Christianity, has promoted anthropocentric attitudes and environmentally destructive behaviors, according to Lynn White Jr. but there is a growing criticism on this. Other reports cite that Christianity and generally religion, are becoming environmentally friendly. This is what is termed by Taylor et al., (2016) as the greening-of-religion hypothesis. Despite all the contrary arguments, Taylor et al., (2016) found that their greening-of-religion hypothesis was not supported, but White's thesis was supported. They suggested that indigenous traditions may likely be more pro-environmental than other religious systems.

According to Danielsen's (2013) analysis of three Evangelical periodicals (Christianity daily, Sojourners, and World), from 1984 – 2010, many articles from 1989 – 1995 proclaimed that environmentalism was becoming part of mainstream evangelism. Religious variables, including evangelical denominational affiliation and high views of the authority of scripture, are strongly and significantly related to attitudes towards evolution (Jelen & Lockett, 2014).

Christianity and ethics are also related in many ways, while they also differ in their primary focus of concern (Steffen, 2007). Some Christian ideas are decisive variables in human culture, which make them either culprit or savior regarding environmental and social well-being. This is the major idea and engine behind "Environmental Ethics" as a distinct sub-discipline in philosophy (Taylor, 2005). Ethics is anthropocentric in the sense that it includes human beings (self, primarily) concerning the "other" of the natural world, which also includes every religious ethics that reflects the same rational structure (Steffen, 2007). It presents a distinctive consciousness of self and its relation, including that of the natural world. While conservative Christians place more concern for human life on earth, many conservative Christian scholars do acknowledge God's concern for non-human life as well, citing the Noah and the flood incident (Gen 7:2-3) (Taylor et al., 2016).

Steffen (2007) argues that what is distinctive in Christian consciousness is the relationship to ultimacy that finally expresses itself as an idea of intimacy and loss of self. Relating this to environmental concern, Christianity can construct and shape attitudes and actions that express care and compassion for the natural world. But it fosters an understanding of a kind of human

relation to the environment that calls into question agent and acts upon self-other, self-object. According to the above author, it is distinct from the anthropocentric self-other relation, which is vital to ethics and ethics projects in general.

Christian consciousness is seen to foster ideas and not a responsible self that constructs an environmental ethic that is concerned with human flourishing or that which advances the well-being of the natural world as what is necessary for human well-being (Steffen, 2007). He argues that Christian consciousness gives rise to a distinctive rational reality, which concerning environmental concerns, yields away from being in the world that expresses itself behaviorally as care for the natural world. Ethics can analyze, critique, appreciate, and then welcome this care (which flows not from an anthropocentric ethical perspective) (Steffen, 2007).

According to French (2008), human existence had been predominantly understood by Christianity in a creation-centered frame for three-quarters of its history. So human participation in a great community of creation is balanced by a powerful and sometimes stronger emphasis on its hierarchical superiority to the rest of creation (French, 2008). Some scholars defined stewardship in the Christian context as the notion that “everything we have (including the earth we inhabit) belongs to God (Ps. 24:1). While we are permitted to use the earth, we must take good care of it, keep it, and even improve on it, and that forms the basis for our stewardship of the environment. Stewards are those who take care of things and do not spoil them. An important theological belief that is likely to generate environmental concern is that there is a strong stewardship bond in the Christian church (Piefer et al., 2014).

There is a considerable variation of people’s attitudes from different perspectives towards environmental issues, which affects their concern for the environment. There is also increasing importance in what Christians think about science today amidst scientific research on global warming that is being contested today in the public sphere. This is so because certain Christian groups are opposed to scientific methods (Evans, 2011). Within the climate and environmental discourse, there is a demonstration of a utilitarian perspective, and environmental sustainability, and ecological balance maintenance perspective (Hirsh, 2010). Responses show that both agreeableness and openness are significant predictors of increased

environmental concern, and agreeableness is related to higher levels of empathy seen to support pro-environmental motives (Hirsh, 2010).

Xiao & Dunlap (2007) on the coherence of environmental concern among the general U.S. and Canada public points that public concern and beliefs regarding the environment are not as fragmented and unorganized as some scholarly kinds of literature have suggested. That finding is also in line with Pier et al., (1992, 2000) based on more delimited samples with a far narrower range of environmental issues. It implies there is a coherent ‘generalized’ environmental concern among the general public in both countries (the United States and Canada). Djupe & Hunt (2009) assert that social interactions within a religious context work in two ways to shape individuals’ opinions on environmental concerns. Primarily, it serves as source(s) of communication, giving individuals access to information used in opinion formation from their denomination, clergy members, and other congregants. Secondly, religious institutions also shape opinion through normative diffusion.

“Green” on the one hand has become a synonym for “environmental”, which signals or indicates environmentally protective action (Taylor, 2005). According to the Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature, “green” connotes environmental concern, awareness, or action. However, nature and the sense of its value and sacredness are more closely related to spirituality than with religion. Most of those behaviors and actions considered to be spiritual could be considered religious as well by an external observer, for they generally believe that life has meaning and that is a sacred dimension to the universe (Taylor, 2005).

Beliefs in the seriousness of environmental problems on the other hand, strongly influence private behaviors. Political conservatism has a very substantial and significant negative direct effect on the perception of the seriousness of environmental problems (Taylor et al., 2016). For example, the American Family Association views the global warming issue as a controversy by the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) to shift away from emphasis from what they considered to be great-moral-issue-of-our-time (Danielsen, 2013). These include the sanctity of human life, the integrity of marriage, and the teaching of sexual abstinence and morality to American children (Danielsen, 2013).

The opposition of religion to science is seen by some scholars as part of a social conflict between institutions struggling for power. There is an assumption that people from certain

religious traditions tend to avoid education, partly for reason due to an epistemological conflict between religion and science. This is supported by results in lower educational attainment, less income and wealth, and other negative outcomes with being a member of certain religious traditions (Evans, 2011). Some scholarly claims reveal that there is a conflict between religious principles and those of science in a way that those who pursue science tend to abandon religion. Evans (2011) evaluates that one reason for the lower level of educational attainment among conservative protestants is the fact that fundamentalists find fault in the scientific method of knowledge acquisition.

According to Evans (2011), the examination of the history and religious teachings reveals the possibility that conservative protestants and Catholics have a slightly different epistemological stance than scientists do. Members of the above groups believe that the scientific method produces correct claims and that a religious method will result in the same claims. In the case where the two methods do not match, it is believed that the scientific claim is an error. This approach establishes the religious method of knowing as superior to the scientific method for most of the scientific claims (Evans, 2011).

Conservative Protestants still maintain their faith in scientific methods when it contradicts religious claims because of their belief that scientists are prone to certain systematic biases that lead to erroneous interpretations (Evans, 2011). They also believe such systematic biases could be caused by theoretical or interpretative abstraction, which can cause them to willfully bias their results sometimes to further non-scientific ends (like an anti-religious or anti-moral agenda). The ambivalence among certain Christian groups (s) is centered around the view that scientists and the scientific approach are not trusted to be pursuing a moral agenda.

Christianity is all about the relation between the self and God-as-other (the divine) (Steffen, 2007). That implies the kind of beliefs people hold about how the divine wants them to behave. This kind of belief affects and improves the relationship between the self and God (divine), an expression of ethical consciousness. The “other” is beyond the range of the normal human experience, but the relationship with that other remains self-other, subject-subject, subject-object, and whatever is religiously done is meant to affect the self-other relationship (Steffen, 2007). This shows the ethical consciousness about a religiously

conceived other – not the distinctive consciousness in which the self-other distinction breaks down.

2.5 Theoretical framework

This study uses Religion and Ecology lens to understand the relationship between Christianity and environmental practice. The framework has to do with integration and the idea that we as humans can contribute in some way towards saving the world (Bohannon II & O'Brien, 2011). In the above respect, environmental activism and Christianity are widely seen by theorists as belonging together, which is a reason why Christian assumptions either support good environmental habits or destructive ones. Christian ideas somehow unfairly influence the world through structuring human-human, human-other animal, and human-earth relations to a great extent, and can be considered as a narrow extension of environmental history (Bauman, 2011).

According to Page (2011), religion and ecology aim to address the environmental crisis in some way. In religion and ecology, traditions are represented because tradition is vital in shaping peoples' worldviews and formulates peoples' most cherished values (Finnegan, 2011). Page (2011, p.108) states that “the most common approach of Christianity and ecology to date consist of critically assessing Christian traditions – often understood primarily as worldviews (instead of ways of life, for example) – according to ecological criteria, critiquing ideas and concepts that justify environmental degradation, and proposing eco-friendly alternatives”.

In religion and ecology, the foundational assertion is that Christianity matters in environmental conversations (Bohannon & O'Brien, 2011). There is therefore a strong connection between Christian traditions and environmental practice(s) (Berry, 2011). Science on the other hand thrives principally on predictions and estimates about the future of multiple dynamic systems, including future human behavior. This makes natural science and religious studies something to be balanced by a dialogue with other forms of expertise and other ways of knowing (Frederick & O'Brien, 2011). Most Christian and ecology scholars alongside philosophers and environmentalists agree that the tendency to treat nature as the foundation of livelihood is a fact (Bauman, 2011). It implies that humanity needs to adapt to peoples'

lifestyles (the ways people live, act, and think) based on information emerging from the science of nature and physical science.

Christian and ecology scholars are much more motivated by the love of nature, and the fear and anxiety about the increasingly damaged planet (Bohannon II, 2011; Frederick & O'Brien, 2011). To consider the environmental implication of various Christian traditions or the religious properties of environmental practices, religion and ecology see the strong need to also think about their understanding of cities and not just nature. Religion and ecology also consider their understanding of human creativity and not just that of creation.

However, concerns over the wilderness 'environment' have often accompanied a lack of environmental concern over the actual environment we live in. Some critics have resort to critiquing most environmental movements that try to always advocate for the preservation of the wilderness environment. The primary relationship and encounter with the non-human environment are one that comes from interactions with "cities and towns, encompassing peoples' workplaces, homes, and grocery stores" (Campbell, 2011, 211). The above relationship somehow makes cities and towns not to be considered as natural environment and because they are human artifacts.

Christianity has particularly greatly influenced the stories we tell about nature and the human environment, which either turn out for good or evil (Bohannon II, 2011). According to Campbell (2011), people conceive nature in four ways which he terms as four models: – as an object, – as a resource, – as a home, and – as spirit. Cities as environmental entities are of critical concern and are taken seriously in the field of religion and ecology. The prioritization of the locals often reflects and is reflected in the practitioners and communities who are concerned about Christianity and the natural world. The above therefore implies a deep localized sense of place is the most solid foundation for environmental ethics (Campbell, 2011). Campbell (2011) states that "paying attention to nature, particularly in an urban context will inevitably raise questions of justice. For example, why does one have cleaner water than another? why are green spaces less accessible to some group of people than to others?". To answer such questions, it would require paying attention to what is immediately observable as to why such landscapes came to be structured in such a manner, and how power systems operate in distributing environmental burdens and benefits.

However, Bauman (2011) sought to develop a view of religion and ecology that admits that all knowledge is based on changing “grounds” as opposed to stable, transcendent foundations. He argues that it is only when religion and philosophical reflection, as well as human scientific knowledge, becomes skeptical, will the human understanding of nature as ‘naturanaturans’ become ‘ever-changing’ ground from/on which humans persist. Some scholars have also argued for the fact that the field of religion and ecology reflects an idealist legacy (the eco-feminist idealist legacy. In the above regard, social and environmental interest has come to mean having a common cause that could be addressed using united and complementary approaches (Bohannon II & O’Brien, 2011).

Bohannon II & O’Brien, (2011) assert that the foundational assumption of the scientific approach to “nature” is one that considers the change in human behavior to be a function of the right information, which makes the understanding of nature something to be understood. It is because Christian ideas, rituals, as meaning-making practices, could be a technology that shapes the world around us (Bauman, 2011). The idea that values have a causal influence on behavior, implies if humans get their values right, practices will follow (Snyder, 2011).

Conclusion

The above synthesis of literature contributes to a broad understanding of the issues of the environment in the Christian spectrum. It creates a good platform to better understand the position of *Laudatio Si’* and the Christian church vis-à-vis environmental protection policy in our global society. It also dissects the issues of Christian teachings and beliefs as it advocates for environmental protection policies. The literature above reveals that Christianity has an important role to play in the conservation and preservation of the environment through its values that shape human behavior and society.

Due to the growing concerns over global warming, Christianity seems to challenge and take its place on the global stage in addressing global environmental issues after some decades of decrease concern over global environmental issues. However, the lack of environmental concern as indicated in the literature above does not mean one causes damage to the environment. It only implies that the role of the Christian church in shaping human behavior affects the environment when the church lacks concern for it. The character of humans yearning to satisfy their consumptive desires can cause them to go beyond the margin to

causing harm to the environment. This reveals that the lack of environmental concern on the part of the Christian church and regarding its role in society in helping to control human excesses has a bigger effect on the natural environment.

Chapter Three

3.0 An analysis of the Laudato Si' Manifesto on the environment

3.1 Introduction

This chapter analyzes *Laudato Si'* concerning how it responds to the present environmental problem and its suggested solutions. It also investigates the different components of *Laudato Si'*'s proposed solution to target the present issue, its prescription, and action. The analysis that makes up this chapter specifically focuses on the practical and spiritual aspects of the solutions prescribed by the document regarding the present global environmental problem and the appropriate approach to it. Since this represents the document's suggestion for a way out of the crisis, it is important to look at how the document explains and differentiates the different aspects of the solutions to the crisis. This part constitutes the core of *Laudato Si'*, and it is also the focus of this analysis regarding the study objective.

3.2 The solutions to the present environmental crisis

The solutions proposed by *Laudato Si'* are in two dimensions; the practical and the spiritual. Pope Francis who is the author of the document believes that a solution does not only come from technological exploration but can come from humanity itself. The solution by *Laudato Si'* is therefore centered on a change in humanity that has to do with sustainable integral human development (*Laudato Si'*, paragraph 187). This is what constitutes the core of the document and it deals with merging the human spiritual aspect of ecology with the physical natural ecology. According to the document, solutions are proposed from a global perspective and humanity has the key to any sustainable solution. This section explores the solution proposed by *Laudato Si'* and investigates its approach to implementing the proposed solutions.

3.2.1 Practical solution to the present ecological crisis

Taking a critical look at the present global environmental crisis, *Laudato Si'* (2015) suggests that certain elements of integral ecology must be considered for a practical solution to the global problem. These elements are seen by the document as those which respect the human and social dimensions of integral ecology. Integral ecology in this context implies the kind of ecology that integrates the human spiritual and socio-economic aspects into natural physical ecology. This integral ecology requires some processes for its achievement. The process

requires looking into the aspects of dialogue, politics and the economy, and religion and science. It is what constitutes the approach to the present ecological crisis.

The fact that ecology deals with the relationship between living organisms and the environment in which they live and develop makes it a point of reflection. It calls for a debate about the conditions required for life and survival of society and the honesty needed to question certain models of development, production, and consumption (*Laudato Si'*, 138). This has a great deal to do with resource use and environmental sustainability. This inter-relationship between living organisms explains why *Laudato Si'* suggested the consideration of some elements that respect the human and social dimensions of what it calls an integral ecology. With the notion of integral ecology, the document seems to suggest that for the world to better address the global climate crisis, the focus must be on the environmental and socio-economic ecology, cultural ecology, and the common good, which are the elements of its integral ecology concept. This would demand taking certain steps to engage discussions on certain national and international platforms that would translate into policies. The above is what *Laudato Si'* proposed to be the best approach to a sustainable solution to the present environmental crisis. It examines the following components.

3.2.1.1 Environmental and socio-economic ecology

Nature cannot be regarded as something that is separated from humans or as a mere setting in which humans live. This implies an ecology that integrates the environmental and socio-economic aspects of society is fundamental in the fight against the present ecological crisis. Environmental and socio-economic ecology in this regard is the kind of ecology that considers the environmental, social, and economic aspects of society, their inter-relationship and deals with them as one component in addressing general societal issues. According to *Laudato Si'* (138), environmental and socio-economic ecology entails reflection and debate about the conditions required for the life and survival of society, and the truthfulness needed to question certain development, production, and consumption models. The document states that “living species are part of a network which we will never fully explore and understand” (*Laudato Si'*, 138). This statement shows one reason why an approach that integrates the environmental and socio-economic components into natural ecology is vital to halt the present crisis.

Laudato Si' (139) equally states that “strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded and at the same time protecting nature”. Since the crisis is complex, an integrated approach can pave a way for a solution that may last. It would help secure inclusivity in the entire process and the approach to be taken. According to *Laudato Si'* (138), a good part of the human genetic code is shared by many living beings, including other animals. The Pope’s understanding of the environment as presented in the document is one that has to do with the relationship existing between nature and human society. This means nature cannot be regarded as something that is separated from the human social and economic sphere or as a mere setting in which humans live. It is rather an inseparable part of the general society.

However, *Laudato Si'* (105, 106) stressed the need for an economic ecology that can appeal to a broader vision of the real world, but to what extent? the document did not clearly explain the extent to which this type of ecology would lead to a broader vision of reality. It instead states in paragraph (141) that “there is an interrelation between ecosystems and between the various spheres of social interaction”. The phrases – “living species are part of a network”, “integrated approach”, “various spheres of social interaction” – indicate a kind of ecology that considers the environmental and socio-economic component of human interaction with the environment. The above phrases also give an understanding of the environmental and socio-economic components of integral ecology. The document presents this proposal as something that should be explored by the various actors in the process of seeking a solution to the present global crisis. It addressed the social, economic, and ecological considerations separately and fits them into an integrated ecological approach.

3.2.1.2 The cultural ecology

Culture as in *Laudato Si'* is more than what humans have inherited in the past; it is a living, dynamic, and participatory present reality that cannot be excluded whenever the aspect of the human relationship with the environment is placed in the front (*Laudato Si'*, 143). Within the United Nations 2015 framework on sustainable development, culture contributes to inclusive and equitable development, thus cultural preservation is vital as an end. It defines people and shapes their identity. Pope Francis sees the preservation of cultural patrimony as one major way to respond to the present

environmental crisis. According to *Laudato Si'* (143), cultural patrimony is a part of a shared identity of each place and a means by which to build a habitable city. The document in paragraph (143) emphasized that there should be “greater attention to local cultures when studying environmental problems”, to be able to incorporate the history, culture, and architecture of each place as separate entities. This can lead to the preservation of the original identity of each place.

Cultural ecology is proposed by *Laudato Si'* as one of the major components of integral ecology. According to *Laudato Si'* (143), preserving cultural patrimony would be a major step in responding to the present ecological crisis. The document further states in paragraph (144) that “quality of life must be understood within the world of symbols and customs proper to each human group”. And in paragraph (145) it states that “the disappearance of a culture can be just as serious, or even more serious than the disappearance of a species of plant or animal”. The above statements imply that no one can care for an environment like the people of that environment because of their close relationship and interaction with their environment. Every place on the earth has a shared heritage which is regarded by the people as precious to their lifestyles and values.

The scientific study demonstrates that local indigenous knowledge is best in the management of natural resources in forest regions of the world. This has been proven in the Congo Basin forest space of Africa and the Amazon forest region of South America, for example. Much of the destruction in the natural space around the world today has been geared by imported knowledge, and since no one people care for a place like the people in that place, cultural patrimony must be valued.

Moreover, *Laudato Si'* (145) also states that “the imposition of a dominant lifestyle linked to a single form of production can be just as harmful as the altering of ecosystems”. It went further to suggest that “it is important that the different parts of a city be well integrated and that those who live there have a sense of the whole” (151). Here, *Laudato Si'* compares the destruction or alteration of culture to the alteration of ecosystems. It asserts that environmental destruction begins with cultural destruction or alteration, therefore preserving culture is preserving the environment thereby preserving nature. This also implies that if

every cultural patrimony around the world is being preserved from exploitation and destruction, the world is bound to have an orderly and sustainable society.

I think *Laudato Si'* is explicit on the above statements in the sense that people would better manage their area because they value it more. This kind of management approach will also lead to the proper management of the entire earth space. It is a very technical and tactical approach to manage the whole simply by taking into consideration the specificity of the different parts that makes up that whole. Conserving the history, culture, and architecture of an area as proposed by *Laudato Si'* is a powerful way of preserving its original identity. This is also one of the best approaches recommended by conservation science to enhance environmental protection. It is important as social sciences demonstrate that the preservation of cultural patrimony helps reduces environmental destruction. Cultural patrimony is therefore a good conservation tool used by conservationists. This goes to corroborate *Laudato Si'*'s assertion that environmental destruction begins with cultural destruction or alteration.

The phrases “attention to local cultures”, “the world of symbols”, “even more serious, than the disappearance”, “dominant lifestyle”, “well-integrated”, reveals a cultural ecology within the human society. This shows a strong relationship between cultural ecology and the natural environment.

3.2.1.3 The common good

Another component of the practical solution proposed by *Laudato Si'* is the adoption of the principle of the common good. The common good as defined by *Laudato Si'* (156) is “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members' relatively thorough and ready access to their fulfillment”. This implies a corporate good of humanity which is of benefit to all within the human social group. *Laudato Si'* (156) presents the common good as the central and unifying principle of social ethics. The earth as a common good compels humans to be stewards and to offer greater care than any other creature.

Laudato Si's (158) statement that “an appreciation of the immense dignity of the poor in the light of our deepest convictions as believers” is what it highlights as the demand of the common good before every other. It added that “the global economic crises have made painfully obvious the detrimental effects of disregarding our common destiny” (*Laudato Si'*, 159). Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* links the concept of integral ecology to anchor on the common good. Respect for the human person is what it portrays as the underlying principle of the common good. According to Pope Francis, this underlying principle has to do with the overall welfare of society and the development of a variety of immediate groups, with an application of the principle of subsidiarity. This subsidiarity principle can contribute to reducing human and environmental exploitation. The fact that wealthy people in society are exploiting the poor for economic benefits is a good reason to invoke this principle which can speak to their consciences. This may translate into a policy. The document is explicit about this aspect of its integral ecology regarding the environment and it can also be that factor that has enriched Pope Francis' advocacy for the poor.

The Pope states in Paragraph (160) that “when we ask ourselves what kind of world we want to leave behind, we think in the first place of its general direction, its meaning and its values”. It concluded by stating that “the issue is one which dramatically affects us, for it has to do with the ultimate meaning of our earthly sojourn” (*Laudato Si'*, 160). Pope Francis made the above statements from the perspective of human dignity which is the perspective of Christ and the Church. It is as though the Pope is trying to be anthropocentric here. The use of the words “immense dignity”, “detrimental effects”, “we want to leave behind”, “the ultimate meaning”, all points to a common good.

3.2.2 Spiritual solution and approach to the present ecological crisis

According to *Laudato Si'*, most people living on our planet earth are supposedly believers. This is a powerful indication that the spiritual aspect cannot be laid aside when it comes to seeking a solution to a global crisis. With the need for concerted effort to face a global challenge like the present environmental crisis, it is imperative to consider solutions from different directions, especially spirituality when dealing

with Christian contributions. However, the belief system is a powerful factor in our global society today when it comes to communication and getting people involved. *Laudato Si'* states that “religious classics can prove meaningful in every age; [for] they have an enduring power to open new horizons”. Base on the latter statement, the Pope seeks to sort for a spiritual solution to the crisis and a deeper approach to it. This demonstrates the strength and enduring power of religion, which becomes an important partner in dialogue with science on nature and the environment. Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* does not see it reasonable for society to try to dismiss religion or certain writings on the basis that they are from a religious contextual belief. It is because powerful ethical principles could find expression in a variety of languages including religious language (*Laudato Si'*, 199). The following therefore explores the spiritual solution of *Laudato Si'* and its line of action.

3.2.2.1 Spiritual solution

The basis for the protection of the environment, to preserve the dignity of the human person, begins with the spiritual aspect of humanity (*Laudato Si'*, 2015). *Laudato Si'* claims that the best solution to the present crisis is one with a spiritual root, with an awareness of our common human origin that would trigger new convictions and life forms. It is this conviction that the Pope believes can contribute rationally to an integral ecology including the full development of humanity. The pope in *Laudato Si'* (202) thinks that humans need a renewal of the mind because there is a great cultural, spiritual, and educational challenge before humanity which is highly demanding.

He also sees that one way the techno-economic paradigm affects individuals is through compulsive consumerism as the market tries to promote this new lifestyle to sell its products. The new lifestyle causes people to believe they are free if they have the freedom to consume. It engenders what *Laudato Si'* (204) refers to as a “self-centered and self-enclosed” lifestyle that eventually increases greed. Pope Francis’s emphasis here is that those who benefit from this new way of life are a few individuals who are committed to keeping generating wealth for themselves with little or no consideration of the masses. This kind of approach of wealth generation makes the concern not to be only about the threat of extreme weather events, but

much more the processes that lead to it. The Pope sees this consumerist lifestyle as an obsession fueled by the capitalist market system (*Laudato Si'*, 204).

Laudato Si' claims that many people still flow with what the market has to offer despite them knowing that the current human progress and the mere amassing of earthly wealth and pleasures are not enough to bring about joy and meaning in the human heart. According to *Laudato Si'* (66), the basis for the protection of the environment and to preserve the dignity of the human person and other creatures begin with the spiritual aspect of humanity. This implies that for humanity to become more effective in handling societal issues is for humanity to become more spiritual. In other words, spirituality is a necessity for humanity to get on track and fix the earth.

Gen 1:28; 2:15 says man is to “have dominion” over the earth to “till it and keep it”. Pope Francis in paragraph (68) of *Laudato Si'* states that “the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures” as other people and groups may view it. The spiritual solution is therefore centered on the renewal of the human mind. This is demonstrated with the following four major aspects that include ecological conversion, joy and peace, and civic and political love.

a. Ecological conversion

Ecological conversion is all about an ecological spirituality grounded in the conviction of the Christian faith. It is centered on the fact that the processes that lead to climate change and environmental destruction is more important than the threat of the effects of climate change when it comes to getting a solution. Here, *Laudato Si'* portrays the Gospel teachings as something that has a direct consequence on human thought, feeling, and way of living, and it links greater spirituality to greater concern for the earth (*Laudato Si'*, 216). The document also shows that the involvement of spirituality in environmental protection is a sustainable approach, which in other words means spirituality can bring inspiration and empowers human commitment in this direction.

To the above effect, *Laudato Si'* (217) states that “the external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have come so vastly”. This implies the present ecological crisis is subjected to what is termed as a “profound interior conversion” (*Laudato*

Si', 217). However, the call for ecological conversion goes particularly to Christians since it has to do with faith. It is believed that change in humanity begins from the mind, which goes down to spirituality, and to sustain change lies with sustaining that spirituality. Here, we can see how *Laudato Si'* links the inward human person and his outer human action. Since spirituality can bring inspiration, it can thus empower human commitment to better care for the environment.

Laudato Si' (210) also states that “environmental education should facilitate leaping the transcendent which gives ecological ethics its deepest meaning”. This implies environmental education needs educators who can develop ethics of ecology, to help people grow in solidarity, responsibility, and compassionate care through what *Laudato Si'* views to be an effective pedagogy. Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*, cited the Australian bishops who spoke of the importance of such a conversion to achieve reconciliation with creation. They said – “we must examine our lives and acknowledge how we have harmed God’s creation through our actions and our failure to act” (*Laudato Si'*, 218). This points to the fact that sustainable change the world needs is one that must begin from the human heart.

However, Change begins from one person to the family, to the community, and eventually the world. The human heart must reconcile with the natural environment for there to be a commitment to change in the present environmental situation. This explains why *Laudato Si'* chose to go back to spirituality as the baseline solution to address the environmental issue. It begins with the awareness and recognition that each creature reflects something of God and reflects some aspects of God and who He is.

Concerning changes in consumer habits, *Laudato Si'* (215) states that “if someone has not learned and admired something beautiful, we should not be surprised if he or she treats everything as an object to be used and abused without scruple”. It asserts that “the ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion”. According to the document (221), various convictions of the Christian faith can help to give more meaning to this ecological conversion. This includes particularly that of nature as God’s creation and what it presents as “the awareness that each creature reflects something of God and has a message to convey to us” (paragraph 221). The logic in this ecological conversion lies in the fact that if the human being is capable to recognize, honor and value

God as the creator of life and can appreciate God for the gift of life, then he can be capable of valuing every other thing created by God. What this means is that we can better treat and handle other creatures, their habitat, and eventually our environment if we consider God and His values for creation.

The use of the words “internal deserts”, “examine our lives”, “also a community conversion”, “each creation reflects something of God” all point to an ecological conversion that begins from the human heart. With this kind of approach, human beings are bound to secure and better protect the natural environment, thereby reversing the present ecological crisis. Based on the above, it is possible to say that ecological conversion is also a community conversion, one that can bring about lasting change and help reverse the present ecological problem.

b. Joy and peace

Laudato Si' presents Christian spirituality as labor that forms part of the very essence of the human person. The labor should be taken into consideration in the fight against the present ecological crisis. Christian spirituality is inherent to the human way of being and convicts the human heart towards acting in ways that respect the dignity of humanity. This brings about another level of joy and peace in the human heart. Our contemporary global world however tends to demean contemplative rest as something unproductive and unnecessary, while it is seen by *Laudato Si'* (237) as doing away with the very thing that is most vital about work. It claims that the present human consumerist lifestyle is a major driver of ecological destruction and environmental exploitation, leading to the present environmental crisis. Environmental exploitation thrives on the competition and longing to want more and live big. This implies there is a fight in the human heart for peace which pushes men to seek ways to satisfy that inner longing.

The document differentiates between receptivity and gratuity with mere inactivity in our work by emphasizing that Christian spirituality is work, a kind that protects human action from becoming empty activism. This labor also prevents the sense of isolation which makes the human person want to seek personal gain to the detriment of every other. According to *Laudato Si'* (237), it is important to consider Christian spirituality if the world needs to get to the root of the present global environmental crisis. What the document is saying here is that this problem starts with and in the human person and the solution must also start from the

human person. The outward expression of the human character that drives the so-called “capitalist system” as expressed by *Laudato Si’* reflects the inner desire of a man that is done away in a Christ-like spirituality.

Laudato Si’ (222) claims that Christian spirituality is a lifestyle, and it manifests in a way that brings about a conviction that “less is more” in a way that enables humans to cherish one another. It points to Christian spirituality as a solution to the human obsession with consumption. This is because according to the document, Christian spirituality proposes an alternative to live, and brings a lifestyle capable to deliver deep enjoyment in the human heart. In paragraph (223), it states that “those who enjoy more and live better each moment are those who have given up dipping here and there”. This shows that Christian spirituality proposes a growth model where moderation and the capacity to be happy are noticeable. the document also defines happiness as knowing how to limit some needs that only diminish humanity and being open to the many different possibilities which life can offer (*Laudato Si’*, 223).

The document considers peace to be a state of being which goes beyond the level of the mere absence of war (*Laudato Si’*, 225). Its view of inner peace is one that is reflected in a balanced lifestyle together with the capacity for wonder which takes the human being to a deeper understanding of life. This inner peace is what it also considers as something that is closely related to care for ecology and the common good (nature). According to *Laudato Si*, nature is filled with words of love that bring peace and which could be listened to only in a quiet environment. This explains the statement that “no one can cultivate a sober and satisfying life without being at peace with him or herself” (*Laudato Si’*, 225).

It further states that “many people today sense a profound imbalance which drives them to frenetic activity and makes them feel busy” (*Laudato Si’*, 225). The above statement gives reason for some of the behaviors we observe today in our society that are harmful to the natural environment (earth). Its view of inner peace is one that is reflected in a balanced lifestyle together with the capacity for wonder which takes humans to a deeper understanding of life. This corroborates the fact the peace is much more than the absence of war. This aspect of joy and peace shows a strong link between Christian spirituality, the human heart, and care for the ecology. It Implies that the Christian spirituality lifestyle can be a great deal to minimize environmental exploitation.

The document also compares the act of Christian baptism with water as a sign to encounter God in nature, which it uses to confirm its assertion that God is in nature and nature is in God. It states that “Christian spirituality incorporates the value of relaxation in which is a solution to our present world challenges” (*Laudato Si’*, 237). The document reveals that nature portrays the mystery of God, which implies it is ideal to discover God in all things and not only in the soul of man. It supports this claim with the ‘Saint John of the Cross’ view that “all the goodness present in the realities and experience of this world is present in God eminently and infinitely, or more properly, in each of the sublime realities in God” (*Laudato Si’*, 234). It also compares natural features like mountains with their beauty, brightness, and fragrant to God. In other words, the text considers God to be in nature and links that consideration to some Christian spiritual practices. Though the document did not explicitly illustrate the relationship and the inclusion of non-Christians in the process. The use of the phrases “giving up dipping here and there”, “sober and satisfying life”, points to a longing for joy and peace.

c. Civic and political love

Laudato Si’ relates the love of God, which makes humans brothers and sisters and God as a common Father, with the care for nature as part of a lifestyle that includes the capacity to live together. This love it talks about is a free one that comes only from God and referred to it as “Fraternal love” (*Laudato Si’*, 228). This kind of love transcends the natural human ability into a supernatural ability to be able to express it even to enemies. The document calls on Christians to regain the conviction that they need one another. It states in paragraph (229) that “we have had enough of immorality and the mockery of ethics, goodness, faith, and honesty” has been of no good to humanity.

The question here is how does the above translate to the global natural environment? According to *Laudato Si’*, the love of God is the same love that binds us, as humans, with the natural environment. This means the more humans love God the more concern they would have for the natural environment since it is part of God’s creation. The more Christians of the world draw closer to God the more they develop and gain godly ability to love beyond their natural ability. The document added that it is the same love that inspires Christians to accept the wind, the sun, and the cloud, even though we cannot control them, in what it calls a “universal fraternity” (paragraph 228). It is this small gesture of mutual care (love) that *Laudato Si* described as being civil and political, and it is capable to drive the world to devise

greater actions to halt the present environmental crisis. It indicates that human beings can do more if they can recognize and rely on God to empower them to be able to accommodate other creatures.

The above implies that this kind of love brings about oneness and encourages the care culture, which engenders civic and political love for common action. *Laudato Si* considers civic and political love as one of the major things missing at the center of every state and government in the fight against the present ecological crisis. It explains that consumerism can induce indifference in a community, causing it to break out (paragraph 232). This aspect of civic and political love also supports the fact that we live in a common home entrusted to us as humans. The implication of *Laudato Si*'s consideration of this kind of love is that community actions can also become spiritual experiences when they express self-giving love. The connectivity between the love for God, love for society, and community action highlighted by the document speaks for itself.

According to the document, the relationship between individuals and macro-relationships is affected by an outstanding expression of charity which comes from the love for society and commitment to the common good (nature). It states that “love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care, is also civic and political” and “social love moves us to devise larger strategies to encourage a “culture of care”. It also points that community actions can help develop and recover relationships that can enable a new social fabric to emerge (*Laudato Si*’, 232). The use of words like “enough of”, “is also civic and political”, “moves us” and “community actions”, points to civic and political love.

3.3. Approach to the present ecological crisis

The approach in this context is ways or methods that can lead to the implementation of the above-proposed solutions by the *Laudato Si*’. The approach is very vital when it comes to responding to any issue of a complex nature. To implement the above-proposed solutions to the present ecological crisis requires an appropriate approach to blend the Christian perspective with that of the non-Christian world which together are part of the global society. Since the global climate issue is complex and needs joint action, ways of reconciling perspectives are vital to this end. In the context of the present environmental crisis, *Laudato Si*’ outlines three major methods with which to approach the issue at hand. The document

refers to these lines of action as a major path of dialogue that can help escape the spiral of self-destruction that has submerged mankind. These include – dialogue, politics, and economy, religion, and science.

3.3.1 Dialogue

Dialogue is a method of communication skills to enable active listening and empathic understanding. International action on the environment has made great steps with this method in responding to the present crisis. This international dialogue, according to *Laudato Si'* (167), has equally “drew up an agenda with an action plan and a convention on biodiversity”. However, solutions are proposed from a global perspective and dialogue is one of the key approaches to face a common challenge, especially when it has to do with global issues in our contemporary world (*Laudato Si'*, 164). This is important because of the human inter-dependence and the ecological system in which we belong as humans. It states in paragraph (166) that “environmental questions have increasingly found a place on public agendas and encouraged more far-sighted approaches”, though there are many challenges in terms of effective implementation of principles in many of the signed accords.

The 1992 Earth summit in Rio de Janeiro is one of such dialogue platforms that has been applauded by *Laudato Si'*. The Vienna Convention for the protection of the ozone layer is another for which *Laudato Si'* (168) stated that its “implementation through the Montreal Protocol and amendments, the problem of the layer thinning seems to have entered a phase of resolution”. Referring to the above international dialogue platforms on the environment, and their implementation, *Laudato Si'* (167, 168) views that a big difference has been made so far. Though the challenges in the implementation of signed accords are enormous, the dialogue approach has proven to be most effective in the past when addressing issues of global importance. What *Laudato Si'* is saying here is that it has recognized dialogue as a powerful tool to resolve global issues and world actors (States, governments, organizations, and powerful individual actors) have to push more for dialogue with the solutions proposed from the Christian perspective as part of the agenda.

The document also considers that there is a need for honesty, courage, and responsibility especially on the part of the countries that pollute the most, which must translate into dialogue for an effective reduction of the present greenhouse gas emission levels. It can be inferred that

the use of words like “a place on public agendas”, “convention on biodiversity”, and “phase of resolution” points to dialogue as an approach that can yield significant results in the present crisis.

3.3.2 Politics and the economy

This is another line of action to the present environmental crisis. *Laudato Si'* emphasizes that politics must not be subject to the economy, nor should the economy be subject to the dictates of technocracy driven by a paradigm of efficiency (*Laudato Si'*, 189). This is one way to reduce human exploitation of the environment. With the power of politics, it should be able to have control over the affairs of the environment by influencing the economy. If the present market system and the technocratic paradigm is cited as a danger to the environment by influencing and promoting excessive waste production and disposal through its diverse mechanisms, then it needs to be controlled. This kind of control can be exercised primarily by political power. So, it would be a disaster to have the economy have precedence over the political power or dictate its direction vis-à-vis the environment. Contrary to the idea of *Laudato Si'*, it would be difficult to eliminate scientific methods in solving social problems if only it can prove effective with very little negative environmental effect. What is important is that there should be the inclusion of diverse methods based on little or no effect on the environment.

Laudato Si' recognizes the real economy as one that makes possible the diversification and improvement in production, which helps companies to operate well and create more employment. The pope in paragraph (190) strongly believes that market forces cannot adequately safeguard the environment. He thinks effective protection of the environment cannot be achieved if it is solely based on financial calculations of cost and benefits. However, the document in paragraph (172) asserts that “for poor countries, the priorities must be to eliminate extreme poverty and to promote the social development of their people”.

The question that arises from the above assertion is that how does the world work to help eliminate extreme poverty in poor countries? Is it enough to help eliminate extreme poverty simply by fixing the environmental problem? The kind of economic politics advocated by *Laudato Si'* is a good approach to the present environmental crisis. Scientific studies demonstrate that much of the impact of the present environmental crisis is on poor countries

and it projects a greater effect, particularly with countries in the global South with little capacity to adapt. This exposes them to more vulnerability. It also demonstrates that the impact of the crisis already has and will have a more additional effect on the poor. This implies that for the world to help poor countries eliminate extreme poverty, it is imperative to halt the present crisis which puts an additional burden on the poor and reduces their resilience capacity.

Moreover, politics has the power to shape an entire system including defining the economy. This in turn makes the economy to be at the mercy of the politics in place. To fight this global challenge, governments and States must engage to shape the various economies in ways that prioritize nature and the environment. This is important because politics and the political systems of the world can easily be controlled while the economy can get to a level where it becomes uncontrollable. If the global system is positioned in a way that the economy is that which defines the political, then the world is bound to remain in the present crisis.

In all the dialogue processes of politics and the economy, some questions must be of a higher priority. *Laudato Si'* (paragraph 185) states that “we know that water is a scarce and indispensable resource and a fundamental right which conditions the exercise of other human rights” for example. The above statement supports the fact that some questions need to be placed at a higher priority. This is because where profits alone count, there can be no thinking about the rhythms of nature (*Laudato Si'*, 190). It can lead to over-exploitation of nature without due consideration of the harm being inflicted on the natural environment and the consequences on humanity. The remedy is stated to be a “more diversified and innovative forms of production which impact less on the environment and can prove very profitable” (*Laudato Si'*, 191). The issue with this kind of remedy is that despite the much pressure, not much is known about the factors that drive the many different types of environmental innovation and the impact on production.

For market forces not being able to effectively safeguard that environment based on experience as stated by *Laudato Si'*, it is easy to conclude. I think for *Laudato Si'* to be able to conclude that environmental protection cannot work if it is entirely centered on financial calculations of cost and benefits, it is based on the above.

3.3.3 Religion and Science

The relationship between religion and science is very important to be considered when it has to do with inclusiveness in finding a solution to a global challenge. *Laudato Si'* (199) states that “religious classics can prove meaningful in every age; they have an enduring power to open new horizons”. The above statement shows the strength and enduring power of religion, which makes it an important partner in dialogue with science on nature and environmental issues. *Laudato Si'* illustrates the importance and value of religion in dialogue with science. According to the document, if the world must reason only within the confines of empirical science, there would be little room left for aesthetic sensibility, poetry, or even the ability to be logical to capture the whole meaning and purpose of things (*Laudato Si'*, 199).

A platform where religion and science blends can be a good one to source for solutions to many human problems, including the present environmental crisis. *Laudato Si'* claims that it is not logical for society to try to dismiss religion or certain writings on the basis that they arise from the context of a religious belief. The reasons for the above claim is an anchor on the statement that “the ethical principles capable of being apprehended by reason can always reappear in a different guise and find expression in a variety of languages, including religious language” (*Laudato Si'*, 199). That implies ethical principles can be expressed in different languages including that of religion. Thus, the document is saying that religion should not be seen or considered as a crime. There must be a consideration when dealing with issues of a religious nature to avoid an unfair general conclusion.

Moreover, the document considers that trying to kick out religious language in the public arena can cause the world to lose valuable contributions that religion can make in responding to the issues of mankind in a better way. Religious classics have an enduring power to open a new horizon (*Laudato Si'*, 199). That implies innovation. The cooperation between religion and science can therefore be much better and strong if issues of religion (faith) are translated into reasoning. It also states that – “the majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers”, which implies that it is normal to have people express ethical principles in or with religious language (*Laudato Si'*, 201). The words “enduring power”, “can always reappear in different guise”, and “a majority of

people”, indicate the importance and value of religious cooperation with science in dialogue on issues affecting society and the natural ecology.

However, concerning the environment, religious movements advocated for environmental conservation and protection that led to the establishment of the first national park (Yosemite and Yellow Stone) in the United States (Taylor, 2005). Christianity for example flows with science on issues that tie with certain Christian values and traditions. According to the present global scientific approach to fight climate change (REDD+), the role of conservation and sustainable management of natural resources is highlighted as important factors (WWF, 2012). Religion has a key role to play in conservation and sustainable development endeavors, which makes it an important partner with science as cited by *Laudato Si’*.

Conclusion

There is no clear distinction between the practical solution and the spiritual solution to the present environmental crisis as addressed in *Laudato Si’*. What *Laudato Si’* refers to as a solution to the crisis is spiritual, which has to do with all men particularly Christian understanding of God and His purpose for creation. It is in this regard *Laudato Si’* calls for an integrated ecology, one that considers the origin of creation. One reason the document takes the approach of spirituality is that it helps brings man back to his origin. Therefore, to help the world resolve the present ecological crisis is to revisit nature which has to do with the origin of creation and its purpose. It is termed integrated because it involves a man and his spiritual [origin], social, economic, and cultural aspects, and not only the economic aspect of man and society.

Chapter Four

4.0 Key critiques of *Laudato Si'*

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines some arguments and claims from thirteen critics based on their focus on the solutions proposed by *Laudato Si'*. It is centered on their point of view as it targets the core of the document which is the focus of the analysis in the previous chapter and line with the study objective. The selection was made with keywords related to the topic and how they target the study questions. It also made use of how the different critics target the document's core ideas and intentions and focus on its strength and weaknesses, to help improve the concerns of *Laudato Si'*.

A total of thirteen critics were selected whose arguments and claims help enrich the ideas of Pope Francis, and the different grounds on which the Pope responds to the present crisis. The insights of these authors also highlight the thoughts and concerns raised in the document and help expand an understanding of the Pope's integral ecology concept. This section looks at the arguments and claims put forth by the following authors on *Laudato Si'* regarding how it responds to the issues in question.

1. Kelvin J. O'Brien (2019) – highlights the scales in *Laudato Si'* and the Christian ecological ethics
2. Clement Campos (2017) – Speaks from an Indian perspective and how the proposed solutions relate to the Indian theological context. He brings a reaction from the Indian context
3. Ken Homan, S.J. (2016) – An opportunity for conversion: American Jesuits and the response to *Laudato Si'*. He speaks from the perspectives of the American Jesuits. His arguments and claims came from the evaluation of the American Jesuits' efforts before and in response to the Pope's call for an integral ecology. His response to *Laudato Si'* also touches on how the Pope's call affects the resilience of the Jesuits' missionary endeavor.
4. Judith Gruber (2017) – Ec(o)clesiology: Ecology as Ecclesiology in *Laudato Si'*. Speaks from the nature and structure of the church. Her argument comes from the perspective of the Catholic church teaching on ecology.

5. Guillermo Kerber (2018) – He elaborates on the structure of *Laudato Si'* as a contribution to Latin American liberation theology. He argues from the perspective of structural change and focuses on how *Laudato Si'* highlights the relationship between nature and poor people.
6. Clare Monagle (2017) – The politics of extra/ordinary times: Encyclical thinking. Speaking from the thinking of *Laudato Si'* through the politics of extra/ordinary time. She argues on how *Laudato Si'* troubles normative notions of the political.
7. Jeane Peracullo (2020) – The Virgin of the Vulnerable lake: Catholic engagement with climate change. She argues from the perspective of the pastoral letters of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) about climate change and various responses from the faithful vis-à-vis extreme vulnerability. It involves how Catholic beliefs engage climate change in the Philippines.
8. Michael S. Northcott (2016) – Planetary Moral economy and Creaturely Redemption in *Laudato Si'*. He speaks from the perspective of the dignity of the poor and the intrinsic values of creatures to the creator and their inclusion in the redemption of all things in Christ.
9. S. Stewart Braun (2020) – Pope Francis and Economic Democracy: Understanding Pope Francis's radical (yet) practical approach to political economy. He argues from the perspective of the Catholic Church's social teaching on political economy and economic justice.
10. Ethna Regan (2019) – The Bergoglian Principles: Pope Francis' dialectical approach to political theology. She examined the influence of theological debates in the post-Vatican II Latin American church on *Laudato Si'* development. She argues from the perspective of four Bergoglian principles – the time is greater than space; unity prevails over conflict; realities are more important than ideas, and the whole is greater than the part.
11. Daniel P. Castillo (2016) – Integral ecology as a liberationist concept. He argues from the perspective of Gustavo Gutierrez's classic concept of integral liberation.
12. Pedro Walpole, S.J. (2016) – Jesuits from Asian-Pacific from the time of *Laudato Si'*: Reconciliation with creation. He argues from the perspective of reconciliation with creation, the capacity of Jesuit institutes to network and collaborates with others to reconcile man to the creation and to deepen the experience of the sacred.

13. Patrick Hutching (2015) – *Laudato Si'*: Climate Change Action. He examines *Laudato Si'* climate change action and argues from that perspective.

The arguments and claims of the various critics are organized in the components of the following sections based on the order in which they appear in the analysis in the previous chapter. It is presented as it fits into and intercepts the various components of *Laudato Si'*'s proposed solution with regards to the study questions. Despite the critiques, this solution was timely as it targeted the 2015 global climate conference and the actors in Paris, France.

The possibility of having local control among people and communities in shaping moral life regarding the Pope's call for global cosmic attention to our common home is better than for it being managed by international cooperation (O'Brien, 2019). Though Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* may not be entirely original in the sense that the ideas are largely based on the teachings of his predecessors and publications of several bishops' conferences and theologians as well as available scientific data, it offers great insight into societal issues. His ideas are robust and offer some deep sense of care for the natural environment. It creates more awareness and stirs more environmental consciousness in our global society.

Laudato Si' views the environment from the perspective of the poor, in solidarity with the poor victims of the world (Campos, 2017). This has played greatly on how it has been received by the masses in poor regions of the world as they feel represented. Most of these poor are victims of history and the document seems to be inspired by their experiences. These poor masses are referred to as "biosphere people" as they primarily survive on the direct product of the biosphere (Castillo, 2017).

With the use of the "See-Judge-Act" methodology and the "cry of the earth and the cry of the poor", the structure of *Laudato Si'* is viewed as a contribution of Latin American liberation theology (Kerber, 2019). It is also the kind of theology that is embraced by the poor and focuses on the need for structural change (Kerber, 2019). The methodology begins with a review of the present environmental crisis, judges it from the perspective of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and advances his proposed solutions with prescribed lines of action on both the individual and global level (Aquino, 2016; Gebara, 2017; Bong, 2017). It clarifies Pope Francis' perspective on theological method and methodology in *Laudato Si'*.

The fact that *Laudato Si'* was issued by the Pope, carries the authority for many within the Roman Catholic tradition. This implies to accept the document is to accept its authority as something that originates from the church, which puts the text primarily into conversation with other authoritative Catholic teachings. An obedient Catholic approach to *Laudato Si'* would involve receiving it as a set of teachings to be learned from and with its validity taken as a first principle (O'Brien, 2019). *Laudato Si'* has bolstered efforts to focus on care for creation (Homan, 2016). So far, it is one document that could be referred to when it comes to Catholic response to environmental or ecological issues (Peracullo, 2020).

There are several ways *Laudato Si'* is helping various institutions and communities act. It has fortified local ecological efforts of the United States Jesuit, in addition to lobbying and education work being carried out across the United States (Homan, 2016). Various environmental studies clubs at Jesuit Universities in the United States have been able to plan several events as a response to *Laudato Si'*, including study groups, a broadcast of Pope Francis' speech to the U.S. Congress, and an interdisciplinary panel of experts for a thorough conversation about the hopes and challenges brought forward by the Pope (Homan, 2016).

Laudato Si' is a good tool in helping the university community to reflect and recognize the excellent work pushed to accomplish in this respect. The release of the document has promoted campus efforts for integral ecology at Jesuit universities, particularly in the United States. It helps to promote greater integration of environmental stewardship, care for the poor, and student learning which is an important step for action. Some university pioneers also hope that *Laudato Si'* can help students develop programs around safe drinking water for the poor and combating homelessness and bring about projects that would correlate creation and poverty (Homan, 2016).

Despite the positive aim of the document, there are some critiques about certain ideas in the document regarding its proposed action steps. These critiques act in a way to improve the understanding and bring more clarity to the ideas put forth in the document. It also challenges certain lines of action by the document in a constructive way to enable us to understand why certain approaches should be taken and why certain steps should be followed. The following sections present critics' arguments and claims to the issues in *Laudato Si'* in the context of the present crisis.

4.2 Some of the arguments and claims and their relation to the context and issues of *Laudato Si'*

This section presents and discusses selected arguments and claims from the critics above based on their focus on the various components of *Laudato Si'*'s integral ecology with regards to the objective of this study and based on the research questions in chapter one. It evaluates how these arguments and claims target specific areas and issues of the proposed solutions, and the theories and perspective of the document.

In *Laudato Si'*, the Pope repeatedly critiques (members of) the catholic church, both past, and present, for falling short of what he described as “their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, as an essential part of their faith (*Laudato Si'*, 64). Though the document targeted the global climate conference with its presentation and judgment and action on the climate situation, it started first and foremost to reprimand the members within the church. This is a fair approach to bring about change to a common problem without trying to cover the church when she fails to assume her place in society. The approach also reveals a genuine determination from Pope Francis to mobilize and engage everyone, both the church and state actors, in his proposed solution.

4.2.1 An integral ecology

The idea of integral ecology is a kind that is derived from bringing together certain major components of ecology to form a whole. It takes into consideration other components of ecology that are left out or treated as separate entities. In the pope's discussion on integral ecology in the context of *Laudato Si'* and his call for more integral ecology, he implicates the inter-relationship between ecosystems and social ecology. He addresses ecology as one component, stressing the idea of the whole and paints the environment as that whole that has parts. In his proposition, he made emphasis that the environment must be one entity if the world needs to sort for a sustainable solution that can address the present ecological crisis.

However, Regan (2019) looking at Pope Francis two-sided approach to political theology, refer to the Pope's concept of integral ecology as a new kind of humanism the Pope is trying to introduce. This is due to the Pope's emphasis on a more integral and integrating vision which she sees as a demonstration of the principle that “the whole is greater than the part” (Regan, 2019). Regarding the Pope's *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), his political vision could be

one where the challenge of the political focus on the interest of the ‘whole’ rather than on the ‘individual’ parts and it is common in *Laudato Si’* concept of integral ecology. This principle of “the whole is greater than the part” is framed in his *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) in terms of the creative tension between the global and the local.

According to Gruber (2017), who view ecology as ecclesiology in *Laudato Si’*, the pope explains that the theological route taken in his concept of integral ecology deviates from previous church teachings. On the other hand, she claims the pope re-appropriates that Jewish-Christian scriptures are resources that consolidate emerging integral ecology. She also adds that ecology as used in the term “integral ecology” is meant to signify a broader complex of eco-social relationships that order the world. It implies that the point where the ecological environment, the economy, and the society in which we live, intercept as one entity.

Laudato Si’ (139) stated that “we are faced not with two separate crises; one environmental and the other social, but with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Castillo (2016), speaking from the perspective of Gustavo Gutierrez’s classic concept of integral liberation, view the aim of that statement as prescriptive rather than descriptive. He claims that the pope’s call for the development of integral ecology (*Laudato Si’*, 23 – 26, 156 – 158) is a call for the right ordering of the eco-social networks of the world so that they may best serve the common good. According to him, the Pope in *Laudato Si’* does not offer a clear definition of the term “integral ecology”, which makes the entire concept elusive, and the Pope’s writing style difficult to understand.

Castillo (2016) observed also that all through *Laudato Si’*, the Pope links the discussion of the “preferential option for the earth” with the question of “the preferential option of the poor”. However, he claims that the Pope did not clearly explain the precise type of politics and the type of political theology that *Laudato Si’* recommends for the realization of those options. Concerning his claims for an inadequate precision by the pope, he argues that the concept of integral ecology should be construed as a liberationist concept, one that calls for a paradigm shift away from the structural and ideological dimensions of our contemporary “global system”. He further argues that *Laudato Si’* notion and call for an integral ecology is one that should be taken as a prophetic reprimand and lament, because that echoes Jesus’ cry when

facing Jerusalem: “if this day you only knew what makes for peace!” (Luke 19:42, NAB). However, he claims that *Laudato Si’s* call is not an endorsement of sustainable development.

According to O’Brien (2019, p.11) who argues from the perspective of the hierarchies in *Laudato Si’* and Christian social ethics, such ecology in “integral ecology” can become integral when it embraces a synthetic view of the world and humanity’s place in it, uniting attention to environmental degradation and social justice. He claims that integral ecology as the central idea of *Laudato Si’* can be extended to include the potential of integrating the divine with creation, the human with other creatures, and of more diverse gender expressions and power relations within humanity. He argues that *Laudato Si’* characterizes a basic mistake of contemporary societies because it thinks too small by “worshipping earthly powers” and humans trying to usurp the place of God.

While *Laudato Si’* suggests that questioning immutable truths is a sign of societal corruption, O’Brien (2019, 11) argues instead that social cohesion is at stake when truths are believed as though they cannot be changed over time and to be beyond question, possibly when those truths are specially stated as hierarchies. But the big question here is how do we change truth over time? For the truth is timeless and ageless. O’Brien’s (2019) argument is that if we apply the deep questioning that Pope Francis offered to political and economic structures to social and theological structures, it will lead to a more rather than less integral ecology.

O’Brien (2019) questions three hierarchies in *Laudato Si’*: hierarchies between male and female, between humans and animals, and between God and the world. He claims that *Laudato Si’* follows the order of St. Francis of Assisi in labeling the earth as a “mother” and a “sister” and refer to other humans as “brothers and sisters”. He further claims that the Pope repeatedly stresses his global argument by appealing to “the whole human family”, but his *Laudato Si’*, however, maintains the traditional Roman Catholic tradition of what a family is. He explains that the claim is most particularly emphasized in *Laudato Si’s* assumption without question that the human species can be divided between two genders with a legitimate power difference between them. O’Brien (2019) sees it as the Pope is making the issue so simplistic and mean. He holds that it is unfortunate that *Laudato Si’* does not articulate nor defend its assumption about gender, neither does it consider alternatives to them.

The above arguments bring to light the question that –what precisely does the concept of integral ecology refer to? According to O’Brien (2019), Pope Francis’ concept of integral ecology informs the methodology of *Laudato Si’*, which insists that multiple ways of knowing and engaging the world must converge if human beings must respond morally to the challenges in the 21st century. *Laudato Si’*’s concept of integral ecology is a powerful example of global environmental ethics. It offers sophisticated use of scalar hierarchies (O’Brien, 2019). The scalar hierarchies seek universal and global morality to justify political and economic systems that commend local and community control. *Laudato Si’* uses the scalar awareness to shine its advocacy of integral ecology and its critique of market logic (O’Brien, 2019).

Homan (2016), speaking from the perspective of the American Jesuits’ efforts before and in response to the Pope’s call for integral ecology, claims that *Laudato Si’* does not develop its theological notions of covenant explicitly. *Laudato Si’* (210) names its notions as efforts to “restore the various levels of ecological equilibrium, establishing harmony within us, with others, with nature and other living creatures and with God”.

The claims and arguments of the above critic shed light on certain aspects of *Laudato Si’*’s concept of integral ecology. They used a holistic approach to judge the proposal of *Laudato Si’*. They however criticize as well as made compliment the document such that they did not cast away the document’s ideas but seek to get meanings and clearer explanations of the Pope’s ideas at certain points. The document’s interest in the principle of the whole, which is considered by Regan (2017) as the political vision of the Pope, implies the global environment should be targeted as an entity and solutions should be geared towards addressing the big picture. The idea of the sense of the whole has a lot to do with enhancing the quality of life and equally protect nature and the environment and this centers on the man taking precedence over nature to care for it.

Concerning the above claims by O’Brien, *Laudato Si’* takes a similar approach when it comes to the relationship between human beings and other species, which makes O’Brien’s claims to be a reasonable consideration vis-à-vis *Laudato Si’*. The Pope does not differ from the stance of church teaching on gender which recognizes two distinct genders, male and female, but as one man in Christ. The Bible states that “So God created man in His image, in the image of

God created he him; man and female created He them (Genesis 1:27 KJV), implies God created both male and female in His image. It is an indication that in God there is no male nor female; there is a 'man' who is in God's image. This reference gives O'Brien the stand to question the Hierarchical differentiation in *Laudato Si'* with less clarity on gender.

4.2.2 Creation and the economy

There are laws of nature that cannot be altered or ignored without consequences. Even though men make laws, the idea of law is created and sustained by God. From a biblical perspective, God created the world and laws, so man can only discover and apply them. It is also a common phenomenon to have Christians call and advocate for economic policies capable to alleviate human suffering. These policies are powerful tools to bring about the kind of change we desire. However, the call for Christians to have compassion and care for their neighbors as themselves make them concerned about the kind of economic policies that are in place. Some approaches, even though with good intentions, may lead to more economic hardship.

Northcott (2016), speaking from the perspective of the dignity of the poor and the intrinsic values of creatures in Christ redemption of the creation, claims that the content of *Laudato Si'* adopted the St. Francis of Assisi's affective approach to nature. This effective approach has to do with the belief that humanity's relation to the natural world has its antecedents in scripture and the medieval monastic orders (Sorrel, 2011). According to Northcott (2016), *Laudato Si'* sets this affective dimension in theological recognition of the origin of creation in the love of God and the relationship between God and everyone. He added that for *Laudato Si'* to call the earth – our common home, implies the document underlines the recognition of Thomas Aquinas' teaching that the first purpose of creation is to provide for the needs of all people to serve their souls. However, he argues that cruelty to animals is a moral hazard not because God cares for them or because they have intrinsic values, but because it badly shapes a person's moral character, and they become brave to sin against nature.

Braun, 2020), speaking from the perspective of the Catholic Church's social teaching on political economy and economic justice, made several claims. He claims that *Laudato Si'*'s approach to socioeconomic matters is one that is guided by practical realities. That is with regards to the economy to secure the common good, human dignity, equality and opportunity, solidarity, ecological responsibility, and dignifies labor (human ends). He added that the

document's approach is not guided by prevailing economic, nor welfarist nor neoliberal ideologies. The document's refusal to accept that the currently constituted capitalism is the best way to secure valuable human ends is also highlighted by Braun (2020) as one of the important components of *Laudato Si's* practical yet radical approach to the present crisis.

Based on *Laudato Si*, economic structures and policies should be designed to primarily secure basic human ends for the economy to gain some level of morality, even if it would result in reduced efficiency in some way. This implies it prioritizes morality over economic efficiency. Braun (2020) claims the *Laudato Si's* criticisms on the dominant neoliberal economic perspective, in a more general sense, fails to properly attend to fundamental human ends and it is one that is not directed against economic activity or the market.

Moreover, Braun (2020) views *Laudato Si's* criticisms and suggestions on some concrete economic and philosophical content (the capitalist system) as quite general. He contends that the document's pronouncements in this respect are broadly consistent with what is typically termed 'economic democracy'. He also questions that if it is right for the Pope's document to criticize the neoliberal capitalist system as ideological, what exactly renders it ideological? and why does that ideology limit or close off alternative approaches that focus more directly on human ends? He claims that the document's offer (which criticized neoliberalism) is a radical challenge to the prevailing system of economic rationality. The critique on neoliberalism by *Laudato Si'* has become endemic in social modes of thinking and leaves little room for human goods (Braun, 2020).

Braun (2020) argues that *Laudato Si's* approach is radical because it does not attempt to prescribe a specific, all-encompassing solution. According to him, *Laudato Si'* instead presents an effort to demonstrate the practical necessity of developing credible policies that are oriented around valuable human ends, and sensitive to the needs of persons. He supplements *Laudato Si's* analysis with the concept of "economic rationality" as developed and elucidated by the social critic – Andre Gorz. According to him, *Laudato Si's* view of capitalism and the economic rationality that it establishes is one that has distorted human value judgment and ethical sensibilities.

O'Brien (2019) argues that the reason Pope Francis named himself after Saint Francis of Assisi, a man who is honored as the patron saint of animals and environmentalism, is because

he offers a far less hierarchical view of other species inter-relation with human beings. St. Francis regularly referred to all animals as his brothers and sisters. On the contrary, Pope Francis in his *Laudato Si'* only uses “brother” and “sister” to refer to human beings or the earth, which according to O’Brien (2019, p.10), it does not question the hierarchy of human beings over the creatures on earth. O’Brien (2019) contends that the most important central hierarchy in *Laudato Si'* is that of God over creation. He viewed this central hierarchy as the ultimate authority, power, and generosity of God (understood as above and beyond all creation) and it is justified by pope Francis’ central argument to be that humans should protect the non-human world.

According to Monagle (2017), speaking from the perspective of the thinking of *Laudato Si'* through the politics of extra/ordinary time, the Pope views the culprits of the present environmental crisis to be “power politics”, a “throwaway culture”, and the “techno-economic paradigm”. By that view, she asserts that the Pope’s document troubles normative notions of the political. This implies that *Laudato Si'* makes a significant impact in the political realm even though it is a theological text. It portrays special characteristics of political thoughts and somehow challenges certain political notions.

Campos (2017), on the other hand, speaking from the perspective of the Indian theological context, asserts that the Indian Christian response to ecological concerns begins with the awareness that humans are wrestling with a Mystery that envelops them. That is because he believes in God dwells all the fullness of creation. However, he affirms that market forces as presented by *Laudato Si'* only encourage consumerism, and further claims that “sustainable development” is the alternative of the technocratic paradigm and the free market.

According to scholars, the solutions we recommend to human suffering must also be those that do not conflict with economic principles. The Pope in his document made some assessments of the global economic system concerning the present environmental crisis which was not very clear and not accepted by some critics even within the church. His assessment of the situation received some response from critics. However, *Laudato Si'* reveals that all aspects of life demand deeper reflection. The document has been greatly received in several places, including the Asia-Pacific, and has made a huge contribution to the growing

environmental awareness and sense of care of the Earth as an integral part of Christian responsibility (Walpole, S.J., 2016).

Based on the critics and arguments above, *Laudato Si'* uses a logical way to call for attention at all realms of societal life, particularly at the political level where policies are made. The document runs on its lane as a theological text but touches other aspects of life and governance in a way that pulls attention to the present challenge that it addresses. Its language is a powerful tool in achieving this end, which is one of the principal aims of the document, to draw the widest attention that it could. The document uses phrases like the common good, our world, mother earth, etc. which is an inclusive language not only limited to the Christian church but to all who are part. It sticks to Christians and the church, but it addresses all people, both Christians and non-Christian, to rekindle an awareness of everyone's responsibility to the world we all live in.

The Pope's language is not uncomfortable as painted by some critics above. It is only uncomfortable because there is guilt in the hearts of men. The sciences reveal that anthropogenic factors are a key driver to the present crisis that *Laudato Si'* addresses, implying there is bound to be guilt in the human heart when these issues are addressed. No matter the direction taking by *Laudato Si'* concerning how it addresses the present environmental issue, it keeps coming back to the spiritual though with the use of technical language. It uses language like integral ecology, an ecological conversion which in essence it means a spiritual conversion, calling on the attention of humanity to be spiritual both in their view and in how they approach to nature (God's creation). The document's language is technical in the sense that it uses biological language to describe or refer to theological meanings. This is how the document introduces its solution to the crisis.

The response that described the approach of *Laudato Si'* to be practical yet radical, reveals that the document was able to hit at the point which I see as a good testimony for the document being able to hit its target. One of the Pope's intention was to speak to the consciences of individuals and policy institutions for quick action without trying to cause harm. It aimed not only to create awareness to the world for joint and coherent action but to direct the world on the kind of action to be taken. The responses help to draw more attention

to the Pope's document and the views concerning the change in the natural environment in recent times which raises more awareness of the concerns of *Laudato Si'*.

4.2.4 Nature in Laudato Si'

The logical grammar of "Nature" in *Laudato Si'* mostly follows a Royal Society Paradigm, and there is no resort to the now contested "Nature" in "Natural Law" (Hutching, 2015, 409). Hutching (2015, 409) claims that the boundary between 'Natural Law' and the 'Law of Nature' is due to re-negotiation (by the twenty-first-century standard). It is evolving, so if the global economy is also to be a moral economy, then peoples whose lives are connected by trade and technology would have to recognize that they are now living in the same moral neighborhood (Northcott, 2016). Hutching (2015) questions that if God builds evolution into His creation, then Darwin and Wallace did not invent evolution to annoy biblical literalists; rather they simply discovered a fact of nature, which so far has happened not to be a dismissible hypothesis.

According to the magisterial teaching of the Catholic Church, divinity is all-powerful and beyond human experience, and human beings are called to be stewards over the rest of creation, and humanity is made up of two genders with distinct and complementary roles (O'Brien, 2019). O'Brien (2019, p.11) disagrees with the pope on the issue of gender, insisting that humanity is made up of two distinct genders, and argues that it is best to treat every hierarchy as construction, to test rather than assume its usefulness and applicability in each situation. *Laudato Si'* (90–91) argues that a "culture of relativism" is one of the roots of the environmental and social degradation of the earth. It refers to relativism as a disorder which "drives one person to take advantage of another, to treat others as mere objects, leading to "the sexual exploitation of children and abandonment of the elderly" (*Laudato Si'*, 123).

The Pope in *Laudato Si'* not being explicit on the issue of gender, and his distinction between male and female indicates his stance on the existence of two distinct genders in line with the Catholic Social teaching. This reflection seems to play on nature, with the man trying to exercise ungodly dominion over nature as though he is not a part of it. This kind of dominion mindset seen by O'Brien to be backed by *Laudato Si'* and the church has contributed significantly to human exploitation over the natural environment, a reason why he suggested every hierarchy has to be treated as a construction. It portrays nature and the natural

environment as sub-ordinate to man and its sustainability is only at the mercy of man (humans).

4.2.5 Lines of approach to the present crisis

Taking a critical review of *Laudato Si'*, we can understand that the problems of ecology are vast and complex, and it requires a holistic approach. Gruber (2017, 818) argues that even though *Laudato Si'* has credited the emerging approaches towards an integral ecology with profound theological pertinence, the document does not consider them as the sole “proprium” of the existing Catholic community. Therefore, the document is said to shift away from the usual catholic teachings in the context of the present crisis. He added that the document does not also consider the traces of resistance to the technocratic paradigm as fully realized within the established church. He went further to claim that *Laudato Si'* diagnoses what he refers to as ‘incongruence’ between salvific, revelatory practices emerging in response to the socio-ecological crisis on the one hand and the established boundaries of the church on the other. He views this incongruence as something crucial to the church’s theological self-understanding that it is the representation of God’s revelation.

According to Gruber (2017), *Laudato Si'* provides ample evidence that ecclesial teaching develops in a feedback loop with its changing contexts. Its emphasis on unity is not about giving unity priority over the conflict in such a way that minimizes the reality of conflict, but it is about the hope that unity will prevail over conflict (Regan, 2019). Implies that in conflict, hope will shape the priorities of those involved. Walpole, S.J. (2016) claims that the document’s call for action is a platform for those who are already deeply involved in communities of practice to express broader and deeper solidarity through global events and social media. Regan’s (2019) view of the pope’s description of unity as diversified and life-giving is not simply unity as defined by the majority, the powerful, or the victors; it is rather unity in quite a different sense.

The above critiques reveal why the concerns of *Laudato Si'* has not been taken very seriously within the catholic church because it deviates from the catholic approach to environmental issues. This means that the approach used by *Laudato Si'* drift away from the usual catholic approach in Catholic social teaching as it concerns its perspective on environmental and ecological issues.

Conclusion

The most important argument in *Laudato Si'* is that the human environment and the natural environment are deteriorating together. It implies that the well-being of the environment is a function of the well-being of humans. It also means that a deteriorating environment reflects the life of the people who live in that environment. In this regard, people must learn to connect human justice and environmental health (O'Brien, 2019). There is no effective response to social problems that do not also attend to ecological issues.

Chapter Five

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the critiques concerning the concerns of *Laudato Si'* and its proposed solutions. It aims to reconcile the arguments and claims in the previous chapter with the analysis of *Laudato Si'* as concerns the study questions, and the relevance and strength to the work of the document. *Laudato Si'* as a prominent church document, diagnose the different facets of the present ecological crisis in a way that touches the major aspects of human and societal life. It focuses on the root cause of the crisis though from a Christian spiritual perspective, portraying Christian spirituality as the key in bringing a sustainable solution to the crisis. Its emphasis on climate change and its dangerous effects as the major concern of the document led to a proposition of a solution to the present challenge from a Christian perspective.

Despite *Laudato Si'*'s assessment of the ecological situation, it went further to make a judgment of it and proposed a solution which it claims to be sustainable. The solution proposed has different components that make it a whole, and these components have been assessed by several critics who made constructive arguments as well as asked hard questions of the Pope's ideas in the text. However, the approach of *Laudato Si'* is highly influenced by our contemporary intellectual atmosphere (Sadowski, 2016). The authority of the document and its target on believers and all people of goodwill, especially global actors in this area gave room for the critics. The Pope's challenge to the Christian church worldwide and the current global market system and politics that he thinks has contributed to the current ecological crisis, also made the document a target for critics. The following sections discuss the critiques in the previous chapter to the analysis in chapter three and based on the study questions and the overall objectives of the analysis.

5.2 *Laudato Si'*'s integral ecology

The Pope's proposed solution to the present environmental crisis is embodied in his concept of integral ecology in which he relates certain essential components of ecology. His call for a more integral ecology and a vision that integrates the different major components of ecology to form a complete is viewed by Regan (2019) as a new kind of humanism. The view is

centered on the argument that the Pope's document gives much importance to humans rather than the divine, taking into consideration that it is a purely theological text. The consideration of the environment by *Laudato Si'* as an existing relationship between nature and the society within it provides a platform to focus on humans as principal actors in that environment. This must do much more with the interaction between the living creatures and non-living components within that environment.

The call for the development of integral ecology by *Laudato Si'* can be seen to be a call for the right ordering of the eco-social networks of the world so that man can best serve the common good. It is so for several reasons: firstly, the document recognizes that change begins from the human heart (from inside out). Secondly, any sustainability of humanity concerning care for the environment must begin from the inside. That is what the Pope referred to as "ecological conversion", a conversion in favor of ecology or for ecology. However, inadequate diagnosis of the crisis can happen when we allow the rationality of problem-solving to shape our interpretation of human personhood and its purpose with the earth (Jenkins, 2018).

Laudato Si' in the above regard can recognize that the reason for the current crisis, among others, is primarily because the human heart is becoming empty concerning putting others first. In other words, greed is becoming the order of the day. In the document, the Pope offers suggestions for an ecological spirituality grounded in the conviction of the faith which is an indication that his call is a call for the right ordering of the eco-social networks of the world. This is clear in its statement that the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion (*Laudato Si'*, 217).

From the bible's perspective, man is commanded to take care of the earth and keep it, which is also cited in the Pope's document. In other words, it implies man is solely responsible for the preservation of the earth. That instruction puts man in a position of responsibility vis-à-vis other living creatures and non-living creatures of the earth. The above perspective provides the platform for *Laudato Si'* to focus on the man in resolving the present crisis affecting the earth on which man lives.

Taking a critical look at *Laudato Si'*, it does not separate nature from humanity. The document rather presents humanity as a part of nature and tends to treat it as one entity.

Considering the social ecology of our environment and our present society, it is increasingly evident that humanity is one with nature and cannot survive without it. In *Laudato Si'*, the Pope keeps emphasizing the wholeness principle by bringing the different ecological components into one in his response. He seems to consider the wholeness principle as the best way to address the current earth crisis. However, considering the different ecological components of the earth as a “whole” is great but using that consideration to address the current earth crisis may not be the best path. This is so because it is imperative not to focus only to establish a single model of social life or attain what Sadowski (2016) referred to as “homeostasis of the earth ecosystems” by influencing individual components.

The concept of integral ecology, contrary to Gruber’s (2017) claim, does not only centers on the inter-relationship between ecosystems and social ecology but also has to do with the scale of change which requires an integrated approach for better strategies for a solution. However, the Pope in *Laudato Si'* considers the quality of life as something that has to do with integrating everyone in society. He also considers the present global governance system as one that must promote a sense of belonging for everyone within any area of habitation on the earth.

Integral ecology provides the basis for justice and development and calls for new global solidarity that must embrace both communities and individuals (Sadowsky, 2016). That insight corroborates the idea of the whole in *Laudato Si'*. *Laudato Si'* also expects the present governance system to function in a way that everyone in an area should have a sense of the whole and be able to grasp the big picture of the environment, rather than being confined and lost. This is a highly inclusive approach to secure the common interest. It is a holistic approach that is highly inclusive and can greatly enhance participation and get people involved in the process of governance. Once people are involved, it is easy to secure the common interest.

The Pope in the above regard suggests that to make everyone grab the big picture is to help every individual see the larger city as a shared space and can help greatly to increase the quality of life. That points to the importance of the integral ecology concept. It can also enable people to develop increased care and concern for one another and their environment (*Laudato Si'*, 150, 151, 152 153, 154). The document’s use of the term integral suggests that

humanity must understand themselves as a member of one single but a multiform community that includes both living and non-living.

Therefore, *Laudato Si'* advocates that interventions that affect the urban and rural landscape should consider how various elements combine to form one entity. It can be a meaningful framework for better livelihood, respect of human dignity, and to mitigate the present chaotic challenge. It proofs the sustainability of the proposed solution by *Laudato Si'* vis-à-vis the present ecological crisis. this entire idea could be an expansion of the teachings of Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI, and as one that shows the integrity of Pope Francis' concern for the world (Sadowski, 2016). Pope Francis' concern for the earth is also manifested in the way he pushes for greater protection and preservation of nature, alongside culture and humanity in all dimensions of life. Its use of the term integral ecology is to help enhance the understanding of human ecology within a wider cosmic common good (Longbottom, 2016).

Laudato Si' presents an understanding that we are a part of nature, and we constantly interact with our natural environment. It proposes a solution to the present crisis that is a prescription of a model as opposed to a description expected by Castillo (2017). The document defends an integrated approach as the best in the context of the present crisis and as that which fits into the dynamics of today's society. It however gives room for researchers and the science of nature to ensure broad academic freedom. However, the sciences about the origin of life are a part of the root cause of the present crisis (Longbottom, 2016). Because of the immense contribution of the science of nature to understanding how the natural environment works, the Pope in *Laudato Si'* thinks science should not be ignored.

Castillo (2016) refers to the term integral ecology as used in *Laudato Si'* to be elusive and difficult to understand in the sense that it is not given any clear definition in the document. The critic is right in his view because *Laudato Si'* does not present a direct definition of the term integral ecology. *Laudato Si'* presents different elements that when put together, make up an integral ecology. It recognizes the inter-relation of the different components of the human and social dimension of ecology that when considered together with the environmental ecology, forms an integral ecology. This implies that the different ecological elements like the environmental, economic, and social ecology, the cultural ecology, and the ecology of daily life, the principle of the common good, justice between the generations, together forms an

integral ecology. The document expounded on the above concept by using illustrations of our global societal dynamics and the natural system which shed some light on the Pope's idea.

The call for integral ecology sounds like a prophetic reprimand concerning the present global market system and the focus on technology for a way out, for some reasons. *Laudato Si'* makes it clear that trying to fix the present problem with the use of only a scientific approach, is stereotypic and may give it only a window-dressing solution. Likewise, trying to fix it by focusing only on the use of a spiritual approach also raises concerns. However, it is important to strike a balance between the two approaches which is what *Laudato Si'* does not consider.

Moreover, the fact that science points to anthropogenic factors as the major driver of the problem shifts the focus on mankind. The global environment is greatly impacted by the present crisis and because man-made factors are at the root of it, there must be a way to deal with mankind to get to mitigate the situation and fix the crisis. *Laudato Si'* aims to source for a lasting and sustainable solution to the problem by introducing a spiritual approach to deal with mankind. It is a reasonable approach but placing more emphasis on humanity while minimizing technology and the changing global market system makes it a more challenging approach. This is because it does not provide a way of dealing with the aspect of technology within the context of our contemporary world.

Since the solution to such a problem demands an integrated approach, this gives room for spirituality. An integrated ecological approach is what *Laudato Si'* term integral ecology, where it proposes the consideration of certain major components that should constitute this type of ecological approach. If we look at the entire picture of the global environment, the subject of *Laudato Si'*, and the timing of its publishing before the 2015 global climate summit in Paris, it gives the impression that its call for action is a prophetic reprimand. The content of the document rebukes the present economic system that it considers having contributed significantly to the present crisis, and this makes the call to sound prophetic. Moreover, the Pope as a neutral entity making a call to action also automatically makes it look prophetic.

However, the motivation of *Laudato Si'*s integral ecology seems to dwell on the idea that everything is inter-related in our contemporary global society. It implies any approach towards a global issue must accept the major factors that drive our global society. The document used that idea to push its approach of integral ecology. The components that made

up the document's concept are those things that touch the core of every society. It includes the environmental and socio-economic aspects of ecology, the cultural aspect of ecology, and the principle of the common good.

By the notion of integral ecology, *Laudato Si'* offers an antidote to unsustainable practices that have contributed significantly negatively to the global natural ecology. *Laudato Si'*'s concept of integral ecology insists on the convergence of multiple ways of knowing and engaging the world regarding challenges in the twenty-first century. It is a concept that involves an integrated approach to combatting poverty, restoring dignity to the poor and marginalized, and protecting the environment at the same time.

5.3 Gender in *Laudato Si'*

The content of *Laudato Si'* can be likened to eco-feminist theologies that interconnect the exploitation, degradation, and deterioration of the environment with women subjugation (Cabine, 2017). *Laudato Si'* (48) claims that the human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together, and this provides evidence on how it links humans and nature suffering. The claim that women and nature have special relation vis-à-vis environmental responsibility provides evidence that the oppression of nature intersect with the oppression of women and makes the climate issue to be women's issue as well (Kim & Koster, 2017).

Climate injustice is linked to unjust human actions that gradually undermine the equilibrium of the earth (our common home), and largely promoted by the sense of dominion over nature. This injustice highlights a different aspect of the specificity of women's suffering from the perspective of women's suffering (Gebara, 2017). This dominion mindset stems from the different gender hierarchies (male and female, human and animals, God and the world) and it is questioned by O'Brien (2019).

Laudato Si''s integral ecology seems to insufficiently address the question of gender justice. It paints a picture of an absolute dominating Father who continues to have patriarchy/kyriarchy theology of power (Cabine, 2017). This creates a theological opening for it to make its concept of integral ecology look appealing (especially to critics), and to unfairly address the issue of gender. The hierarchy between human beings and other creations seem to be based on 'species entitlement', on the ground that humans are created in the image and likeness of God

(Deifelt, 2017). This makes humans consider their interests to be more valuable than that of other creatures on the earth, which partly explains the reason for the present environmental crisis. It is also detrimental to humanity as it negatively affects how humans interact with themselves and the unfair treatment of other social groupings, especially women.

Laudato Si' (1) appeals to God the creator (a male figure) who through 'our sister' Mother earth, governs and sustains all creatures that live in it (humans inclusive). In the same regard, culture also causes women to still believe in a male entity who can help and support them, and this culture is entrenched in human projection. This makes it difficult for women to overcome the barrier of a male figure. However, it portrays a clear gender division between males and females with a distinct role, one that is dependent on the other for help and protection, considered by Gerara (2017) as a major factor for women's exploitation and suppression. When compared with the present situation of the earth, man is still portrayed to have dominion over the earth, thus responsible for the degradation and exploitation of the natural environment.

In the above, we notice an unjust social division of labor between a male and female figure. However, the image of God as an all-powerful, superior being and emperor presented by the most prominent religions (Christianity and Islam) seems to be the reason for the contemporary events of killings of enemies and suppression of women (McFague, 2017). This male power attribute strengthens the social, cultural, political, and economic structures established to control the other, basically women and women's bodies (Deifelt, 2017). The patriarchy/kyriarchy seems to act as a cause of the present ecological crisis. God's ability to become a man through Jesus Christ has helped to legitimate this power deal between a male God and man over women and other creatures (McFague, 2017). This is evident in *Laudato Si'* as the Pope does not criticize Christian traditions that continue to promote and prescribe patriarchy/kyriarchy and does not also engage Christian traditions to foster women's innovative and noticeable contributions (Cabine, 2017).

Despite some resistance in the past from liberation theologians, we see that O'Brien (2017) is right on his argument on hierarchy in *Laudato Si'* as the document still maintains a paternalistic goodwill stance towards many groups, women inclusive (Gebara, 2017). It makes the male figure to appear at the core of divine revelation. It is the same sense of

hierarchy that breeds the dominant power mindset in humans to exploit nature at will for self-gain. Most Christian women, social status notwithstanding, therefore regard God as a male authority that safeguards and watches over them (Gebara, 2017).

Moreover, *Laudato Si'* is considered by O'Brien (2019) and in a feminist theological sense to offer a theology of creation which is anthropocentric because it puts humans at the center of creation. This kind of human dominion mindset over nature has been highly praised despite the excesses of anthropocentrism and has contributed to the present crisis. To resolve this, the human being must be considered as one being among other species and not one above others (Bong, 2017). According to Leonardo Boff, a liberation theologian, a true ecological approach must be a social approach that must integrate the question of justice concerning the environment (Cabine, 2017). An ecological conversion that embraces the inclusiveness of women, without any hierarchy, where everyone is unique, can help realize *Laudato Si'*'s vision of the common home.

5.4 Spirituality in Laudato Si'

Laudato Si' views spirituality as a vital part of integral ecology to achieve the kind of conversion it talks about. The document thus actually includes the potential of integrating the divine with creation, and all other aspects of life, including the social. It uses the preferential option for the poor to explain the preferential option for the earth. It explained that the preferential option for the poorest in our society recognizes the implications of the universal destination of the world's goods. The type of politics or political theology to be able to realize this option is one that first and foremost appreciates the immense dignity of the poor in the light of believers' deepest convictions. According to the Pope in *Laudato Si'*, he expanded more on this in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013). This option of spirituality is an essential and ethical imperative to effectively attain the objective of the common good (*Laudato Si'*, 158), which is a good move. The Pope in *Laudato Si'* views this notion of the common good to be an inseparable component of his integral ecology.

There is a need for a habit change in the effort to restore the ecological dignity of the natural environment. These changes in habits can impact the cultural and ecological crisis of the present time. Market forces drive the kind of destructive habits observed in our society, which is one reason why *Laudato Si'* see market forces as a major driver of such destructive habits

that are harmful to the environment. Some of the difficulties experienced by young people in trying to change some of their harmful habits are a result of the fact that they grew up in a milieu where such habits are prevalent. It includes environments where extreme consumerism as highlighted by *Laudato Si'* is systematically promoted. However, true humanity is grounded in spiritual intimacy with other creatures and not by a demonstration of a master attitude over other creatures (Jenkins, 2018). In other words, learning to use the earth in the right way, a way that respects nature, which begins with not considering nature as an object to be used, is the best way to start.

When *Laudato Si'* speaks about the common good, to who or which group of being in the common good? In other words, it is a common good to who or to which group of living creature?. If the common good notion is one that puts humans at the center and every other being at the side as part of the common good to humanity itself, then we can say the Pope is trying to be anthropocentric. For Leonardo Boff, the common good is not exclusively human; it is a common good to all of nature (Longbottom, 2016). This implies that even humans are a part of the common good to other living creatures because humans are also necessary for their wellbeing. Boff's integral liberation paints that all beings in nature have rights and deserve respect and reverence (Longbottom, 2016). According to Leonardo Boff, the idea of the common good is one that makes all beings citizens of nature and not simply humans within the context of the common good.

However, the Pope's *Laudato Si'* addresses the principle of the common good from the perspective of human dignity which is the perspective of Christ and the Church. This can look like the Pope in *Laudato Si'* is sliding toward anthropocentrism, but that is not the case. Longbottom (2016) argues that since the common good is conceived as a principle to serve humanity in general, it is fundamentally anthropocentric. Biblical account highlights that man is made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26). *Laudato Si'* states that nature portrays the image of God and that we can see God reflected in trees, mountains, and in other animals in nature. This shows the immense dignity of creation that cannot just be as a thing but as a person because it reflects someone (God himself). *Laudato Si'* with reference from (Ps. 104:31) which says, "the Lord rejoices in all his works", claims that in the eyes of God, other living beings have

value. The reason one cannot conclude that the Pope is nevertheless sliding towards anthropocentrism is the fact that he rejects today's notion that man being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute dominion over other creatures (*Laudato Si'*, 67).

One other reason why we cannot also say that the Pope is trying to be anthropocentric is his use of the term "common good" which is quite broad and inclusive. He refers to the climate as a common good that belongs to all and is meant for all (*Laudato Si'*, 23). The statement climate belonging to all provides room for both living beings including animals and plants, and non-living things. The use of the statement above also provides the possibility of including others and not only humans, which makes the environment to be a shared benefit to both humans and other creatures. But humanity as it stands has a responsibility to care and not to cause harm to this common good that also benefits other creatures.

According to Pope Francis, some Bible texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate interpretation. It can be seen from the above that man's responsibility to protect the earth is not mainly for sustainability's sake, to secure man's survival, but first and foremost it is to honor God the creator and in obedience to His word. We can also see that the responsibility to protect and care for nature is for humanity to respect the laws of nature and the fragile equilibria that exist between creatures. Making references from (Deut. 22:4,6) and (Ex. 23:12), Pope Francis explained that the Bible does not give room for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures of the earth.

5.5. Laudato Si's line of action

The document's recommendation on the kind of approach needed to achieve an integral ecology is that of unity. It defines unity as cooperation which is quite different from what is generally considered as a unity. For example, to achieve the common good, politics and economics must cooperate. It states in paragraph (190) that "environmental protection cannot be guaranteed solely based on financial calculations of cost and benefits. It implies the environment is one of those goods that cannot be adequately safeguarded by market forces.

When we look at the bigger picture of society, *Laudato Si'* considers unity as being able to accept without engulfing other innovative forms of production that are profitable and has less impact on the environment. It is also being able to diversify ways of doing that seems to yield profit for the society without jeopardizing the good state of the environment or affect its ability to recover from the shock. This kind of unity propagated by *Laudato Si'* considers other possibilities, human creativity, ideas, innovations, tools, developments that can enable our world to work better, including the environment, the economy, and ecosystems. It considers them without necessarily bringing them together but giving them a chance. This kind of unity can prevail over conflict.

The question here is how feasible is this kind of a vision put forth in *Laudato Si'*? As the context of the world changes, processes become adaptive to be able to drive change. There is a need for a global consensus in search of a solution to the present challenge, one that is sustainable. This global consensus on one hand explains why the document proposes a change in humanity, from a Christian perspective, to be able to deal with the problem. In the context of our contemporary world, *Laudato Si'* expresses that we the people of the world must think global in our approach because global issues today cannot be solved by a one-way action (*Laudato Si'*, 164).

The above phrase implies that general interest and not that of a few people must drive our actions. It provides some evidence that the Christian Church teaching develops in a feedback loop with its changing context concerning Gruber (2017). The document calls for a rethinking of processes in their entirety and emphasizes a need to include more ecological considerations and to question the logic that underlies contemporary culture. Every economy needs its politics to drive it, and healthy politics is one that takes up the challenge to reconsider ecological considerations.

However, humans live in a global society that is interconnected in everything and as time passes, it becomes clearer that the world is interrelated than we ever thought. This explains on the one hand why *Laudato Si'* calls for a vision that is capable to consider every aspect of societal life in addressing the present global ecological crisis. This is what sparks response from people who were able to express concerns for its integral ecology call. In the document, the Pope views the problems of ecology to be vast and complex, and as one that requires an

integrated approach. In this respect, I examine two of those approaches in *Laudato Si'*, ecological conversion, and environmental education.

5.5.1 Ecological conversion in Laudato Si'

Ecological conversion in *Laudato Si'* is a spiritual conversion of the man so that he can begin to regard nature again as God's creation and treat it as such. The Pope expressed his passion for how spirituality can be a source of motivation to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world. The rich heritage of Christian spirituality, its precious contribution to the renewal of humanity makes it an asset and a resource in the present global environmental crisis. He also addressed the importance of the family, schools, and media in this endeavor for ecological education, which are sensitive tools that impact the human mind greatly. According to Longbottom (2016), the healthy relationship between humanity and creation is one dimension of personal conversion. Implying only a conversion can bring about the change in attitudes and thinking patterns needed to escape the present crisis and avoid future disaster. It goes to support the Pope's approach for an ecological conversion which is rooted in a spiritual conversion.

Laudato Si''s call is a call for a radical conversion of the political and cultural dimensions of the present global system. This present system contributes significantly negatively to the abuse of human dignity, human exploitation, and environmental degradation, which are the key issues raised by *Laudato Si'*. Longbottom (2016, 21) views *Laudato Si'* ecological conversion as that "junction where the theological, political, and personal aspects of responses to care for our common home converge". For *Laudato Si'* to criticize a market-oriented economy, it is not to challenge the legitimacy of a market-oriented economy. Its critique rather identifies significant deficiencies with the current neoliberal capitalist paradigm in a constructive effort to produce socioeconomic outcomes that are responsive to basic Church values.

5.5.2 Environmental education in Laudato Si'

Our relations with other creatures, shape who we become; thus, this makes education a vital tool for any human conversion. The church sees herself to have a responsibility towards creation, to serve humanity and the common interest. *Laudato Si'*, highlighted the issue of environmental education as that which plays an important role in the stability of the

equilibrium of the global natural ecology. Environmental education which was based on scientific information is no more the case today; it has been extended to include a whole lot of things among which are unregulated market, competition, and consumerism. Since the invention of the sciences, the predominant cultural mindset has been that the environment is an open-access resource (Young, 2017; Crabbe, 2019). This predominant mindset has contributed significantly to the ill-exploitation of nature that leads to environmental degradation and unimaginable consequences on global biodiversity. However, man's ill-considered exploitation of nature has made him become a victim of his degradation action (Young, 2017).

Laudato Si' extended environmental education to involve other aspects like ethics. It includes educators who are capable to develop an ethics of ecology that can help people through a pedagogic process to grow in solidarity, responsibility, and compassionate care (*Laudato Si'*, 210). However, natural law provides the foundation for ethics in church teaching. Being part of the earth (our common home) reveals to us as humans our identity in God, and for humans to be deeply one with God is for them to be deeper with the earth, including all creatures (Jenkins, 2018). This view supports *Laudato Si'*'s view of humanity being one with nature which is important to be considered in environmental education. Moreover, ethics is a major motivator for proper individual behavior, which Crabbe (2019) sees, on the one hand, to confirm the conviction of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*. Despite the value of science and technology, its method cannot be used to determine epistemology in matters of meaning (Jeckins, 2018).

5.6. The relevance and strength of Laudato Si'

How is *Laudato Si'* helping churches to address the present crisis?

The Pope's document has shed great light on the present global environmental issue with significant emphasis on its inter-relation with other components of our global society. These include the socio-economic, political, and ecological dynamics of all living things (both plants and animals). Climate economics is related to ethical commitment (Crabbe, 2019). *Laudato Si'* as a document released by the Catholic cleric, Pope Francis, and as a Vatican document, has significantly moved away from the focus of the Catholic Social Teaching's (CST) on the environment. This move is essentially from an anthropocentric model of stewardship

(Longbottom, 2016). As a result, it changes the direction of the church from a human-centered focus to that which includes other living beings alike. In the document, the Pope did that by replacing the idea of stewardship as a guiding ethical principle with a more emphasis on the term '*creation care*'.

According to Cardinal Turkson who is one of the key architects behind *Laudato Si'*, the term "care" as used in the document signifies passion and love rather than a sense of duty (Longbottom, 2016). So, the above term of care goes beyond just stewardship because stewards or good stewards take responsibility and perform their obligations to manage and render account without necessarily feeling connected to that which they do. Rather, the term 'care' speaks of connectivity, passion, and love. It also allows a person to be affected by what he/she cares for and causes the path and priorities of that person to change.

Stewardship on the other hand has been the Christian church's traditional environmental ethic (Crabbe, 2019). Therefore *Laudato Si'* has been able to upgrade from 'stewardship' to 'care' which is helping the church to improve on its responsibility towards the environment by becoming more committed to enhancing environmental protection. This enhancement of environmental protection happens primarily through enhancing human behavior vis-à-vis the environment. The move from stewardship to care by *Laudato Si'* puts 'care' at the center of the document's emphasis on virtues. From the emphasis of the document, this move can also be the need for wisdom and generosity (*Laudato Si'*, 47, 209), solidarity and care, tenderness, compassion, and concern (*Laudato Si'*, 58, 91).

Therefore, the entire notion of care is one way that *Laudato Si'* is helping the church to address the present crisis, by changing the direction of church thinking in the above regard. This ethic of care as well inspires indigenous peoples and feminist ethics (which links social injustices mainly against women to ecological degradation) (Caro, 2016; Cabine, 2017; Crabbe, 2019). *Laudato Si'*, provides a good platform for the church to generate a new ethical architecture on nature and about nature and the environment to better address the present ecological crisis. The platform also enables the church and Christians to start developing new ethical schema that incorporates the environment (Young, 2017).

The title of the document – '*care for our common home*' calls for a revolution and conversion at various levels. It is a complete restructuring of Christian ethics towards nature. This new

development forms a backdrop to a changing church teaching (Young, 2017). The Pope's choice of the word 'common home', which is broad and inclusive, also provides a good base for an ethical schema that takes into consideration the whole of God's creation. The document's ingenuity is centered on its ability to redefine the CST principle of the common good to expand and respond to the present ecological crisis (Longbottom, 2016)

For *Laudato Si'* to stress the interconnectedness of everything including the natural world with humanity, it portrays a common ground for a more heartfelt, virtue-based model of connectivity between humanity and the natural environment. Emphasis on the interconnectedness of everything which happens to be the driver of *Laudato Si'*'s integral ecology concept also provides support for the kind of cosmic common good principle presented by the document.

The destruction of the tropical rainforests at a rate of fifty acres per minute of every day, a natural feature that has taken approximately sixty million years to form, would demand a type of human response that stewardship alone cannot provide (Longbottom, 2016). In this regard, *Laudato Si'* is helping to nurture an ecological culture of encounter in communities and in building an already existing openness to interfaith encounters around the world. An example is the Appalachia in the United States, especially among the Appalachian Catholic workers (Iafrate, 2018).

The document also brings new inspiration and challenges the Christian church to a new vision of pastoral calling vis-à-vis our natural environment. This is important because it creates a new fresh pathway on how to view our world and be able to take responsibility at all levels and retaining our hope. This happens through the ethical schema that it portrays from the basis of 'common home'. It can help address the current crisis and build a universe of harmony in line with God's principles and plan for our world (Young, 2017). It is also helping to shape the church's mission greatly vis-à-vis the groaning of creation as a result of anthropogenic influence. The authority of the document is also helping to legitimize change and define a new pathway for the church vis-à-vis environmental concern and action towards halting the current crisis (Briola, 2019).

Moreover, the message of *Laudato Si'* is helping to excite grassroots movements for eco-justice action and climate advocacy both within the Roman Catholic tradition and beyond.

Grassroot communities are making moves from *Laudato Si's* call to build a culture of encounter. *Laudato Si'* has also given a new kind of legitimacy to many grassroots movements and church advocacy groups for eco-justice and many environmental church projects geared towards environmental protection (Iafrate, 2018). They have also been energized by *Laudato Si'* to push for sound environmental practices in favor of the poor and other creations. These movements are being supported greatly by the church.

Conclusion

This section discussed the issues in the analysis of *Laudato Si'* with regards to the different critiques and the aim of the study. The various responses to the document are powerful and relevant in the sense that it targeted the core issues of the document. They questioned the different points made by the Pope in *Laudato Si'* concerning particularly his concept of integral ecology and his idea of ecological conversion. These critics questioned the document from different viewpoints including the theological viewpoint, the ethical viewpoint, the spiritual viewpoint, the economic viewpoint, the political viewpoint, and the social viewpoint. There are other claims made by these critics from how *Laudato Si'* defines the crisis, its view of the present global economic system, and its proposed solution to the ecological crisis. These are all relevant in that it helped to expand a broader understanding of the issue and the ideas of *Laudato Si'*. The document is playing a great role to influence action both within and outside of the church towards participatory environmental protection measures.

Chapter Six

6.0 General Conclusion

This study explores *Laudato Si's* suggested solutions to the current global environmental crisis and responses to it. It analyses the document concerning how it responds to the root cause of the problem, its proposed solutions, the responses to the document, and how it helps improve the concerns of the document. The document places much emphasis on human irresponsible behavior and the global capitalist market economy that has engendered the global environmental crisis. Its suggested solution is proposed from the standpoint of humanity which is directed to the need for an ecological conversion to achieve its idea of integral ecology.

This human irresponsible behavior is the major root cause of the environmental crisis which has inflicted harm to the natural environment, leading to a huge climate crisis from environmental degradation of all sorts. The negative effects of climate change, in turn, cut across all areas of human and societal life with huge damage to the health and wellbeing of nature. *Laudato Si'* on care for our common home shed more light on the issue and elaborates on humanity's need to take urgent action in resolving the present crisis. It proposes a solution that has to do with an integral ecology, having both a physical and a spiritual dimension that touches major spheres of ecological life.

The document prescribed an integral ecology and an ecological conversion as a solution to the environmental crisis. This integral ecology involves an integration of the environmental and socio-economic ecology, cultural ecology, and the common good principle into the natural ecology, and it constitutes the practical solution to the present crisis. The ecological conversion is especially an inward human conversion which involves a transformation of the inward human person to affect his outer human action, and it constitutes the spiritual solution to the crisis. This ecological conversion is spiritual, and it works by a spirituality that brings inspiration to humans and empowers the human commitment to better care for the environment.

The above solutions in the context of *Laudato Si'* are what is needed to bring about a sustainable change to the ecological crisis. The first is an integration of other important societal components of ecology, and the other is a community conversion which begins with a

human conversion. The second is all about a deep recognition of God and His creation by humans who are the main cause of the problem to be capable and committed to valuing every other thing created by God. In the context of *Laudato Si'*, the ecological conversion is also a community conversion through Christian spirituality and stands as the solution to the human obsession with consumption. These solutions are a proposition of a growth model where moderation and the capacity to be happy are noticeable.

The suggestions of the *Laudato Si'* are rooted in practical wisdom and biblical interpretation of what humanity can and should do. It reveals that Christianity has a major role to play in the process of change through its influence on human behavior and human attitude. It also reveals that Christians must play a stronger role by taking necessary and quick action in the process to fight climate change. The kind of solutions proposed by the document, emphasizes that politics must not be subject to the economy, nor economy be subject to the dictates of the technocratic-driven paradigm of efficiency (LS,189), as one major way to reduce human exploitation of the environment. This is because politics has the power to shape an entire system, including the economy. However, the strength and enduring power of religion also make it an important partner in dialogue with science vis-à-vis nature and the environment.

The major critiques targeted *Laudato Si'*'s integral ecology and its line of action to help improve the concerns of the document. The proposed solutions are embodied in the concept of integral ecology and seems to be a new kind of humanism as it is focused more on mankind than on the divine. This integral ecology call is geared to serve the common good, with man at the center of it. The concept of integral ecology is centered on the inter-relationship between ecosystem and social ecology and involves the scale of change that requires an integrated approach. Moreover, the term integral ecology seems to be elusive and difficult to understand in the sense that it is not given any clear definition in the document, yet it sounds like a prophetic reprimand to those to whom it is delivered.

The analysis shows that *Laudato Si'* has developed earlier Christian church teaching on global environmental challenges in a more holistic way. The document's approach takes into consideration different dimensions of societal wellbeing and different components of ecology, for the wellbeing of other creations and nature. *Laudato Si'* has and is inspiring many studies concerning the evaluation of Pope Francis' idea and approach to humanity vis-à-vis our

contemporary world, including both animate and inanimate nature. It stirs more focus on the environment worldwide both at the global, regional, national, and grassroots levels. However, it does not give an explicitly fair explanation concerning gender. Its stance on gender insists that humanity is made up of two distinct genders which are in line with the church teaching and this stance does not seem to fairly address the issue of gender justice.

From the analysis, Christians have a special responsibility, and they must use their privileged position as the children of God to foster care for the environment. This is important because of the knowledge they have about humanity and spirituality. It also calls for Christians and people of goodwill to be active participants in the process to fight for God's creation and cultivate greater care for the environment to drive change on the earth.

The critiques question the ideas in *Laudato Si'* concerning particularly its concept of integral ecology and its idea of an ecological conversion. There are other claims made by the critics on how *Laudato Si'* defines the crisis, its view of the present global economic system, and its proposed solution to the ecological crisis. The critiques throw light on certain aspects of *Laudato Si'*'s concept of integral ecology. they questioned the document from a theological viewpoint, the ethical viewpoint, the spiritual viewpoint, the political viewpoint, the economic and social viewpoints. It involves a holistic approach in judging the proposal of *Laudato Si'*. They also criticize as well as compliment the document such that they did not cast away the document's ideas but seek to get meanings and clearer explanations at different points. These are all relevant in that it helps bring deeper insight into the issue and the ideas of *Laudato Si'*.

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