

THE CHURCH AND ECOLOGICAL CONCERNS: A DOGMATIC-SYSTEMATIC APPROACH

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DOI: [10.13140/RG.2.2.14922.03528](https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.14922.03528)

Abstract

This paper is titled “The Church and Ecological Concerns: A Dogmatic-Systematic Approach”. The task of a theologian is to animate theology with charity, which is the life of the church. Theology orients men and women toward a life of integral love: love directed, first of all, towards God, secondly towards their fellow human beings and thirdly towards the rest of creation. The absence of the love for creation is evident in the indiscriminate manner in which man plunders the earth with reckless abandon and complete lack of consideration for the effects of his actions on the present and future. The paper began with an introduction to give a direction to the study. The theological framework is established in which is discussed the doctrine of creation as the foundation of the Church’s teachings on the environment. An exposition of the ecological concerns of today reveals such ominous problems as pollution, deforestation, global warming and many natural disasters. In highlighting the causes, the paper reveals technology, development, capitalism, anthropocentrism and, above all, the disruption of universal connectedness as major factors. These result in many disastrous effects on plant and animal species. The Church’s position on the global ecological concerns is x-rayed, with a special focus on ecumenical and papal documents. Finally, such recommendations as ecology-based pedagogy, concretizing eco-theology and eco-spirituality, parish and diocesan ecological projects, ecological inculturation and ecumenical collaboration, among others are proffered and the conclusion is drawn. For the purpose of this research, the systematic and thematic methods of inquiry were employed.

Keywords: Ecology, Church, Dogma, Eco-spirituality, Eco-theology

Introduction

When Pope Francis, on the 24th of May 2015, released the encyclical *Laudato Si: On the Care of our Common Home*, it was received with profound enthusiasm, because at no time in history has the world been in greater need of such a clarion call in the direction of our natural habitat as today. In this social encyclical, which is a masterpiece and incited reactions from across the world, the Pope highlighted the injustice being done to the environment and its consequent effects in the lives of the earth's inhabitants. While discussions are being held across the globe on the need to apply caution in the exploitation of the earth's resources, they all apply to exist only on the level of theory with practical applications far from realization. This has prompted the Church to join her voice in the call for a renewed concern for the ecosystem. The role of the Church in matters of ecology has given rise to the modern terms eco-theology and eco-spirituality.

It has been the debate among natural scientists whether the current historical period should be called the *Anthropocene*, marking the epoch when human accomplishments became the principal cause of global ecological alteration. Originally, this new period, which corresponds with the advent of contemporary capitalism and industrialization, was suggested to have begun within the eighteenth century. Capitalism and its imperative for development, combined with other sociocultural vicissitudes, is a crucial factor that has engendered major ecological complications that climax in ecological problems. Thus, it has become increasingly certain that human beings are threatened by an existential catastrophe. In the year 1992, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) held its first Conference of the Parties (COP). This came with the sudden realization of the imminent dangers of climate change. In December 2015, world leaders met in Paris, where they made a concord to reduce greenhouse gasses emissions and also to maintain global temperature upsurge beneath the 2°C level in order to safeguard the environment. This is what has come to be called COP21 or the Paris Agreement which so far has been signed by over 195 countries and ratified by about 25 other countries. The last of the COPs took place in Madrid, Spain in December 2019 and is popularly called COP25.

Our era is one plagued with ecological disasters, of which human actions and inactions are highly culpable. The situation is more dismal on the African continent where the evident depressing circumstances have provoked strong debates on matters concerning the environment. The exploitation of the African

continent by colonial, neo-colonial and more recently, trans-national companies that leave the continent raped, ravaged, drained and laid-waste has become a matter of grave concern to anybody with even the slightest hint of a conscience. The impact of this is seen in every sphere of African life. Here in Nigeria, it is impossible to estimate the effects of climate change and environmental degradation in our country in terms of the damage done to human lives and property and the severe harm it causes our country. In the *This Day Newspaper* of 2nd June 2016, Nigeria is recorded to have four of the world's worst cities in air pollution by the World Health Organisation, with Onitsha being the first (worst), Kaduna fifth, Aba sixth and Umuahia sixteenth. Kenechukwu Obiezu in *The Sun* of 4th November 2016, warns of the dangers of environmental degradation as it has consequent effects of the earth yield¹⁸. The earth's yield decreases in measure with its degradation. The more the earth is ravaged, the less it will yield.

Theological Framework: The Doctrine of Creation

The doctrine of creation forms the foundation of the Church's teachings on the environment and is the theological framework of our discourse. Scripture provides the basis of these teachings. The two accounts of creation show creation as a deliberate and premeditated act of God. The Priestly account ends with God appreciating the works of his hands: "God saw all that He has made and indeed, it was very good." (Gen. 1:31). The Gospel of John beautifully weaves the role of the Divine *Logos* in creation: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God... All things were created through Him and not one thing was created except through Him." (John 1:1-3). The Council of Nicaea (325 AD) is renowned for its formulation of the Creed, which begins thus: "I believe in one God the Father Almighty, creator of Heaven and Earth, of all things seen and unseen". With this, it attributed the creation of both the material and spiritual worlds to God. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, "Scripture and Tradition never cease to teach and celebrate this fundamental

¹⁸ Taking Nigeria as a case study in terms of the impact of Climate Change and Environmental Degradation on Food Security in Nigeria, \$1bn is posted as annual loss in non-timber forest products due to rapid deforestation, 90% permanent loss is sustained in the natural habitat of pollinators critical to agricultural production 50,000MT annual loss is sustained in fresh water fish supply as a result of the drying up of Lake Chad 55% estimated loss in pasture land due to desertification (posing a challenge to beef production), 95% drop in quantity of milk produced per cow as a result of poor cattle nutrition and massive reduction in crop yield in the past 20 years (45% in tomato and 55% in wheat).

truth: The world was made for the glory of God...for God has no other reason in creating than his love and goodness.”¹⁹

However, the Church’s doctrine of creation will never be complete without reference to St. Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130-203AD). Irenaeus doctrine of creation was formulated in response to the Gnostic heresy. According to Gnosticism, the true God is unknowable. Early Gnostics preferred to call him *Bythus*, which is the Greek word for depth or profundity. *Bythus* emanated or produced in some unknowable way, beings which the Gnostics called “*aeons*.”²⁰ These are intermediaries between the ultimate, true God and us. The *Aeons* and the True God, make up the realm of fullness (*Pleroma*), which is where the potency of divinity is fully operational. According to the Gnostic doctrine, one of these aeonial beings named *Sophia* (Wisdom) deeply wanted to know *Bythus*, the unknowable Father. She left the *pleroma* and the other 29 *aeons* in search of him and after a fruitless journey in which she could not find him, she mourned that she was all alone and that she could not know God. But unknown to *Sophia*, her travails and sorrows had produced a being, called the “*Demiurge*,” who would become the God of this world and of the Israelites.²¹ This being, the *Demiurge*, created a flawed world because he created it in his own flawed image. This flawed being, oblivious of his origins, came to imagine himself as the ultimate and absolute God. However, because he took the already existing divine essence and fashioned it into different forms, he is called the *Demiurgos* or the “half-maker” There is another authentic half, a true deific component existing in creation, but unfortunately he is not acknowledged by the half-maker and by his cosmic minions, called the *Archons* or “rulers”.

The central point of Irenaeus’ theology is the unity of [God. This is](#) in opposition to the Gnostic belief that divides God into a number of divine *Aeons* and who distinguish between the utterly transcendent True God and the inferior [Demiurge](#) who they say created the world. Irenaeus uses the [Logos](#) theology which he inherited from [Justin Martyr](#). Recall that Irenaeus was a student of the bishop [Saint Polycarp](#), who had been tutored by St [John the Apostle](#). John the Apostle had used the Logos theology in his gospel and in his first letter. Irenaeus, following the Apostle, sees the world as good which God created with His two

¹⁹ Catechism of the Catholic Church 293.

²⁰ Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) 76.

²¹ Paul F Pavao, *Christian History for Everyman*, (Web 03.02.2017).

hands. Irenaeus refers to the Son and the Holy Spirit as the two hands of God. In his masterwork, [*Against Heresies*](#), He clearly taught creation *ex nihilo* as a defining principle of Christianity, in contrast to Gnostic speculation. He states clearly as follows:

They [the Gnostics] do not believe that God (being powerful, and rich in all resources) created matter itself, inasmuch as they know not how much a spiritual and divine essence can accomplish...For, to attribute the substance of created things to the power and will of Him who is God of all, is worthy both of credit and acceptance. It is also agreeable [to reason], and there may be well said regarding such a belief, that 'the things which are impossible with men are possible with God.' While men, indeed, cannot make anything out of nothing, but only out of matter already existing, yet God is in this point preeminently superior to men, that He Himself called into being the substance of His creation, when previously it had no existence."²²

Emily Brunner states "God stands 'above' the world, because He is the Lord, because it is only through His Word that it exists at all..."²³ Discussing the purpose of creation, Brunner states that:

The Creation is because God wills it; it has no other foundation. God's will is the *ratio sufficiens* of the Creation. The Creation is the work of the Divine Omnipotence but also of His Holy Love. God creates the world in absolute freedom, it is true, but there is nothing arbitrary about His action. His freedom is identical with His Love. God creates the world because He wishes to have something "over against" Himself. As the Holy God He wills to glorify Himself in His Creation; as the loving God He wills to give Himself to others. His self-glorification, however, is in the last resort the same as His self-communication. He wills so to glorify Himself that that which He gives received in freedom, and rendered back to Him again: His love. Hence the revelation of this love of His is at the same time the revelation of the purpose of His Creation, and this purpose of creation is the reason why He posits a creation.²⁴

²² Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus Haereses*, 2.10.3-4.

²³ Emily Brunner, *Dogmatics II: The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co. 1952) 2.

²⁴ Brunner 13.

Thus, for Brunner, creation is God's act of self-communication, self-glorification and self-revelation. The purpose of creation is for God to express his love to the other than himself. God gives his love in freedom and expects it to be rendered back in freedom. Creation exists because God wills it in freedom and love. For Smulders,

Creation is to be considered as the free act of God whereby he gives the world and man entirely to man, as a gift of his goodness and as a task to be carried on to a fulfillment in which man responds to this word of his creator with the fullness of his own being and of his world.²⁵

Here he reaffirms that creation, which includes man, is a gift of God to man and a duty to fulfill.

It is against this backdrop that we can firmly say that the current ecological problems are in total conflict with God's plan for creation which, *ab initio*, He found very good (cf. Gen. 1:31).

The Global Ecological Crisis

Hansen captures the global ecological situation in the following words:

Planet Earth, creation, the world in which civilization developed, the world with climate patterns that we know and stable shorelines, is in imminent peril. The urgency of the situation crystallized only in the past few years. We now have clear evidence of the crisis...The startling conclusion is the continued exploitation of all fossil fuels on Earth threatens not only the other millions of species on the planet but also the survival of humanity itself--and the timetable is shorter than we thought²⁶.

Leonardo Boff describes the ecological crisis as "the crisis of the paradigm of civilization". In his 1997 work *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, he says the will to dominate everything by humans is bringing us under domination and holding us in subjection to the imperatives of a degraded earth.²⁷ According to him, the dream of improving the conditions of human existence has compounded the

²⁵ Pieter Smulders, "Creation," *Encyclopedia of Theology*, Karl Rahner (Ed.) (London: Burns and Oates, 1975) 319.

²⁶ James Hansen, *Storms of My Grandchildren* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2009) 23.

²⁷ Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997) 8.

problems it tried to solve. Thus the dream of unlimited development has resulted in the underdevelopment of two-thirds of earth's population and the exploitation of the earth's resources has led to the breakdown of environmental balance. Socialism and capitalism have both undermined the real basis of wealth which is the earth's resources and human labour, thus today the earth is experiencing a menacing state of exhaustion. Both the land and the worker are gravely wounded and this emphasizes the ecological question with greater seriousness.²⁸

Ecological Concerns of Today's World

Some major ecological concerns of the present time are:

- a. Depletion of Resources: 100 million hectares of natural habitats and ecosystems are destroyed every year and 9 million hectares of forests are lost every year. Thus at this rate, 50% of plants and animal species face possible extinction.
- b. Pollution: Industrial countries are all guilty of water, land and air pollution due to the overuse of chemicals and the mismanagement of radioactive wastes. Many modern industries and chemical plants poison and damage the atmosphere by injecting carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide through industrial activity. These, addition to damaging the air, also contaminate the land and waters.²⁹
- c. Deforestation and Desertification: Large expanses of the world's forests are being cleared agricultural and urban development thus accelerating deforestation and put the earth a greater risks of floods, droughts and the dearth of oxygen. 50% of graving lands have already become deserts and the deserts keep extending across the globe.³⁰
- d. Global Warming and Climate Change: Through the greenhouse effect, global warming poses the greatest environmental threat. The rise in carbon dioxide and other deleterious gases have seen to the growth of the earth's atmospheric temperature. This is compounded by the burning of fossil fuels and changes in vegetation by the destruction of rain forests responsible for the production of oxygen.³¹
- e. Damage to Ozone Layer: One of the signs that the environmental damage of the earth has reached critical proportions if the breakdown of the ozone layer. This

²⁸ Boff 8.

²⁹ Savarimuthu Ignacimuthu, *Environmental Spirituality* (Mumbai: St Pauls, 2010) 23.

³⁰ Ignacimuthu 24.

³¹ Ignacimuthu 25.

exposes life to excessive ultra-violet radiation which damages genetic materials exposing higher animals including human beings to higher risks of skin cancer.

- f. Erosion of Soil: The earth's soil is being eroded and losing fertility through destructive agricultural practices. The destruction of topsoil especially in third world countries has reached worrisome levels. This occurs through erosion, overgrazing and inappropriate farming techniques.³²
- g. Natural Calamities: Some natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes and hurricanes are becoming more frequent in recent times. These can be traced human activities such as mining, deforestation and reclaiming of land.
- h. Nuclear Waste: Many islands and their inhabitants have been destroyed by nuclear tests and the dumping of nuclear wastes in the Pacific. Islands have been destroyed and waters poisoned causing radiation sickness and the birth of deformed children with genetic defects. The April 26, 1986 nuclear disaster of Chernobyl is a quick example of this.
- i. Damages: The production and storage of biological and chemical weapons and the use of nuclear power plants across the planet create multiple imbalances and threats. These cause diseases and death and the extinction of plant and animal species.³³

Causes of Ecological Problems

Boff succinctly captures the causes of the ecological crisis under the following headings:

- a. Technology and Ecology: The Attacking Virus that will not bring Healing
He points out the imbalance of the Earth-system is due to technology which is still primitive, destructive and polluting. The technology of the present-day is responsible for a great deal of ecological evil because it is energy-hungry, dirty and ecologically destabilizing. It is thus an illusion to think that the same virus that is destroying the earth can heal it.³⁴
- b. Development and Ecology: The Contradiction of Sustainable Development
For Boff, the current model of development is responsible for the ecological crisis. This is because for centuries all societies have been held hostage by a myth of progress and unlimited growth whose standard for judging whether a country is developed, underdeveloped or backward is in its level of production of goods

³² Ignacimuthu 26.

³³ Ignacimuthu 27.

³⁴ Boff 64.

and services. This fuels the desire to maximize benefits while minimizing costs and time. Thus production becomes the sole aim of development. The irony is the belief in sustainable development because no how it is tagged, development never gets away from its economic root which is aimed at increasing productivity, accumulation and technological innovation.³⁵

c. Society and Ecology: Ecocapitalism and Ecosocialism

Boff warns of a development that does not exist in itself but points back to a ready-made model of society that provides itself with the type of development it wants. In modern society, economics is seen as the science of unlimited growth rather than the original sense of the management of scarcity. In both capitalist and socialist societies, there are profound dualisms separating capital from labour, work from leisure, person from nature, man from woman, body from spirit, sex from affection, efficiency from poetry, wonder from organization and God from the world. In the end one pole dominates the other resulting in anthropocentrism, capitalism, materialism, patriarchy, machismo, secularism, and monarchical un-trinitarian monotheism.³⁶

d. Anthropocentrism: The Human Being, Earth's Satan?

Today the human being is accused of being the Satan of the Earth. This stems from the fact that in contemporary societies human beings have made themselves the center of everything and aim at a *dominium terrae* crushing everything that stands in their path to actualize their aims. This dominion theology is even recognized by some Popes such as Nicholas VI (1447-1455) in his bull *Romanus Pontifex* in which he promises rule over the earth the Portuguese monarchs and Alexander VI (1492-1503) in his bull *Inter Coetera* in which he grants similar powers to the monarchs of Castile and Leon. Boff finally traces the problem to androcentrism, because for him it is the male rather than the female who proclaims himself lord over everything in nature including the woman.³⁷

e. Civilization against Nature

A dominating civilization is another cause of the ecological crisis. Our civilization is characterized by power and domination and this has become embodied in our technology. Power and domination and become both the means and the end of our existence. In his words "Power and domination continually

³⁵ Boff 66.

³⁶ Boff 68.

³⁷ Boff 70.

conspire against life; peaceful coexistence and a synergistic energy between them is impossible.³⁸

- f. **Ultimate Root of the Crisis: The Disruption of Universal Connectedness**
Boff finally traces the root of the ecological crisis to ongoing disruption of the basic connectedness between the whole of universe and its creator. This disconnection was created and perpetuated by human beings and is traced back to the Original Sin. Because of this disconnectedness, beings devour one another in a predator-prey world.³⁹

Effects of Ecological Problems

The effects of the aforementioned ecological affronts are colossal. The Chernobyl disaster of 1986 caused so much damage and the gas leak at the Bhopal pesticide plant that resulted in 2500 deaths, blindness, respiratory diseases and genetic disorders. These are ominous warning of the effects of some of these industrial activities which occur every day on a smaller scale. Pollution occurs in milder forms every day through the use of pesticides and the activities of fertilizer, chemical and radioactive plants. Oil spills poison the waters and damage beaches, while the combustion of fossil fuels pollutes the air thus creating a fear that the immune system of newborn children may be compromised.⁴⁰

Fertilizers and pesticides poison the fresh waters, killing millions of fish species. The destruction of forests, which is the natural habitat of millions of animals, leaves many animal species at the risk of extinction. While biologists claim knowledge of about 1.7 million animal species, it is speculated that there are still between 10 and 30 million species that we have no knowledge of. Thus the activities of human beings such as over-grazing, over-fishing, over-mining and over-straining the soil pose a serious threat to the survival of these animal species. As it is already, the only thing left of some animal species is in history books while others are gravely endangered. The survival of these creatures is important for the survival of human beings who depend on them for food.⁴¹ A sad example of this is the Australian fire of September 2019 to March 2020, which

³⁸ Boff 74.

³⁹ Boff 82.

⁴⁰ Thomas Menampampil, *All Creation Groans with Pain* (Mumbai: St Pauls, 2012) 24.

⁴¹ Menampampil 27.

killed 34 people, burnt over 18.6 million hectares of land, destroyed over 5,900 buildings, and affected nearly 3 billion terrestrial animals.⁴²

Deforestation is an alarming phenomenon across the world. People need timber and firewood and agricultural activity destroys a lot of forests. Unfortunately afforestation does not match the rate of deforestation. Half of the primitive forests have disappeared already. This, aided by heavy erosion, causes the deterioration of the soil leading to desertification. This in turn affects the climate resulting in severe droughts and colossal floods.⁴³ Forests are also threatened by acid rains which occur when pollutants in the air, released through burning fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas, fall to the ground from which trees and plants derived their nutrition. Also, the combustion of fossil fuels and the use of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) damage the ozone layer which protects the earth from harmful ultraviolet rays, thus posing serious dangers to humans and animals.⁴⁴

The Church and Ecological Concerns

Until very recently, the Catholic Church's documents did not include much on the environment, partly because environmental consciousness is a relatively new topic and partly because the Church did not fathom in time the gravity of the environmental crisis. However, it has become a major topic of discussion in the Church today. Early church councils did not say anything definite about environmental protection. They focused more on the relationship between God and his creation. It wasn't until the Second Vatican Council that the Church made definite statements with regards to man's relationship with his environment. The Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World is a major landmark in the relationship between the Church and the world.⁴⁵ Also, her Dogmatic Constitutions on the Church and on Divine Revelation mention the doctrine of creation.⁴⁶ Other papal documents such as Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* and *Octogesima Adveniens* as well as John Paul II's *Redemptor Hominis* and *Laborem Exercens* all provide strong information

⁴² Web 10.03.2021.

⁴³ Jochem Douma, *Environmental Stewardship* (Oregon: Lucerna Publications, 2015) 4.

⁴⁴ Douma 5.

⁴⁵ *Gaudium et Spes* 34

⁴⁶ Cf. *Lumen Gentium* 36; *Dei Verbum* 3.

on the Church's teaching on ecology. Both Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI took interest in the environment as seen in John Paul II's 1990 message for the World Day of Peace titled "Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All Creation" and Benedict XVI's 2009 encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, in which he stressed the connection between humans and the environment.⁴⁷

However, the Church's teaching on the environment can be said to have reached its climax with the works of Pope Francis. The Holy Father's first reference to ecology was in his *Evangelii Gaudium*, in which he notably said:

There are other weak and defenseless beings that are frequently at the mercy of economic interests or indiscriminate exploitation. I am speaking of creation as a whole. We human beings are not only the beneficiaries but also the stewards of other creatures. Thanks to our bodies, God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement. Let us not leave in our wake a swath of destruction and death which will affect our own lives and those of future generations.⁴⁸

The release of the encyclical *Laudato Si* (on Care for Our Common Home), by Pope Francis in May 2015, marked the apex of papal documents on ecology. This encyclical was dedicated totally to the care of the environment. In it, the Holy Father bewailed the ecological situation faced by the world today and called for definitive action towards these issues. An integral ecology is at the epicenter of Pope Francis's encyclical. Thus, a commitment to our environment and commitment to our fellow human beings, especially the poor, are held together in one vision. These two commitments are united as the same vision of the one ecological vocation. Our response to the crisis we face will need to be all-inclusive, taking into consideration all aspects of created life which includes plants, animals, habitats, the atmosphere, rivers and seas, and not excluding human beings and their cultures. Thus, he writes: "Everything is interconnected. Concern for the environment needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of

⁴⁷ Cf. *Caritas in Veritate* 211.

⁴⁸ *Evangelii Gaudium* 215.

society”⁴⁹ He specifically calls for “Ecological Education and Spirituality”, a new lifestyle oriented towards the care of God’s creation. It focuses on the individual believer, families and communities, and invites them to make a difference in small but tangible ways. Here, the Pope highlights a major cause of the global problem which is selfishness. In his words “when people become self-centered and self-enclosed, their greed increases. The emptier a person’s heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume”.⁵⁰

Recommendations

Having come this far, we humbly make the following recommendations as a panacea to the ecological concerns of the world today:

a. Ecology based Pedagogy

A catechesis built around the love for the environment is necessary in the catechetical formation of the faithful. This should begin from childhood to adulthood. The penny catechism should be revised to inculcate an elaborate teaching on the care of the environment. Since the formation of an individual at infancy influences to a large extent the individual’s worldview, then it is necessary to shape the worldview of individuals to accommodate the concern for the ecosystem beginning from childhood. Children should be taught “to love God, your neighbor and your environment”. Ecological stewardship is the duty of all Christians and training individuals for this purpose should be a major objective of our catechetical formation. Thus Bishops, priests, deacons, catechists and all those responsible for the catechetical formation of the faithful should conscientiously instill values that stimulate environmental consciousness in them. This implies that the pastoral agents and teachers of catechism themselves will require some level of ecological formation in order to serve as authentic ecological educators, because *nemo dat quod non habet*.

b. Concretizing Eco-theology

There is a wide lacuna between speculative theology and practical Christian living and this is very evident in the high percentage of Catholics who are

⁴⁹ Cf. *Laudato Si* 91.

⁵⁰ *Laudato Si* 204.

completely ignorant of the Church's teaching on the relationship between human beings and their environment. Most Catholics are not even aware that ecology is a major branch in Catholic theology and presume that it is purely a discipline of the biological sciences. Thus their idea of a relationship between humanity and the ecosystem is entirely a pragmatic one. Little wonder a parasitic attitude towards the planet and its resources is the general approach. Concretizing eco-theology is major challenge for theologians of today. This should be their enduring legacy for posterity. Concretizing eco-theology will entail presenting the Church's ecological doctrine in a more practicable manner to the faithful. A good starting point will be a presentation of the gospel in its creational context. The cosmic dimension of theology should be a major theme in Christian theological formation. Until now, many Catholics are completely uninformed about the ecological implications of the incarnation message. A sound theology of creation consolidated by the message of the incarnation that portends an eschatological dimension of the cosmic world is vital in creating ecological consciousness.

c. Ecology-themed Homilies

The Liturgy of the Word is an indispensable part of the Eucharistic celebration. One essential part of this liturgy is the homily. The homily is the kerygmatic expression of the Word of God in the linguistic currencies familiar to the people. This is one medium necessary for the ecological orientation of the faithful. Catholic homiletics should develop methodologies of breaking down the gospel of ecology in imagery familiar to the faithful. It should be the goal of homilists to consciously awaken a sense of ecological devotion in the hearts of the faithful through the preaching of eco-themed homilies. While the relationship between God and human beings is the focus of homiletics, homilists must promote a relationship that interweaves love between God, human beings and the rest of creation. Cosmic solidarity should be a major objective of our kerygma. The homily is one very resourceful way of promoting a harmonious relationship in the bionetwork of all God's creatures.

d. Enhancing Eco-spirituality

Encouraging an eco-spirituality in the faithful is one new challenge facing the Church today. Spirituality goes beyond religiosity which is merely the outward expression of religious devotion. Spirituality deals more with an internalization of religious values with a commensurate result in holiness of life. There is an intimate connection between love and holiness. A spirituality oriented towards the ecosystem must be instigated in the hearts of the faithful. For this to succeed,

an unbreakable link between holiness and the love of nature must be highlighted in Christian life. Dioceses and religious congregations should devote themselves to the safe-guarding of the planet through an ecology-based spirituality. This can be through prayers and devotions offered for the preservation of the ecosystem.

e. Parish and Diocesan Ecological Projects

Dioceses and parishes should undertake ecological projects. These can come in the form of tree planting, waste management and environmental sanitation. These projects are not capital intensive. Tree planting should be a major project for every parish to create a healthy environment for respiration. Waste management and recycling can be diocesan projects. There is a deep connection between wastefulness and waste mismanagement. The Church must lead the way in providing an alternative to an attitude of wastefulness by undertaking projects that recycle used materials for reuse. Environmental stewardship also entails the ability to economize the earth's resources in order to avoid the unnecessary production of new materials.

f. Sacramental Ecology

The sacraments are avenues through which the gospel of nature can be propagated. Two very important sacraments in this regard are the Eucharist and Penance. Because of the union between the incarnation and ecology, the Eucharist has an unbreakable relation with the environment. The faithful must see how devotion to the Body of Christ provokes devotion to the nature which He came to perfect. Also, the sacrament of Penance should inculcate penitence for violations of the natural order through sins committed against nature. Penitential services focused on absolution for the sins against nature should be organized intermittently. In March 2008, the Vatican published in *L'Osservatore Romano*, an update on the list of deadly sins to which they added the destruction of the environment. However, the idea of ecological violation as a sin is still unknown to many Catholics. The Sacrament of Penance should be an instrument through which people should come to realize the mortal harm of environmental degradation and find respite from their transgressions. Consequently, those involved in catechetical instruction must be updated on this development and communicate it to catechumens undergoing catechetical teachings for the reception of the sacraments.

g. Ecological Inculturation

Adopting and adapting certain practices from African cultures will go a long way in enhancing a practical application of the love for the environment. The

Church in Nigeria should identify those traditional ecological practices that do not contravene the gospel message and find a way to integrate them into the Church's life. One of such practices is the observance of certain festivals that promote an ecological culture. These festivals can be stripped of their fetish elements and adopted into the Catholic calendar. In this way, the Church can celebrate festivals that appreciate the gift of nature.

h. Ecumenical Collaboration and Ecological Dialogue

From the ecumenical perspectives seen in the fourth chapter of this study, it is evident that the issue of ecological preservation is not alien to other ecclesial communities and world religions. It is therefore incumbent on the Church to seek ways of fostering collaboration with other ecclesial communities and religions with a view to saving our common home. As we seek meeting points for dialogue and ecumenism, the preservation of our natural habitat should be a good starting point. This is because the effects of ecological misbalances are felt by all irrespective of denominational or religious orientation. The salvation of the ecosystem can be the one gospel preached in every religion across the globe.

Conclusion

The theology of creation is the foundation of the Church's teachings on ecology. To promote any form of ecology devoid of the doctrine that traces the origins and ultimate end of all things to the Creator, God, will never stand the test of time. This is because it is the love of the Creator manifested in the creation and sustenance of the visible world that animates the need for ecological ethics. The task of Christian theology is to generate in human hearts, through the study of His dictates, a profound love for the Creator and all that He has created. Human beings, as creatures of God, are part of a cosmic family in which the interdependence of members of this family is the key to the survival of the whole. The realization that human beings are citizens of a community of interdependent parts which encompasses non-human creatures: the land, water, plants and animals is a significant step in the resolution of the predicament of our ecosystem.

The idea of human beings as conquerors and lords of the earth may have been pushed to the extreme. While apportioning blames may not resolve the issues at hand, it is necessary to trace the origin of the ecological crisis to the wrong attitude of human beings towards the other than themselves. The fact is the disregard humans have for other creatures, is born out of an exaggerated feeling

of self-worth which in turn fuels their selfishness. The resultant effect is an egocentric hedonism that sees everything else, even their fellow human beings, as objects to be exploited. Unfortunately, in this ordeal, those most affected are the weakest members of the cosmic community. Science and technology have empowered people to achieve a lot more than was ever imagined possible in the past. However, there is need to establish boundaries in the exploits of scientific and technological development. This calls for a redefinition of development based on ethical ecological guidelines. Any form of development that will create greater harm for the future than good for the present, is merely ephemeral and inimical to the overall progress of the biological community. Such a development should be aborted before its effects become irreversible.

Laudato Si 211 recommends an education aimed at creating an ecological citizenship. This citizenship should not be limited only to the cognitive domain of the human intellect, but should influence, more importantly, the affective and psychomotor domains, thereby inciting a change of heart and provoking us to ecology-directed action. The cultivation of sound virtues is necessary for ecological commitment. At the background of all these should be a firm belief in the eschatological terminus of the created world which is in Christ. The protection of the environment is a noble call to which all must answer and a re-orientation of human beings towards the preservation of the ecosystem can be achieved. The belief in this colossal, but feasible, task is the inspiration behind the Pope's document. It is also the motivation behind this work, which is not exhaustive, but aims to serve as encouragement to all those who have the ecosystem and its survival at heart.

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AKU: AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH

ISSN: 26814-0761 (Print) 2814-0753 (e). Vol. 3 No. 2. 2022

A Publication of the Association for the Promotion of African Studies

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